

Hamilton, Steve: Born: From: Oklahoma

“Cowboy Steve”, 43 years old (in 2017). Came back to riding after a 10 year absence and having returned to his native, Oklahoma, to be there while his kids grew up. His kids were 8 & 10 when he first “retired”, now 18 & 20 he returned to his true love—riding. In OK he worked the oil fields and was also a farrier so he stayed fit but not light. To return to riding he lost 37 lbs. in 6 weeks but running twice a day and eating 2 eggs for breakfast, a small (3 oz.) can of tuna for lunch and the same for dinner.

Son, Weston Hamilton, is a jockey now too.

A winner of nearly 1,300 career races since his first in 1991, Hamilton is in his third incarnation as a jockey. He stepped away from racing for the first time following the 2000 season and spent three years working on oil fields in his native Oklahoma.

Hamilton returned to riding in 2004 and rode late into 2006 before an automobile accident – which left him with fractured vertebrae in his neck and several broken ribs – and a desire to raise sons Garrett and Weston caused him to call it quits again.

“I never was away from horses at all. I was shoeing horses for the last 10 years. To be back to riding, people don’t get a second or third chance and just by the grace of God and working hard and people giving me a shot it’s all come together,” Hamilton said.

Hamilton returned to competitive riding with 12 mounts during the State Fair Meet at Timonium last August and followed the circuit when it returned to Laurel Park for the calendar year-ending fall meet. He wound up with 10 wins from 219 mounts in 2016, going 0-for-56 before getting his first victory aboard Bo Vuk on Oct. 2.

So far in 2017 Hamilton has enjoyed 11 multi-win days including a riding triple on April 8. He ended Laurel’s year-opening winter-spring meet that concluded May 7 tied for fourth with 40 wins and fifth with more than \$1 million in purse earnings.

Heading into the summer meet at Laurel, Hamilton has 46 wins from 309 mounts and \$1.246 million in purse earnings. He set career highs with 172 wins and 1,209 starts in 1997 and \$3.2 million in purse earnings in 2004.

“I was absolutely doing what I wanted to do. I’ve always said to my wife and everybody, not that I’m the greatest rider in the world. I don’t think I’m the greatest. I try hard and I learn something every day,” Hamilton said. “Every year I’ve ridden I can look back at the prior year and say, ‘Wow, I learned so much this year. I don’t know how I wasn’t falling off last year.’ You’ve got to keep an open mind that way. To me if you ever quit learning at something you’re doing, it’s time to do something else and get out.

“With that being said, it was a rough start. I thought, ‘I’m going to be back.’ I thought I was fitter than I was,” he added. “I had been running a lot [but] you’re never really race fit until you’re riding every day. People think, ‘I’ve been galloping 10 a day and I’m doing this and I’m doing

that;’ it’s not the same as riding a race. To be out as long as I was, my timing wasn’t just right. I wasn’t seeing everything just right. It just took a little while ... and it took a little while to get on some decent horses that actually had a shot to run well.”

“We have been lucky. People say they’d rather be lucky than good but sometimes you make your own luck, too. Again that’s where I think hard work absolutely pays off, being persistent,” Hamilton said. “I tell my boys all the time, both of them, the squeaky wheel gets the grease so don’t give up.”

Hamilton’s sons Garrett and Weston – both born in Maryland, where his wife is from and still has family – were 10 and 8 when he last left racing and will be 21 and 19 before the year is out. His youngest Weston plans to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a jockey, having done some prep work in Elloree, S.C. with Franklin Smith, brother of Laurel-based trainer Hamilton Smith, before returning to Maryland recently to have his appendix removed.

“I’m not one to pat myself on the back by any means but I think I do a good job and I try to learn every day, just watch everything that’s going on. You learn every day. I try to instill that in my youngest boy because he’s wanting to ride,” Hamilton said. “He’s been down in South Carolina galloping horses. He’ll be with me until September and he’s going to gallop for Mr. Ham Smith. Hopefully I’ll get to breeze a few horses with him out of the gate and from the pole and stuff like that. That’ll be a big highlight for me just to be beside my son doing what we both love to do.”

Hamilton, Weston: Son of jockey Steve Hamilton. Riding with the bug in Maryland. Won 4 races on Feb. 18, 2018 at Laurel.