

Jimmy Cruise Is Taking His Own Rest Cure

Ailing Trot Driver Is Known for Work on Sick Horses

By LOUIS EFFRAT

Knowledgeable harness racing people have been pointing to Earl Laird as this country's best active trotter — one of the few free-for-all standardbreds at that gait — and to Jimmy Cruise, his trainer-driver, as the "best man with a crippled horse."

For years, "Dr." Cruise has been patching up broken down, lame or sore trotters and pacers so effectively that other horsemen seek him out for advice. From the top trainers and drivers in the sport—such as Billy Haughton, Stanley Dancer, Delvin Miller, Bob Farrington, Del Insko and George Sholty—to the rawest rookies, hardly a trainer or driver has not, at one time or another, sought Cruise's advice.

Cruise worked out Earl Laird for three one-mile training trips at Roosevelt last Friday.

And it is a wonder that the 49-year-old Cruise is able to still sit in a sulky let alone work a horse. Less than six months ago, there was no way of determining when, if ever, the soft-spoken Kentuckian would be able to drive again following his worst accident in 33 years as a professional reinsman.

The Other Trotter

Jimmy had taken the 7-year-old Earl Laird to Inglewood, Calif., for the classic races at Hollywood Park last fall. He had also taken another trotter, an 8-year-old gelding named Joey Montgomery, with him. Cruise was handling Joey Montgomery in a \$5,000 event. The horse was not going to win it, but he was in a tight fit for second or third money. Suddenly, Cruise found himself tossed out of the sulky as Joey Montgomery went to his knees just at the wire.

Sitting outside Barn P at Roosevelt Raceway after working Earl Laird last Friday, the ruggedly handsome Cruise, who speaks a bit above a whisper, recalled the accident. All the while he spoke, Cruise held and squeezed a sponge with his left hand.

"I don't know exactly what happened that afternoon at Hollywood Park last October,"



Jimmy Cruise, trainer-driver, looks after Earl Laird in a barn at Roosevelt Raceway

Cruise said. "Joey Montgomery was trotting along nicely and the worst he was going to wind up was third. All of a sudden and right at the finish line, the gelding collapsed. I was spilled and on the way down lots of things must have happened to me, including a fierce kick from Joey Montgomery. "When the ambulance arrived, I was unconscious, 40 feet past the finish line. At Centennial Hospital, where I was taken, they found I had two broken ribs, a fractured right wrist, three broken bones in the back of my left hand, a terrible cut over my left eye and a nasty cut on my upper lip. I was a mess. I don't know how many stitches were taken over my eye, but I do know the doctors worked five hours on the stitching.

"I was hospitalized for two weeks, released and returned for another week because surgery was needed on the back of my left hand. It's still weak. That's why I'm continually squeezing something, trying to strengthen it." Most of the time, Cruise, who was born at Shepherdsville, Ky., and who now lives in West-

bury, L. I., with his wife, and two sons, squeezes a 10-cent rubber ball. However, he had forgotten to bring along the ball Friday. The left hand still is too weak for Cruise to drive in a race and his only training these mornings is behind Earl Laird. "The first time I get back to driving in a race, it will be with Earl Laird," Cruise said. "Since there is such a shortage of free-for-all trotters, I don't expect that to happen until some time in May, so I have plenty of time to strengthen the hand."

The "Dr." Cruise theory is that when he finds a lame, broken-down or ailing horse, the first thing to do is "look for a fever." Having found the fever, his next step is to prescribe a rest, followed by water therapy (whirlpool baths,) a poultice to draw out the fever, a mild blistering (burning or rubbing the infected spot) and more rest.

Following his theory "Dr." Cruise has accomplished out-

standing patch-up jobs on: Spencer Mite, a 6-year-old trotter with ankle and neck

troubles who cost \$500 and earned \$80,000.

Alonzo Hanover, a 3-year-old trotter with knee trouble who cost \$1,000 and earned \$30,000.

Little Charlie, a 3-year-old pacer with two bowed hocks and big knees who cost Cruise a pacing mare and earned him \$40,000.

Jimmy's late father, a tobacco farmer and harness horse- men, who did all his campaigning around the fair grounds of Kentucky and Indiana, "introduced" his son to horses in 1923. At that time, Cruise senior bought a pony, Dixie Girl, for the boy.

"Horses," Jimmy said, "are the only thing I know. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't know how to earn a livelihood."

Of Cruise's expertise, be it at breeding, training, driving or patching up horses, John Chapman, summed it up best, saying "Jimmy is one of the greatest I've ever seen. Whether the animal is completely crippled, half-lame or altogether sound, he'll get that horse to the races, if it is at all possible."