



Mark Johnston's

Straight Talking

Sales now in full swing



Mark views a yearling at Arqana

OCTOBER sees our sales season hit fever pitch starting with Goffs, Ireland, in the first week, followed by almost two solid weeks, and four books of yearlings, at Tattersalls Newmarket, and then back to Arqana in Deauville for another round of French offerings.

Charlie and I have already been together to Arqana's August sale and Goffs Doncaster. He has attended Tattersalls Ireland sales at Ascot, where he bought nothing, and Fairyhouse, where he came home with a whole truck load. I have had the pleasure of Baden-Baden in Germany and, for the very first time, the Osarus sale at La Teste in the Bordeaux region of France.

Osarus and their partners Tattersalls invited me to the La

Teste sale and treated me royally. I think it was a good move on their part -- I bought three

yearlings and I am already planning a return next year.

BEWARE the 'bogey man'. It hadn't occurred to me, until it was pointed out recently by an experienced owner, breeder and veterinary surgeon, that governing bodies and regulators commonly create a 'bogey man' or potentially catastrophic situation, and then ask for more money to solve the problem.

APOCALYPSE NOW?

We were talking about the fact that the risk to the integrity of horseracing from the use of cobalt as a doping agent is being blown totally out of proportion and that many of the measures being used by the BHA in the name of upholding racing's integrity are heavy-handed and totally unnecessary. Not to mention, very expensive.

I'm not saying that the BHA created this particular bogey man. They may well have borrowed or inherited him from Australia, but they are certainly running with him and allowing him, with plenty help from the racing media, to poison the minds of racegoers and followers of the sport.

This week, Richard Forristal, writing in his Racing Post 'Thursday Column', when referring to a cobalt positive in an Irish Point-to-Point horse said: "The perception now is that a trainer can get off with the same minimum €1,000 fine as they would for an anti-inflammatory being found in a horse's system. A risk worth taking, especially in a point-to-pointer who could be sold in the days after the race?"

Eh? He has obviously been convinced that the use of cobalt, a naturally occurring substance which has never been substantiated as a performance-enhancer, is worse than using anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. phenylbutazone ["Bute"] or corticosteroids) which are well proven to reduce inflammation, kill pain, and could effectively be used to mask and reduce the effects of underlying injuries -- 'especially in a point-to-pointer who could be sold in the days after the race'.

He clearly has things totally out of perspective and I would have put the blame for that firmly with the BHA if it were not for the fact that he ends his column with reference to "the imminent apocalyptic threat of a hard Brexit". Now, that's another subject on which there are many strong and varied opinions, but I haven't heard anyone else describe the situation as apocalyptic. Beware the bogey man!

MUTUAL RESPECT

SADLY, this is the last Kingsley Klarion, for the foreseeable future, in which you will find a contribution from James Willoughby. James will now be acting as a consultant to the BHA and it is considered that writing for the Kingsley Klarion might constitute a conflict of interests. I'm not surprised by that as there were some who thought that my writing for the Klarion constituted a conflict of interests when I was a member of the BHA board. It is a moot point as it can easily be argued that what is good for me is good for

horseracing and vice versa. And I am sure the same applies to James Willoughby.

I will miss him but, hopefully, we shall keep in touch on a personal level.

There might just be a few of you who have missed out on the story of how I first met James Willoughby and so I think it might be worth recounting here.

Sometime back in the mid-1990s I received a letter -- email hadn't been invented or, at least, wasn't in common use -- from a young undergraduate in mathematics at Leeds University who

wanted to get into the horseracing industry. He was seeking something along the lines of an assistant trainer's position.

I couldn't see where someone like this could fit into my fledgling business but something intrigued me about his letter -- perhaps its similarity to the many I had written to trainers in the hope of getting a foot in the door -- and I suggested that he come and see me. Now I can't remember whether he was early or late but I do remember that, around the appointed time for our

meeting, the doorbell rang and, when I answered it, I was faced with a very sweaty young man in training shoes with a rucksack on his back who had taken a

fit into my plans but I was never going to forget him or his unprecedented desire to get into horseracing. And, from his point of view, I believe I was the

only trainer who had gone so far as to agree to see him. As a result, we quickly developed a

mutual respect and

friendship that endures.

He assures me that Simon Rowlands will be an able successor. I hope he is, but he has large shoes to fill.

I was faced with a very sweaty young man in training shoes with a rucksack on his back

train from Leeds to Harrogate, a bus from Harrogate to Ripon, another bus from Ripon to Masham, and had run the last eight miles.

Sadly, I still didn't see where he could