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Roedown It's the see-and-be-seen social event of the season

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By WENDI WINTERS For Entertainment
Published 04/04/08

This Sunday is the 34th annual running of the horses at the Roedown Farm in Davidsonville, and for the event's fun-loving fans up and down the East Coast, there's no other place they'd rather be.



Rodney Calver - For The Capita

The 34th annual running of the Marlborough Hunt Races will be held starting at noon Sunday at Roedown Farm in Davidsonville. It draws more than 5,000 spectators. Many of them, including Tom and Susan Bolander, organize elaborate tailgate spreads.

For the uninitiated, Roedown is the most colorful, fun and family-friendly of the yearly series of Marlborough Hunt Races hosted by the Marlborough Hunt Club. It is a fundraiser for the club and an irresistible lure for horse aficionados of all stripes.

A day at Roedown is also a magnet for thousands of folks who've never ridden a horse - and don't want to.

Stretched up and down the hills and greenswards of the old Maryland farm is a colorful, social sea of over 5,000 people of all ages who turn out for the fun, great food, outlandish tailgate parties and an amusing fashion parade of hats - plus the breathtaking spectacle of thousands of pounds of muscular horseflesh thundering by on the grassy oval track.

Rain or shine, Roedown is an 18-karat hoot. A see-and-be-seen scene.

A Colonial touch

But, this year, you might think you've stepped back in time - to 1743.

Roedown Sunday is always an opportunity to dress casually but elegantly - 21st century style. This Sunday, however, expect to see dozens of men, women and children strolling the grounds wearing powdered wigs, satins and brocades.

The women and young girls will wear long, full dresses, acres of petticoats, and elaborate bonnets, wide brimmed straw hats or lace hoods. The men will sport waistcoats, knee breeches and silk stockings tucked into leather boots.

They'll be dressed and tressed 18th century-style to celebrate Annapolis Alive!, a yearlong festival commemorating the Annapolis Tricentennial.

As part of the fun, the fifth race of the day's exciting 11-race card is a revival of the 1743 Annapolis Subscription Plate, a race of amateur riders.

In 1743, Charles Carroll, father of the Charles Carroll who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, wagered his horse, a local legend, could beat another in a 3-mile race. The owner of the winning horse would take home a silver bowl created by Annapolis silversmith John Inch. It was the first formal horse race to run on an oval in Maryland.

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At a racetrack in Parole, a crowd of Colonials watched breathlessly as the Carroll horse lost to the mighty Dungannon, owned by Dr. George Steuart.

The name of the Carroll horse is long forgotten. The bowl, now on display in the Baltimore Museum of Art, is the oldest surviving silver object made in Maryland and the second oldest horseracing trophy in America. Dr. Steuart's family, almost a dozen generations later, is still spinning the tale.

Steuart Pittman Sr., a seventh generation member of the family, recounts how the invaluable bowl "was used to feed chickens for a while."

The original Roedown races, in 1973 and 1974, were held nearby on his farmland, Dodon Farm. "The Annapolis Subscription Plate race is going to be run every year," he promised.

His son, Steuart Pittman Jr., noted, "Roedown is a combination horse event and a social event. Everyone who goes to Roedown likes horses or likes to have fun!"

Tailgate food & fun

And they do, especially those who go all out with lavish tailgate spreads.

Friends David Price and Darlene Gaffney have traditionally done a western-themed tailgate. This year, they're scrambling to pull off a Colonial theme with a straight face.

"We're calling it 'Patriot Games'," Mr. Price said. "The food harkens back to the Colonial period. We've got the cook books out and we're doing research.

"We do a tailgate every year to get all of our friends together. It's a reunion," explained Mr. Price. "We put all this together so our friends can have a good time. Darlene does the cooking. There's no catered food. We feed 150 people over the course of the day."

Patriot Games also will feature live entertainment. Mr. Price is tasked with finding a guitarist-singer who is Colonial yet contemporary.

Dr. Norman and Jeanine Ove of Arnold are cooking up a storm for their tailgate theme, "Colonial Delights: Gem of the Land, Pearl of the Sea."

Mrs. Ove spent quite a bit of time plowing through 300-year-old recipes.

"Every year, I know what I'm going to do two days after Roedown. But, this year, it's different," she said. She's discovered Colonists loved a fish "muddle," which consists of a complicated fish stock teaming with mussels, clams and shrimp.

Stewed "pompion" she learned, "is basically a recipe for pumpkin. People didn't know how to spell. They ate stewed pumpkin at every meal. They also loved succotash."

With her sister-in-law, she is going to dress in Colonial attire to serve up cornbread, peanut soup, sweet potato pies and, possibly, Virginia ham.

"I'm also going to serve something made from venison," she said with an air of mystery.

The drinks almost had her stumped.

