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ATOMIC BLONDE (GER) RUNS DOWN FAVORED CHOP CHOP TO WIN \$234,500 KEERTANA STAKES

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Saturday, May 25, 2024) – West Point Thoroughbreds, Christophe Clement and Winters Equine’s Atomic Blonde (GER) surged late to get by heavy favorite Chop Chop and win Saturday’s 11th running of the \$234,500 Keertana Stakes (Listed).

Ridden by **Tyler Gaffalione** for trainer **Christophe Clement**, Atomic Blonde covered the 1 ½-mile Keertana distance in 2:31.01 over the rated “firm” Matt Winn Turf Course.

It was a wild opening to the 12-furlong marathon when **Sand and Sea** spurted clear to a commanding 22-length lead over the field following a sharp half-mile of :47.01. Sand and Sea maintained her massive margin over her five rivals until the field reached the three-furlong marker where **Vegara** quickly took advantage, passing her tiring rival with favored Chop Chop mounting her bid in second. At the top of the lane, Atomic Blonde was still third, about three lengths from Vegara. As the trio battled inside the final eighth-mile, Chop Chop took the lead from Vegara but had to hold off the late bid of Atomic Blonde who was rallying down the center of the track. At the wire, Atomic Blonde surged late to defeat Chop Chop by a half-length.

It was another 4 ½ lengths back to Vegara who was followed by **Heavenly Appointed, Holy Foley** and Sand and Sea.

“I just let (Atomic Blonde) relax early and everything worked to plan,” Gaffalione said. “She was able to relax nicely and turning for home I could feel like I was starting to get my best run out of her. She really dug in late to catch (Chop Chop) and continued to gallop out well around the turn even after that.”

Atomic Blonde rewarded her backers returning \$2 mutuel prices of \$7.64, \$3.16 and \$2.42. Chop Chop, under jockey Axel Concepcion, paid \$2.34 and \$2.10. Vegara, with Jose Ortiz in the irons, paid \$2.26.

Atomic Blonde is a 5-year-old gray mare of The Grey Gatsby (IRE) out of the German-bred mare Areion. She was bred by Gestut Karlshof.

The Keertana was Atomic Blonde’s fourth-lifetime victory from 20 starts. She banked \$138,105 for her win to improve her overall purse earnings to \$478,249.

Live racing continues Sunday and Monday this weekend at Churchill Downs with daily first posts of 12:45 p.m. For more information about the 2024 Spring Meet, visit www.churchilldowns.com.

Keertana Quotes

Tyler Gaffalione (jockey, Atomic Blonde, winner) – “I just let (Atomic Blonde) relax early and everything worked to plan. She was able to relax nicely and turning for home I could feel like I was starting to get my best run out of her. She really dug in late to catch (Chop Chop) and continued to gallop out well around the turn even after that.”

Terry Finley (founder and president of West Point Thoroughbreds, co-owner of Atomic Blonde, winner) – “All the credit has to go to Christophe (Clement) and his team. They’ve done a great job with this mare. I saw Christophe the other day after she worked and I’ve had horses with him for six or seven years. I can tell from his voice when he likes one. He had quite the pep in his step after that work and was pretty confident in her shipping her to Kentucky to get the job done. I talked to Tyler in the paddock and the thing we wanted to do was get covered up to make that one run. (Sand and Sea) took the bit immediately out of the gate and you can’t go that speed for 12 furlongs out of the gate. I then saw him covered up on the rail and figured it would be a battle late through the stretch when she came back to the field.”

ABOUT CHURCHILL DOWNS RACETRACK

Churchill Downs Racetrack (“CDRT”), the world’s most legendary racetrack, has been the home of The Kentucky Derby, the longest continually held annual sporting event in the United States, since 1875. Located in Louisville, CDRT features a series of themed race days during Derby Week, including the Kentucky Oaks, and conducts Thoroughbred horse racing during three race meets in the Spring, September, and the Fall. CDRT is located on 175 acres and has a one-mile dirt track, a 7/8-mile turf track, a stabling area, and provides seating for approximately 60,000 guests. The stable area has barns sufficient to accommodate 1,400 horses and a 114-room dormitory for backstretch personnel. CDRT also has a year-round simulcast wagering facility and Race and Sports Book. www.ChurchillDowns.com.

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