

STRAIGHT TALKING

by Mark Johnston



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Best in Britain

I WAS delighted to be in attendance for Seamus Buckley's last day as clerk of the course at Goodwood. He was retiring after 23 years in the job so, by my calculations, he must have started the year before Double Trigger won the first of his three Goodwood Cups.

I don't remember racing at Goodwood without him and I don't remember when I began to consider it to be the best-kept racing surface in Britain, if not the world. The topography of the track makes it challenging for horses and jockeys and



Seamus Buckley receives a "thank-you" silver plate from Jim Crowley and his fellow jockeys

must make it more difficult to produce a fair racing surface but, as we saw this year in August when Glorious Goodwood was drenched by unprecedented rain, Seamus Buckley and his team could cope with virtually

anything that nature threw at them.

He will be sorely missed and we can only hope that he won't be too far away if his successor needs to tap into that wealth of knowledge on the maintenance of racetracks.



VERY MANY congratulations to Silvestre de Sousa on being crowned champion jockey again. He thoroughly deserves it, especially as he has ridden more winners so far this year than any other jockey in Britain, with 50 more successes than Luke Morris.

It is virtually guaranteed that Silvestre will finish the year in front without needing to sit on another horse, as the most wins ever achieved by Luke Morris in November and December is 47. It is nonetheless a little disappointing for British racegoers and followers of flat racing that they are

unlikely to see the champion jockey riding in this country for the next four months but those charged with the job of marketing our sport obviously believe that it is worth it for them to have their day in the mud at Ascot.

This year they had the added bonus of being able to crown the champion trainer as well, as Aidan O'Brien is beyond catching in that championship. Very many congratulations to Aidan too, for being champion trainer in Britain again, and in particular for breaking the record for the number of Group 1 wins in a year.

DARTS DAFT

A STANDARD dartboard is 18 inches in diameter, about the same width as the average jockey's chest, and it can be seen very clearly from seven feet, nine and a quarter inches.

So what idiot came up with the idea of putting the same pattern on a set of silks which are intended to be distinguishable – albeit, these days, with the aid of a television camera and a big screen – from hundreds of yards away? Probably the same person who previously commissioned a group of art students to produce new psychedelic racing colours and came up with the idea of selling plain silks in different shades of the same colour to more than one unsuspecting owner.

When the BHA produce, and sell,



The dartboard design

racing colour designs with no regard whatsoever for their purpose it makes me wonder whether the designers have ever watched a horse race.

Missing the target

SO, under new rules, eight flat trainers and one jumps trainer will lose the right to use self-certificates for declaring their horses non-runners if they have not reduced their percentage of non-runners by next March.

Firstly, you should note that the flat trainers outnumber the jumps trainers by eight to one. That was to be expected as jumps trainers are still operating under the old 24-hour declaration rules whereas flat trainers declare 48 hours in advance -- a change which resulted in a 50% increase in the number of non-runners on the flat.

Next, let's assume that these eight flat trainers are indeed abusing the self-certification process and that their number of

non-runners can be brought into line by this ruling without compromising the welfare of their horses. If that is the case and these trainers bring their number of non-runners down to below the BHA threshold level of 14%, I calculate that there will be approximately 50 fewer non-runners on the flat in Britain in a year, a reduction of less than one per week.

The BHA and racecourses should also consider that, even if they can prevent this handful of non-runners, the horses concerned will not run any more often than they do at present. It will do absolutely nothing for average field sizes.

As I have said before, the BHA should really be endeavouring to understand why an owner or trainer might not

want to run a perfectly fit horse, rather than trying to introduce rules to force people to run against their will.

No time to contribute

THE YEARLING sales season, which begins in earnest for me at Deauville in mid-August, is just about over now as I only have a one-day sale left to attend at the end of November. I really enjoy it and find it to be one of the most exciting and rewarding parts of the job, but it takes over my life for two months. In between sales I train horses and read catalogues for the next sale. If Scotland and Catalonia had declared independence in the first week of October, I might not

have noticed.

I am not, therefore, going to apologise for my failure to contribute to the BHA's Consultation on Racecourse Stewarding in Britain. Looking back, I now see that an email on the subject arrived on August 22 as I travelled home from Deauville and it invited comment by October 17, the day after I returned to France for the second round of the Normandy sale. Apparently 118 people did respond and I get the feeling that many of them were against the proposed introduction of professional stewards. I too would be very much against it. I cannot help but feel that the risk of bias is greatly increased by passing even more power to full-time BHA employees. I am already uncomfortable with some aspects of the roles of stewards' secretary

and stipendiary steward and, on the few occasions that I have been required to attend stewards' inquiries, it has struck me that the paid officials often try to assume the position of prosecutor and judge. I am generally reassured by the presence of the honorary stewards.

Hats off to Hanover

I HAVE been to many tracks in Germany and I really don't know why I missed out on Hanover until last week, but I shall certainly be making the effort to go back. From the time I made the entries I was thoroughly impressed with the service. I received an email thanking us for making the entries and encouraging us to run.

Great care was taken to tell us all about the track and how best to get there. On the day, Franny Norton and I were collected from the airport and taken to the track where we were met and warmly welcomed, and I was taken to be allocated with the appropriate badges and given a tour of the facilities. I was then shown to the VIP area where an excellent buffet lunch and free bar was available. The weather was miserable but Peach Melba's win made that more than bearable and I shall now be looking to return on a sunnier day. I told some of the directors what I thought of their hospitality and I was gratified to hear that they had visited York and Nottingham this year and had tried to replicate the service that they had received.