"They had very little wine. Instead they had Madera, mead, beer and cider. But, people at tailgates prefer wine and champagne."

Jamie Kolb of Heritage Farm and David Kolb of Henry M. Murray Insurance Agency, both of Harwood, along with Billy Bagdasian of Adams Ribs, are riding into Roedown with a Lowdown tailgate theme.

"We'll probably have 200 to 300 people at our tailgate," Mr. Kolb said. "We're ignoring the Colonial theme. We're Lowdown, not Roedown. Back in the day, the Bentleys and candelabra were in the first row - and I had a pig in a pickup truck and didn't style up. We're doing the gamut: roast pig, seafood, fish, chicken, all kinds of desserts that people bring, cole slaw, potato salad.

"Rain or shine, we'll be there. It's a good time. I wouldn't miss it," he said.

A big party will be going on under the Chance tent near the rail. It was the winner of the Best Gourmet Food Award in 2007.

A tax deductible donation of \$35 is a ticket to Chance's cheerful bash with gourmet goodies, beer, wine, Bloody Mary's and mimosas. Proceeds from this event will be donated to Maryland Therapeutic Riding.

"Take a 'Chance' and do something to help others while you wine and dine in style," said Liz Brandenstein, one of the organizers.

"We have some fabulous prizes for the winners," said Brian Henley, the editor of *Entertainment* and chairman of the 16th annual tailgate competition, "including dinner for four at some of the finest restaurants in the area, wine tastings and concert tickets."

Hat contest, too

The annual hat contest for the ladies and young girls is fun, fashionable and practical - your entry will shade you if the sun puts on a good show. From noon to 1 p.m., all millinery contestants should head over to *The Capital's* site, set up near the paddock, where the judges will be as busy as mad hatters.

Attendees can celebrate Annapolis Alive! by donning hats designed with a Colonial theme, or that are spectacular, outlandish or simply beautiful.

The Capital is sponsoring both the hat contest and the 16th annual tailgate competition.

Also starting at noon, teams of tailgate judges will taste, nibble, snack, imbibe and take notes up and down the hill. (Tailgate contestants were required to register in advance.)

Winning hat contestants will receive similar head-turning prizes.

Natalie Fluharty of Deale, last year's winner, is the one to top this year.

"Last year, we had a tremendous turnout," said Tina Henley, chairman of the third annual hat competition, "so this year we added an extra category for the ladies and two special awards for children."

11-race card

While the competitions are going on, horses and riders will be vying for honors, too.

The 11-race card is expected to draw more than 120 entries.

"Roedown attracts the top steeplechase thoroughbreds, trainers and riders from the mid-Atlantic region," noted Rodney Calver, spokesperson for the Marlborough Hunt Club.

"Last year, Good Night Shirt won the ninth race. The gelding, trained by Jack Fisher, subsequently won the Eclipse Award for steeplechase horses. Mr. Fisher was the leading trainer in the nation last year."

For steeplechase fans, the season in Maryland began at the Foxhall Farm in Monkton on March 16 and will end Sept. 27 at The Legacy Chase of Shawan Downs in Cockeysville. Other races include Howard County's Iron Bridge in Brookeville, Green Spring Valley's Point-To-Point race near Towson, the Elkridge-Harford race of last weekend, Sunday's Marlborough Hunt Club races at Roedown, and four more races concluding with the Potomac Hunt Races May 18. The final event is the Legacy Chase in the fall.

Throughout the season, riders and teams accrue points to earn cups and other prizes. Last year the Maryland Governor's Cup Steeplechase Horse of the Year went to Bubble Economy, owned by Arcadia Stable, trained by Mr. Fisher. The Novice Timber Horse of the Year, Incaseyouraminer, is owned and trained by Benjamin C. Swope. Mr. Fisher took the Leading Trainer Award and Overall Leading Rider Award went to Desmond Fogerty. The Leading Female Jockey in 2007 was Diana Gillam.

As the crowd warms up, so will the intensity of the races at Roedown. By the third race, purses will escalate to \$1,000 for the winning horse. Race 4, at 1:30 p.m., offers a \$2,500 purse. The biggest purse of the day is Race 9, at 4 p.m. boasting a \$5,000 prize.

Between the races, there's plenty to do, see and eat.

Local rock radio station WRNR 103.1-FM will host a live broadcast at the starting line rail, featuring John Salvia. "We'll have lots of giveaways," Mr. Salvia promised. The station is sponsoring live entertainment by Michael K and The Populists.

"I've been to Roedown four times and played three times," noted Michael K, who "daylights" as a government consultant for Hewlett Packard and moonlights weekends at Heroes Pub.

Performing from noon through 5:30 p.m., the four-piece band will play short sets between races.

"Loud music and horses don't mix," the bandleader said.

Wendi Winters is a freelance writer in Annapolis.