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They tell us we are going to have an Indian summer. That means a period of unseasonably good weather in the autumn. It doesn't really mean that temperatures are going to soar to a level that you might expect in India in summertime. You won't be growing bananas in Basingstoke or mangos in Middleham.

The trees might hold their leaves a little longer and, if we're really lucky, there might still be some growth in the grass but it is still October, Indian summer or not. Nothing will hold back the changing day length and the onset of winter, so don't be buying a mankini and you can pack away your sprinklers, whether you're a gardener or a Clerk of the Course.

Sadly, I know they won't listen to me so you can brace yourselves for some dodgy Going reports and inexplicable changes in form. Don't pass it off as the horses having had enough for the year if the divots are flying from the watered turf.

Last Thursday, when making declarations for Saturday, I was particularly surprised to see that Chester was Good-Soft and Haydock, just down the road, was Good-Firm and had had 15mm of water applied.

I asked one of my racing secretaries Jacqui Connor to call the Clerk of the Course at Chester and ask how this could be possible – I was convinced he must have over-watered – but he was adamant that his ground was Good-Soft and that he hadn't put a drop of water on it.

### Damaged

Silly me. I was questioning the wrong clerk. I was shocked on Saturday morning to find that Haydock was also Good-Soft having had just 1mm of rain on the Friday. I went to Haydock and, Clerk of the Course, Kirkland Tellwright was able to lay part of the blame on the current inaccuracy of the Racing Post (another important issue) as he had apparently changed the ground description to Good on Wednesday after rain on Tuesday.

Nonetheless, the ground at Haydock on Saturday was not as described at declaration time and the change was nothing to do with the weather. We can't change the weather and I accept that, sometimes, we can't even predict it very well but, as Richard Hughes told us earlier in the year, racecourse turf is often damaged by watering and, in my opinion, it is particularly susceptible in spring and autumn.

Unfortunately, it seems that many clerks of courses just cannot accept that they are supposed to be aiming for Good-Firm ground. That BHA instruction simply is not being adhered to and should be changed or enforced.

## A source of pride

LIES, damn lies, and statistics – isn't that what they say? Statistics can be, and often are, manipulated to give different impressions, but the figures are facts and it is only the interpretation which can be altered.

It is generally accepted as good business practice in most, if not all, industries to have targets, goals and objective measures of those goals. For us, one goal is the number of winners and I am immensely proud to have passed the 200-winner mark again this year. I hope, if nothing else, it shows unparalleled consistency.

Of course, it isn't all about the number of winners – I am the first to say that – but any owner who tells you that winning races is not their foremost goal is kidding you and/or themselves.

Certainly, different owners have different objectives and we try to cater for whatever they may be. Ultimately we want to maximise the horse's potential and win the best possible races and the most prize-money, but that all starts with trying to win a race.

I freely admit that I look at the British Flat Trainers table in the Racing Post almost every day and, once a week, I discuss our targets and results with the yard managers, who each have their own individual targets for winners and prize-money. This year we are particularly proud of our achievements in terms of winners and prize-money as they have been accomplished with fewer horses than we have had in recent years.

I am always drawn to the figures for individual winners to individual horses

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Who remembers that?

I do, despite the fact that I was no great fan of the programme, so it was clearly a good catch-phrase; it got straight to the point, and we all knew where and when the programme was on.

'It's summertime, it's Monday evening, it's racing at Windsor.' How would that work?

Windsor races on 22 Mondays – mostly evenings – throughout the flat season and has become pretty synonymous with the slot. I expect it works for them and, as Mondays are generally a quiet day on racecourses, their competitors have probably been happy to allow them to establish this niche.

However, if a course was trying to establish something of a monopoly on Saturdays, you would think they might meet with a bit more resistance.

Newmarket (pictured) now races on 17 Saturdays, up from 15 in 2009, 13 in 2004 and 10 in 1993. How and why did this come about? I assume it is good for Newmarket but is it good for horseracing?

