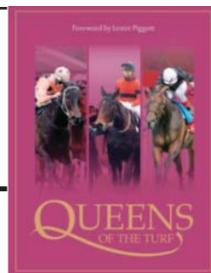


Queens of the Turf Edited by Andrew Pennington Racing Post Books



THIS book sets out to celebrate the careers and achievements of 'the most illustrious fillies and mares in racing history'. It's a tribute to some outstanding horses, drawn both from Flat racing and National Hunt, and is a high quality product, liberally sprinkled with superb photographs, both in colour and black and white.

'Queens of the Turf' is organised into 50 short essays by a selection of the Racing Post's top writers – Alastair Down, Nick Godfrey, Peter Thomas, Alan Sweetman, Scott Burton et al. These essays are preceded by a foreword written by Lester Piggott, in which he nominates Petite Etoile, Park Top and Dahlia as his three favourite fillies, and by an introduction by Racing Post editor Bruce Millington, in which he explains how the idea for the book occurred to him.

Originally serialised in the paper itself, each essay stands on its own and tends to follow the normal style of its writer. Those penned by Alastair Down and Steve Dennis are, for example, not short of humour. They make for highly entertaining reading; for example, in his essay on "Oh So Sharp", one of just two winners of the fillies' Triple Crown since the Second World War, Alastair Down reminds readers that the young Lord Howard de Walden, owner and breeder of that great filly's sire, Kris, knocked down a pedestrian in Munich in the 1930s who turned out to be a young Adolf Hitler!

The geographical scope of the book is impressive, too, as

great fillies from the United States, Australia, France, Hungary and Ireland make the list. It was fascinating to read about the extraordinary career of the unbeaten Kinseem, and I must confess the exploits of the great Ruffian seem to have evaded my notice over the years.

The strength of this book lies in the memories which the words and pictures evoke of some memorable horses. The secret to enjoying it, I would suggest, is not to think too much about how the list was compiled, and in particular not to seek to compare one horse against another.

It would be an unenviable task, surely, to seek to rank these horses in strict terms of merit. What struck me when reading through the book was how many of those included improved markedly for age and racing; for example, Pebbles and Stanerra were two who excelled at the end of their careers after inconspicuous beginnings. How do you compare such fillies with animals who were more or less unbeaten but across much shorter careers?

The decision to include National Hunt heroines, and in fairness how could you exclude Dawn Run from such a book, is understandable, but, from a personal point of view, regrettable. Great fillies of the past have been omitted, perhaps as a result of the likes of Solerina and Lady Rebecca being included, and, in a perfect world, I would like to have seen two separate books released.

It also has to be said that it astonishes me that Attraction, the first filly to win the English and Irish 1,000 Guineas and the Coronation Stakes, fails to make the cut.

Leave aside this nitpicking, however, and simply enjoy a beautifully produced tribute to some of the best fillies to grace the turf worldwide. ■

Moments In The Sun Tales From The Punter's Pal

Claude Duval
Racing Post Books



IN October 2016, Claude Duval retired as the racing correspondent of The Sun, a job he had held since 1969. Remarkably, he was the last surviving member of the staff team put together by Rupert Murdoch when he acquired and launched the tabloid paper in November 1969, and this book is not so much an autobiography as an entertaining account of some of the more interesting people and horses Duval encountered during his 47 years in the job.

I have to confess that I have never been a reader of the Sun, so much of the material is new to me. Duval begins the book by retelling the story of Blackwater Bridge, a chaser acquired by the paper to run in the Grand National in 1982 and to be the prize in a readers' competition; it turned out to be a disastrous episode, but makes for fascinating and topical reading as the subject of the payment of 'luck money', one of the practices

exposed in the Racing Post's recent focus on the breeding industry, features prominently in it.

Duval tells us a little of his background. The son of a fruit farmer in Kent who had a lifelong obsession with Kent County Cricket Club, Duval fell in love with racing when his mother, Faith, took him to the Ashford Valley point-to-point meeting at Charing as a 10-year-old. A decent cricketer himself as an off-spinner in the Sussex

League, he attributes his landing of his job with The Sun as much to the sports editor's desire to assemble a decent cricket team for the paper as to his journalistic talents.

Thereafter the book really deals with a selection of the people and horses who stood out from the crowd during Duval's lengthy career. Overall, there is more material from the world of National Hunt racing than the Flat, but this is a highly entertaining and readable account of some of the stars of racing in the last 50 years.

I particularly enjoyed reading about his encounters with Tom Foley and Fergie Sutherland, trainers of the memorable Danoli and Imperial Call, and the chapter on Barry Dennis, whom Duval dubbed 'The Romford Foghorn', is equally entertaining. Anyone who loves their racing will find this book an enjoyable read. ■

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