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IS WINNING INFECTIOUS?

DO YOU remember back in January when I wrote about 'trainer form' after a Tom Hunt sent an email calling for me to retire? I wonder what he thinks now. Actually, I don't give a damn what he thinks so, if you read this Tom Hunt, don't bother sending me any more emails.

Anyway, it is interesting to consider the concept of trainer or yard form when things are going well in the hope that we can learn something for the inevitable troughs when things don't go so well. But, so far, we are still uncertain about the existence of the trainer form phenomenon.

As I said back in January, it is generally assumed that horse health dictates whether or not the horses in the yard, as a whole, perform up to their best or not. But I can tell you now that, if that is the case, most vets, trainers and other horsemen are not looking at the right parameters. May and June 2015 have seen an unusually high incidence of coughing in our yard and, in some cases, this was accompanied by other signs of infection such as raised temperatures and nasal discharge.

Despite this, the team is performing very well and the media are generally referring to us as an 'in form' yard. Could it be possible that our horses would have won even more races if we hadn't had so many coughing? It is hard to imagine that being the case.

Gaining an edge

YOUR Klarion this month is jam-packed with news about two-year-olds. Twenty-eight individuals had won 35 races between them to the end of June, which is certainly an exceptional start for us by recent standards although I am loathe to call it our best juvenile campaign just yet. I can't remember how many two-year-old winners we had had up to this point in 2003 but we did have three juvenile scorers at Royal Ascot that year, so this type of training and racing isn't as new to me as some might like to suggest.

Nonetheless, the change from recent seasons is there for all to see and Dr Henry Swan (see Kickback, p. 8) has asked whether this is an early positive sign from the breeze-up experiment we are conducting.

Outstanding

Realistically, a group of five new inmates from the breeze-ups was unlikely to have a significant impact on a team which is now in excess of 130 unless one of them immediately proved to be a very outstanding individual, but the breeze-up experiment has, nonetheless, been a great success. All

five have run, which is an achievement in itself; all five have been placed; and two have won. That, I think, by anyone's standards, has to be called a success and I will be very surprised if the other three don't win before the season is out.

I pointed out when embarking on the project that our first winner, Hinari Video, had come from the breeze-ups way back in 1987 and our first Listed winner was purchased in the same way. Back then I thought it was the ideal introduction for new or single-horse owners as it greatly increased the chance of a runner and a winner at some level while retaining the dreams that come with an unraced horse. As the breeze-up system evolved and vendors moved from breezing in threes or pairs to galloping individuals against the clock, I felt that I was at a disadvantage and that others had more knowledge and information on timing.

James Willoughby and Jason Hathorn gave me back the edge and they have rekindled my interest in breeze-ups. I am very pleased with my purchases and I have also had the opportunity to follow others which they recommended but which I chose not to, or was unable to, buy. The information



Muhadathat, a winner bought from breeze-ups

they provide is clearly worth having.

I will be back at the breeze-ups next year and will, hopefully, be working with James and Jason again. That will not impact on my buying at the yearling sales but I will certainly be offering breeze-ups as an option and recommending them for new owners and those who are going to have only one horse.

The experience of working with James and Jason, and the information they have

been able to give me about my own record over the years, has also convinced me to embark on another project and I will, for the first time ever, be looking at horses at the horses-in-training sales. As you will see from James' piece in this issue, they have already done quite a bit of research on horses-in-training sales and they have convinced me that there is value to be had and improvers available. It will be another interesting project and, perhaps, an opportunity to plug some gaps in the MJR team.

An 'A' for Ascot

I HAVE often praised those racecourses which provide good facilities and high standards of hospitality for owners and, when doing so, I have suggested that Ascot tends not to get the credit that it deserves for their facilities and the wonderful complimentary meals which they offer.

For me, they remain the unsung leaders and the Royal meeting, despite the large crowds, did nothing but reinforce that view. The Owners' and Trainers' bar, which received a lot of criticism for being away from the grandstand, is an excellent facility and it, and the adjoining dining room, is staffed by an exemplary team who are welcoming, friendly and highly efficient.

Television coverage from other meetings, in the owners' bar, is limited to one screen showing ATR and one showing RUK but it is always on and sets a simple example to every other flat racecourse in Britain. No other course achieves this basic standard of racing coverage and Newmarket must earn the brickbat in this category as they have installed three large televisions labelled 'Attheraces', 'RacingUK' and 'Newmarket Television' but they are invariably on the wrong channels.

I'm not sure if the Owners' and Trainers' viewing area has been moved since the new Ascot was first built, as it took me a long time to find it, but I now find that it is easy to get to and more than adequate even at the busiest of times.

The new Ascot, if we can still call it 'new', is growing on me.

Separating facts from opinion

LAST month I wrote about the increasing demand for 'information' about runners and my belief that much, if not most, of that which is mandatory under the rules is nothing more than conjecture and opinion and is, if anything, misleading to punters when reproduced as if it were fact. Roy David (see Kickback) agrees that 'there are idiosyncrasies in the amount of information the BHA instruct trainers to reveal' but he would like some detail on the dates when horses were gelded, as is made available to punters in France, and on whether or not fillies or mares are racing in foal.

Well, I cannot deny that the removal of both testicles from a colt could be pretty significant and I can imagine that the

date when the deed was done might be relevant if it took place too close to racing to have allowed all the hormonal changes to take effect, or if the horse was still a little tender in its nether regions. However, I can appreciate that the BHA might have some difficulty in policing a rule that requires the exact date of surgery to be reported. What if the horse was not in training, or in the care of a licensed individual, at the time of gelding? What if it changed hands after gelding or was imported from another jurisdiction where such rules don't apply? It strikes me as far too complicated and unnecessary and I wonder how the French apply that ruling. We already have a rule which requires us to declare that a horse

has been gelded and that information is made available to the public. Failure to notify the BHA by five days prior to running will result in the trainer being fined and this did happen to two trainers just recently.

Mandatory

Likewise, pregnancy is an undeniable fact although diagnosis can sometimes be tricky. The BHA have recently introduced rules making it mandatory to declare that a filly or mare is racing in foal, to give the last day of service, and to notify them if she is found to have lost the pregnancy. These are facts and I see no reason why the information cannot be made available to the public.

However, we should refrain from implying that these changes have a predictable affect on performance and we should end the current practice of declaring jockeys' and trainers' opinions as if they were fact. Sadly, we actually seem to be going in the opposite direction.

