



mark@markjohnstonracing.com

176 and counting . . .

HAPPY NEW YEAR! Another year over, a new one just begun. Another 215 British flat winners added to our total, for those who are counting from 1987, but, for those who like to concentrate on the present, it is back to zero and we start all over again.

The debate about championships apparently raised its ugly head again but, apart from the fact that it was briefly mentioned when I appeared on Racing UK's Luck on Sunday, it pretty much passed me by. I do get the feeling, however, that a majority are beginning to see sense and realise that the trainers, rather than the jockeys and the owners, have been right all along and a 12-month season is the only fair and proper way to decide who is champion in a sport that now operates a 12-month season.

Individual

While Silvestre de Sousa is undoubtedly a worthy champion, (nobody could ever question his work ethic, and he was going to be champion this year almost regardless of the time period over which it was calculated), it was not in the best interests of British racing to have him crowned champion long before the season was over. It is time to stop putting the interests of individual courses and sponsors ahead of the overall interests of the sport.

Let's get back to 12-month championships for all, with the flat racing championships sticking to the calendar year. With much of our flat racing categorised by the age of horse, and thoroughbred horses all being deemed to have their 'birthday' on January 1, there is no other logical time period.

I also heard raised



The Go Racing In Yorkshire trophy presented to Mark (right) and a commemorative trophy given by owner Dougie Livingston, both for achieving 4,000 domestic winners

the issue of whether the trainers' championship should be based on number of winners or prize-money, and I heard Richard Fahey point out in a TV interview that, by number of winners, he would have been champion for two years, 2015 and 2016. Well, if it were calculated in that way, I would have led the table on 11 occasions, but I have never suggested that that should be the case.

As I see it, it is a trainer's job to get the best out of each individual horse in

his or her care, with the owner's best interests to the fore, and that is best measured by prize-money. That said, I can't help but feel that, at times, too little is made of the importance of winning at all levels.

Passing 4,000 British winners and joining Richard Hannon Snr and Martin Pipe as the only trainers ever to pass that milestone was very important to me and I was very grateful to Go Racing in Yorkshire for marking the occasion with a Special Achievement award and a

lovely film which took us down memory lane and which will be shown again at our staff party on January 6. Of course, it can be said, and often is said, that it is easier to achieve such a feat now as there is so much

more racing and trainers have much bigger strings but, if it was easy, more would have done it. Plenty have had the opportunity.

The Racing Post website trainers statistics tables go back only to 1988, the year after I started. I had five winners that season to add to the one I had trained the year before. There were 20 currently licensed trainers who trained more flat winners than me that year. One of them trained 100 winners that season, three of the 20 ran more than 100 individual horses that year with one running 148, and they had been training for anything up to 20 years previously. Those 20 trainers, at least, have had all the same opportunities and more, so it was virtually unthinkable, even to me, that I could ever train more winners than those who were near the top of the game then and remain so today.

I apologise for repeating myself so often on the subject but, the thing that set the Kingsley Park team apart from the others and made it possible to catch, and pass, those doyens of the training ranks was our consistency. We have long boasted of the fact that we hold the record for the number of consecutive centuries of winners (24, the next closest being Richard Hannon Snr with 16), and that figure almost seems old hat now that we are targeting, and often hitting, 200-plus winners in a season. But it is that consistency of getting into the hundreds that has enabled us to chip away at Richard Hannon's record.

I believe we now lie just 176 winners away from that all-time record. All we need now is to continue to do what we have done for more than 20 years. It looks inevitable that it should be achieved in 2018 but, in this business, nothing can be taken for granted. From zero, 176 is still a big number.

Condemned to the doldrums?

MY Italian friend, Emilio Aliverti, makes some very astute observations about British racing and its new prize-money injection (see Kingsley Kickback, page 7) and asks for my opinion on the subject.

I think it is disappointing that Emilio can see the risks attached to this policy while the racing media in Britain and stakeholders in British racing, like politicians in search of votes, are too busy back-slapping and congratulating themselves on giving a few hundred pounds extra to the worst horses in Britain, whether they are capable of running into a place or not.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with aiming for all races to be run for a pot of, at least, £6,000. After all, as we have pointed out so often in the Klarion, maidens were being run for around that amount more

than 20 years ago. But it is the lack of meritocracy and incentive to improve the stock, as Emilio can so clearly see, that is the problem.

As far as I can see, in the initial all-weather period at least, and I have no reason to think it will be any different on turf, the vast majority of maiden and novice races, including open maiden and novice races, will be run for less than the 46 – 55 handicaps.

Can they not see the folly in this? If the breeding industry was governed by, or even remotely influenced by, commercial principles, they would be apoplectic

at this lack of incentive to improve the stock and reward according to ability. It is down to the breeders, and the racing industry, having lost touch with reality through having now enjoyed decades of being propped up by mega-rich people, mostly from abroad, for whom there doesn't need to be any correlation between the value of the animal and its earning capacity.

Many, of course, resent the fact that these people can afford to buy the best stock and race them in Britain, but ignore the fact that, if they were not here, the quality of British bloodstock and British racing would have fallen through the floor.

The wonderful thing about

horseracing is that there is no guaranteed formula for recognising the fastest horse before it is tried and, in reality, the vast sums of money that some are willing to pay for yearlings only gives them a

relatively small advantage over the cheaper horses.

The 'small' owner – and we should always recognise that training and racing horses can never be cheap and available to all – does actually have a chance of hitting the big time and the best way to increase that chance is to keep trying with another unproven horse. Another dream.

Incentivising owners to keep horses rated in the 46-55 bracket rather than aspire to improve or upgrade, condemns them to the doldrums and is bad for the future of British racing and the thoroughbred breed.



Mark and Emilio Aliverti

All we need now is to
continue to do what we have
done more than 20 years