

The Most Famous Horse in the USA in 1900

By Neil Shapiro

Born in 1896, by 1905 he was legendary in the United States. Used in advertisements, touring in his own railroad car, undefeated in racing competition, Dan Patch, an American harness racehorse was the toast of America until 1909, when he retired.

Sometime around 1900, a match safe, featuring Dan Patch pacing his famous mile in 1:56, was issued by the International Stock Food Co. of Minneapolis. The tin, lithographed safe, 2 1/4" x 1 1/2" x 3/8", pictures Dan Patch in front of four other horses in a harness race on the front side. The back side reads, "The Compliments of International Stock Food Co., Minneapolis, USA, Toronto, Canada. Paid in capital \$2,000,000.00. Dan Patch, 1:56 eats International Stock Food. 3 Feeds for One Cent, every day."

The roughened dimpled striker pivots on a small rivet to swing out and enable access to the matches.





Unless you are a current aficionado of harness racing you may wonder how a company could expect to earn income and sell products by advertising a star harness racehorse, a sport that today has little hold on the general population.

By the time Dan Patch reached racing age, circa 1900, the USA was well into the industrial age and the memories of church suppers, county fairs, and neighbors waving to one another on small town streets were mostly memories. In 1909, when Dan Patch was no longer racing the Model T car was being manufactured and by 1916, when Dan Patch died, Ford was selling a half million cars. But in the 19th century many rural people still used horses and could closely identify with the sport. They loved Dan Patch's speed and newspapers papers called him the "national pet."

In a way Dan Patch stood for Middle America's cultural values. In the industrialized East the well-to-do favored trotters* while Midwesterners preferred pacers. * Dan Patch's fame converted Easterners to prefer the pacers, one of the few "wins" for the population of the middle of the country over the urban coast.

In 1902, Marion Willis Savage, a businessman purchased Dan Patch for \$60,000.00 (the equivalent of over \$2,000,000.00 in 2024) and Dan Patch became the main marketing tool for Savage's livestock feed business. And more. He was used for selling cigars, washing machines, a newspaper, and an automobile. He earned appearance fees and became the forerunner of the idea of using athletes to sell products.

*Pacers and trotters move their legs with different gaits.