Of course, there is much more racing than there was 20 years ago,



Newmarket has great turf and plenty of it at their disposal with two separate tracks and grandstands, and they do have a large percentage of the horse population on their doorstep, but I still wonder how they have managed to grab such a large percentage of the cream. It isn't by paying the best prize-money, that's for sure, and they are repeatedly trumped in that category by courses such as Chester.

Don't get me wrong, I like racing at Newmarket, on any day of the week, and do very well there, but I think our weekends are over-congested and there seems to be little regard for the horse population, race planning, or availability of jockeys when cramming all our best racing into the same day.



Winners -- and already this year MJR has sent out more than 200 of them

and, unfortunately, the Racing Post only publish this for the season (November 10, 2013 to November 8, 2014), but this season we are the only yard in Britain to have had more wins than individual horses run and I expect the same would apply to the calendar year.

We are also more than satisfied with our prize-money total this year which, at more than £2.7 million, is well ahead of target. However, as Deirdre never ceases to remind me, come January 1, we're back to zero and the slog and the uncertainty all starts again.

## Better without them

RACECOURSES are, apparently, up in arms at the BHA's suggestion that owners' contributions to prize-money should be capped at 75% of the total. They are saying that there hasn't been proper consultation.

What is there to consult about? Surely they can't try and justify the current situation where they run some high-value races with more than 90% of the prize-money coming from entry fees.

I am no stranger to winning such races, with Secret Brief being our latest winner in the Tattersalls Millions series, but I have consistently argued against the principle and I always spell out the economics of these races to owners before the entry stage.

The Racehorse Owners Association has now come out against such races and they made the claim that some races are funded by owners to the tune of more than 90%, but I know, and have shown in the recent past, that

some of the Sales races, especially in Ireland, raised more than 100% of the prize-money pool in entry fees.

These races distort the whole race programme as they often carry greater prize-money than Pattern races of much higher quality and they have a significant effect on annual standings of trainers, owners, horses and, above all, sires. As with bonuses which are funded by owners, they bring no extra money into the sport and they give a very false impression of prosperity in an industry where returns to owners are, frankly, pitiful.

To be blunt, while individuals, including myself, can benefit from winning these races, the industry, overall, would be better without them. Let's hope the BHA takes a firm stance on this and that the ROA is right behind them. A 25% minimum combined contribution from courses, levy, and sponsors, surely, isn't a lot to ask for.

## Keep up debate on handicapping

A number of important subjects have been discussed in the Klarion this year and I feel that we must maintain the debate on some of these issues. In August I drew attention to Simon Holt's views on the handicap system and, while I didn't necessarily agree with his proposed solutions, it was refreshing that he was willing to question the basic principles of the system as applied to British racing.

Last month Bill O'Gorman gave us his personal view on the subject and, again, it was thought-provoking stuff. Bill is a mine of information on horseracing and, in particular, on the history of the sport. I fear that his piece would have been rather difficult to follow for anyone without a thorough understanding of the subject but Bill also, clearly, believes that the system is flawed and requires a thorough review.

Again, I am inclined to disagree with many of Bill's proposals but I respect his opinion and I think that his ideas are, at the very least, worthy of proper consideration.

The BHA has vowed to have a review of the whole system but, unfortunately, more pressing issues appear to have pushed the subject on to the back burner. It still needs to be done and, when the time comes, I dearly hope it is done by people with open minds and a willingness to consider radical change. Simon Holt and Bill O'Gorman should, at least, be afforded the opportunity to air their views.

## P.S.

In last month's *Off The Bridle*, John Scanlon questioned the principle that 'raising the status of the races', in the new upgraded sprint programme, 'will somehow raise the standard of the horses competing in them' and he asks why, if this is believed to be the case, the opposite principle has been applied to staying races such as the Queen's Vase. Is somebody out there going to answer his question? I think it is a good one and deserves some response.