



# Mark Johnston's

**O**UR Leading Horse by Prize-money Earned table (page 27) is an eye-opener – not that the average Klarion reader needs their eyes opened when it comes to discussing prize-money in British racing.

Despite what we are all hailing as a tremendous start for our team in 2021, Mildenerger has won nearly four times as much as our next highest earner, Lucky Deal, largely due to having earned £36,496.35 for finishing sixth in the Red Sea Turf Handicap in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 20. The winner of that race, Gifts of Gold, collected more than £1 million despite this being just one of the supporting races on the seven-race card.

The feature race, the Saudi Cup, went to Mishriff, owned by local owner Prince Faisal, trained by John Gosden and ridden by young David Egan. Mishriff collected a cool £7,299,270 for connections and it is worth noting that, had he instead won every Group 1 race in Britain last year, from the five furlongs



Mildenerger

of the King's Stand Stakes to the two and a half miles of the Ascot Gold Cup, all 35 of them, his earnings would have fallen almost £1.4 million short of that which he earned in this one race.

Some will be quick to point out that 2020 was a unique year for British racing with prize-money reduced due to Covid-19, and more will say that the

## Eye-opening disparity of Britain's prize-money

prize-money in Saudi Arabia is incomprehensible, at least to those who don't own oil wells, and I heard several people say that it is unsustainable.

Frankly, I might agree, if I had not been hearing the same said about the prize-money in Dubai for more than 20 years. That said, I have always believed that Sheikh Mohammed runs his country like some people might run a private business and sees every penny that goes into Dubai as a result of horseracing as off-set against the costs. How many pointed out that no hotel, no matter how expensive it was to stay in or how

# Straight Talking

many rooms it had to let, could ever be considered viable if it had cost as much as the iconic Burj al Arab, which reputedly left no change out of 7.8 billion US dollars? But that hotel quickly put Dubai on every holiday programme in the world and its role in the development of Dubai as a tourist destination and global transport hub can never be underestimated.

Saudi Arabia is a very different country and I cannot imagine that anyone is weighing the cost of horseracing against potential income for the country, but I may be wrong. There is some evidence that there is an aim to expand and develop their tourist industry. There are holiday advertisements in the airline magazines, the Hilton Hotel seemed a much brighter and more inviting place than I remember from my last visit more than 10 years ago and Riyadh looked quite a bit cleaner and greener than it was before. Trees have been planted alongside many of the major roads and there is clearly an effort to improve the appearance of the place.

**W**HEN I was last there horseracing was relatively low-key with an atmosphere suggesting that there was an element of embarrassment among the participants over competition for large sums of money in a country where, unlike UAE states, the contrast between rich and poor is stark and the rulers do not seem to be viewed with the same level of respect. This meeting was very different and I left with the impression that the principal objective was to showcase the country.

It would seem that Saudi Arabia now has a very different approach to international sport and its use as a marketing tool for the state. It can only be good for horseracing as it is bringing considerable new investment, much of which will

find its way to Britain thanks to our current standing in world racing, but it should serve as yet another reminder of the importance of maintaining that standing.

It makes my blood boil when racing journalists voice the simplistic and, frankly, quite ridiculous view that the answer to poor returns for owners in Britain is simply for them to pay less for the horses. They take no account of the huge number of jobs and livelihoods dependent on the breeding industry and the vast positive balance in favour of money coming into our country through breeding and racing of horses versus money going out.

I have been frustrated for almost as long as I have been a trainer by my inability to buy the horses I want at the sales because so many other buyers have deeper pockets and recently I criticised the level of stallion fees at a time when the vast majority of breeders are losing money. But I have to accept that to simply devalue the stock would not be an answer to any of racing's ills. We are not operating in a British bubble and the vast majority of owners, breeders and even stallion owners are bringing money into this industry, much of it from abroad, rather than taking it out. They are not using their income to diversify into other areas and they are keeping British racing at the forefront of the world stage despite the challenges from our internal financial structure.

**L**IKEWISE, it is vital that we maintain or, better still, significantly increase the value of our top races to avoid the embarrassment of comparison with more and more nations who, quite logically, see prize-money as the way of attracting the best participants and giving their racing and, in turn, their country greater prominence on the world stage.

## FRANCE GALOP GET IT RIGHT

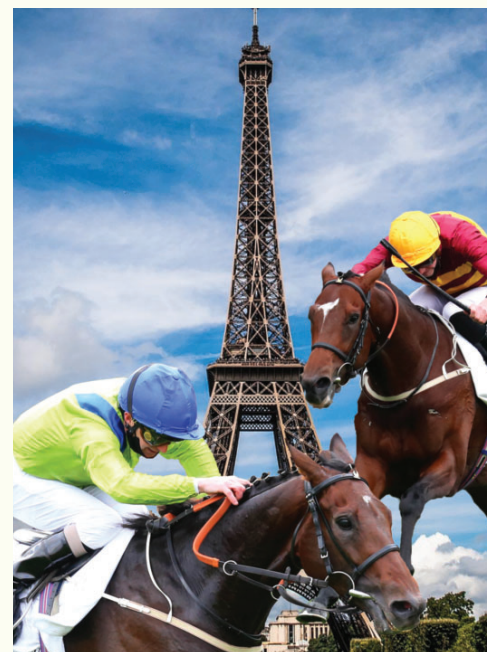
**W**E ARE still waiting to hear how much extra we are going to receive for our two Group 1 winners in France last year but we know we'll get something as France Galop have pledged to return some of the money taken from their racing in 2020 due to Covid-19. When it transpired that the drop in income was not quite as bad as they had feared, they decided to reinstate some of the prize-money.

Can you ever imagine the same thing happening in Britain? When the number of betting shops closed due to limits imposed on FOBT stakes didn't

reach the levels predicted, did any racecourses think to give back the money they had slashed from prize-money?

Sadly, they didn't and I cannot see it ever happening in the UK under our current structure. In Britain the racecourses set their own prize-money levels rather than the racing authority and most, but not all, of them want to put on the highest possible level of racing as cheaply as they can.

**Subjectivist, left, and Gear Up both won French Group 1s last October**



## Accommodating the apprentices

**L**AST MONTH I wrote about the devastating consequences, for young people aspiring to be jockeys, of the new apprentice jockey arrangements. I told you of the difficulties I faced in trying to find a first ride for young Jonny Peate and the fairy-tale ending to the saga when he steered Coupe de Champagne to victory.

Well, since then Jonny has had three more rides, one more winner, and he has another ride booked. All is going well for him but he isn't out of the woods yet and it has to be said that Jonny is not typical of new apprentices. His two outside rides have

come thanks to Robert Cowell and he is booked to ride for Jane Chapple-Hyam, both friends of his family. We are all very grateful to them for their help and support.

Olli Stammers, who is already banging in the winners this year, did not have the same connections and I have to wonder how he would have got the opportunity to demonstrate his talents had we not had horses such as Ravenhoe and X Rated for him to ride.

As yet there is no news on moves to rectify the situation. I shall keep you posted.



Jonny Peate