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Remarkable

THIS time last month I wrote about Fire Fighting being a remarkable horse. Well, since then, he has become even more remarkable. At that stage he was not long after winning the Listed Carlingford Stakes at Dundalk by five lengths on his 22nd start of 2015 and he had then visited Tattersalls Horses in Training sales where he was bought back for 85,000 guineas.

He then ran again, just a few days after the last Klarion went to press, at Kempton and finished fourth of nine having been denied a clear run at a crucial stage of the race. Ten days after that we took him to Lingfield where he finished a disappointing 11th of 14. That run would probably have resulted in a fairly long break for most horses but not for Fire Fighting: we are never disappointed now, so long as he comes home in one piece, and we immediately started looking forward to the next race. That came just 11 days later and put Fire Fighting back in the winning groove with an emphatic victory.

There is little or nothing of any value for him now, for the rest of this year, so he will end 2015 on four wins and seven placed efforts from 25 runs. In his career to date he has started 51 times for nine wins, 19 times placed second or third, and winnings of £221,722. A remarkable horse by anyone's standards.

He will now walk and trot until the end of December, provided he doesn't get too fresh and look like he needs a canter. He will be back on the racetrack in February with the All Weather Championships in mind. Thank goodness he wasn't sold.

Mellowing

IMET James Underwood at Tattersalls last week when he was distributing his 'Review of 2015'. It reminded me of the first time I met the man, in exactly the same place, way back in 1988, when I had just completed my second season as a trainer. I had already managed to get a hold of the 'Review' by the time I saw him that year and I immediately challenged him about his failure to have me in his trainers' table which was based on number of winners to number of horses in yard, as listed in Raceform's Horses In Training book of that year.

He explained that he considered only trainers with more than a certain number of winners but, as he hadn't made that clear in the publication, I was not placated and I made my feelings very clear to him. I was especially incensed as he had advised owners to choose their trainer from his list and I believed that I should be on it.

Trepidation

Despite that, I came to love his publication back in those days and his forthright opinions on the sport. Every year I and, I suspect, most others who worked in this industry would await his Review with a huge amount of trepidation, dearly hoping to receive one of his 'bouquets' and fearing a dreaded 'brickbat'.

Sadly, I think the publication has gone a bit 'soft' although he might well say the same about me and my writings. Perhaps, as the Review has grown, he has delegated the writing to others with less grit than he has

Leading Trainer by Total Wins/Individual Horses Run in 2015
(to 28.11.2015; minimum 40 wins)

Trainer	Runs	Wins	Strike Rate (%)	Individual Horses Run	Wins Per Horse
Mark Johnston	1193	200	16.8	197	1.02
James Given	293	40	13.7	41	0.98
Keith Dalgleish	508	73	14.4	75	0.97
Ruth Carr	410	43	10.5	45	0.96
Sir Mark Prescott	293	57	19.5	66	0.86
David Evans	643	80	12.4	95	0.84

himself; perhaps, as the amount of advertising which the publication attracts has more than doubled, he no longer wishes to risk biting the hands that feed him – I hope that is not the case; or, perhaps, (like me?) he has just mellowed with age.

HIS way of assessing trainers has certainly changed. Back in the day it was all about the trainer who delivered the most winners, and wins, from the material available, although his use of Raceform's Horses In Training to determine the size of string was flawed. That publication was then, as it is now, hopelessly inaccurate. Small trainers tend to put in every horse that they can claim

some tentative connection to, as I did back in 1988, while some of the biggest yards omit up to half of their team.

But his views on trainers, their results, and their pricing structures rubbed off on me back then and I still try very hard to maximise the number of individuals in my yard which win, at least, one race.

Assessment

It is still impossible to measure the size of a trainer's team from Horses In Training or any other published list so the best assessment comes from looking at the number of individuals which run, although this too is flawed as some yards, like ours, will run a

very high percentage of their horses while others run fewer than half.

James Willoughby has recently given us some statistics for a brochure we are producing and the top three trainers in one table, trainers ranked by wins per individual runner, particularly caught my eye. Immediately behind yours truly come former Kingsley Park employees, James Given and Keith Dalgleish. I wonder, if we looked at the Irish figures, whether Andy Oliver, another MJR old boy, would feature.

Unfortunately, my prowess in that area no longer earns me any awards in the James Underwood Review. All I got this year was the description of 'doughty'. I'm not sure if that was a compliment or not.

Fit for purpose?

LAST month I also commented on the fact that the under-bidder on Fire Fighting had told me that the vet report he obtained for the horse 'wasn't that great'. I said that I would love to see that report and discuss it with the vet who produced it. I couldn't see how any vet could find fault with the horse and I said, 'They hardly need look at the horse. His record speaks for itself.'

My friend, Simon Stirk (see this month's If Only They Could Talk on p.18) disagrees with me and put it to me,

while we were out on one of our cycling trips, that it is the vet's job to base his opinion as to the horse's soundness on his clinical examination and that the horse's race record should play no part in this.

I take his point but I believe that the first, and often most helpful, stage in any clinical examination involves gathering an accurate history for the animal.

History

This can be incredibly difficult with some cases where the owner either doesn't know the full details or has reasons not to be forthcoming with them but, for a horse at a Horses

In Training sale which has run regularly and recently, the most important part of the veterinary history is there for all to see. Of course, something may have happened in, or since, the last race but any such injury will usually still be apparent if the last race was only a few days ago.

FIRE FIGHTING had run, and won, just five days before that sale and, if there were any signs of disease or injury present at the time of sale which might affect his ability to race, I couldn't see them. And there was nothing to stop him from racing just eight days later and twice more since that.

The vet who reported to the under-bidder probably wasn't

the only one to find fault with the horse. Four vets examined him at the sale which confirms that four potential buyers were serious enough about buying him to go the lengths of having him vetted. It is possible that three of them passed him as fit for purpose and recommended him to their clients but it seems highly unlikely, if that were the case, that they would all value him at less than 85,000 guineas, especially as the person, apart from me, who bid most admits to having a vet report that 'wasn't that great'.

Is there a vet out there who examined Fire Fighting at Newmarket and is willing to come forward and say what he or she found wrong with the horse? Maybe I am carrying on racing him in blissful ignorance.

