

PERMIAN'S THE DANTE DANDY!

By
JOHN SCANLON

Derby trial win for MJR colt evokes memories of a Middleham legend

PERMIAN swooped to a Derby trial victory on the Knavesmire in the Group 2 Dante Stakes, stirring echoes of a Middleham racing legend.

For the race takes its name from Dante, the last northern-based winner of the Derby, having been trained by Matthew Peacock at Middleham to win the premier Classic in 1945.

The race named in Dante's honour was established in 1958 and has long been seen as a major trial for the Derby itself. In its 60

renewals, the race has been won 10 times by a horse who went on to land the Blue Riband of the Turf at Epsom, the first being St Paddy (1960) and the latest Golden Horn (2014).

Permian was one of 10 runners who went to post on May 18 for this year's renewal of the Dante. After rainstorms struck York on the first day of the meeting,

Cracksman's participation in the race was in doubt, and he was duly ruled out of the event on the day. In his absence, Godolphin's Benbatl was sent off favourite, and with Ryan Moore required to ride Aidan O'Brien's Exemplar, Franny Norton renewed his acquaintance with Permian.

In the race itself, a trio of Godolphin runners led the way, with Wolf Country making the running, followed through by Benbatl and Swiss Storm. Franny was able to settle Permian in a decent

position in fourth, racing towards the rail. Turning for home, the leaders moved off the far rail as is now customary at York. This gave Franny the option of mounting a challenge on the inside of the leaders, and indeed he chose to play that option, asking Permian for his effort with two furlongs to run.

Benbatl edged past Wolf Country and into the lead with just over a furlong to run, but Permian was flying on his inside and soon took over the lead as the

beginnings," noted Mark.

"But he has clearly progressed through the spring. To see him at Epsom and Newmarket you could see he'd come on and you could see it again today."

Mark had not previously won the Dante, although Mister Baileys finished third to Erhaab in 1994.

In addition to prize-money exceeding £105,000, Permian's Dante display also earned the colt a crack at the Derby, for which he was supplemented on May 28,

at a cost of £85,000. Having travelled to Middleham to acquaint himself with the horse, William Buick, who partnered Wolf Country in the Dante, was confirmed as his jockey for the big race on June 3.

Permian, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed's Teofilo colt, had served notice of his improvement with a cracking run in Epsom's Derby Trial at the end of April. Sent into the lead by Franny Norton with well over a furlong

to run there, he just failed to hold the late challenge of the odds-on Cracksman and was beaten by a short head.

Sent to Newmarket to contest the Newmarket Stakes on May 6, Permian faced four rivals, including another hot favourite in Khalidi. Straight from the stalls, James Doyle sent Majoris into the lead. Ryan Moore settled Permian in second, but Majoris was soon well clear of the field, and at one stage seemed to have opened a gap which could well have extended to 10 lengths.



Godolphin's John Ferguson (right) receives the Dante trophy on behalf of Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed from Betfred's head of media Mark Pearson

field flashed past the furlong pole. Keeping on strongly for Franny, Permian went on to win by three-quarters of a length from Benbatl, with Crystal Ocean staying on to grab third, a further half a length in arrears.

Somewhat predictably the media reaction to Permian's win was to concentrate on the boost to Cracksman's Derby chances they felt it represented. However, connections were in no doubt as to the merit of Permian's win.

"Permian's come from humble



Clockwise from top: Permian hits the front in the Dante; Permian with MJR groom Gavin Hardisty; Franny Norton interviewed by Oli Bell on his way to the winner's enclosure

However, Majoris eventually came back to his field and was overtaken with well over a furlong to run by Permian. Soon clear, Permian stayed on strongly in the closing stages for Ryan Moore

and scored by four and a half lengths from Speedo Boy, with Khalidi, from whom Permian received 3lb, finishing in third, a further length and a half behind Speedo Boy.

"Ryan said he'd not gone so quick in a 10-furlong race in a long time," joked Mark Johnston after the race.

"But he liked the horse, who stayed every inch." ■