

# Biography of a winner

**A new, authorised biography of Mark Johnston by best-selling sports writer Nick Townsend is published this month under the striking, one-word description that pithily sums up the trainer: Phenomenon. Within the near-400 pages of the book the author justifies that singular title with details of how Mark rose from a humble, working-class background to become the winningmost trainer in the history of British racing. Townsend's book is no token update**

**of his work first published in 2006; it is a substantial revision, covering in depth not only Mark's early career but also the astonishing achievements of the past 15 years, as well as providing an insightful look to the yard's future.**

**Here Klarion writer JOHN SCANLON reviews the book, which is published by Welbeck on October 14 with a cover price of £20. Available at all leading bookshops.**

**B**ACK IN 2006, Highdown, a Racing Post company, published a biography of Mark Johnston written by Nick Townsend, the then Chief Sports Writer of the Independent on Sunday. As he explains in that book, the project had its origins in an interview conducted in a cafe in Harrogate in 2005, where Townsend wanted to pick Mark's brains in advance of 'Royal Ascot at York'.

The book was well received, and offered Townsend's insight into the many qualities which had by then, 20 years after Mark had entered the training ranks, led him to the upper echelons of the British training ranks.

Memorably, Townsend chose to start the Introduction to the 2006 book by quoting Samuel Johnson. 'The noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees is the high-road that leads him to England.' I remember wondering whether Townsend chose to begin the book with such an inflammatory quote simply to infuriate Mark, or whether it was intended to highlight a view that Mark's fulfilment of his ambitions could only have been achieved by leaving his native Scotland.

Thankfully, the quote has been omitted from this revised biography of the Master of Kingsley Park. The introduction to the new book takes as its inspiration Mark's appearance on Desert Island Discs in June 2020. Townsend argues that Mark's choice of Fleetwood Mac's 'Don't Stop' neatly encapsulates his philosophy throughout his training career. In many ways, he has a point.

The story of relentless progress which Townsend charted in 2006 has continued

apace since then. Indeed, Mark's achievement in becoming the winningmost trainer in the history of the British turf is dealt with thoroughly.

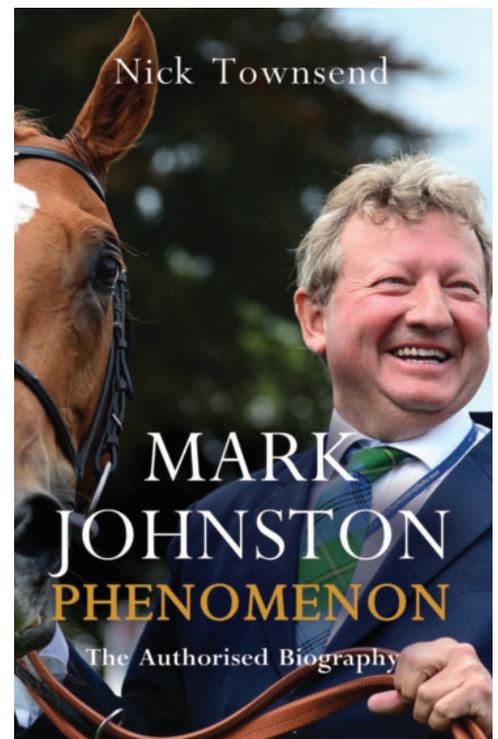
Townsend looks at the major developments at Johnston Racing up until this summer: the achievements of the stable stars in recent years, the development of Kingsley Park and its facilities and the growing influence of Charlie Johnston in the training and running of the yard's horses are discussed in full.

As in the earlier volume, Townsend is also happy to explore opportunities to press Mark into discussing racing's burning issues, such as prize-money and the whip.

For those who have followed Mark's fortunes over the years, there is a fascinating section on the yard's use of jockeys, a subject about which, so far as I am aware, Mark has said very little in the past.

**T**HERE is also an interesting section on Mark and Charlie's experiences in the sales ring, including a memorable admission from Mark that 'when I buy 50 yearlings, they're not the 50 yearlings I wanted most.' Clearly, purchases are guided by budgetary limits, but it's intriguing to read how the trainer approaches such an important part of his role.

It's clear from Townsend's text that he has enjoyed an ongoing dialogue with Mark over the years which have elapsed since the initial book was published. As someone who can claim to know Mark reasonably well, I think this is evident in



the way he portrays Mark and his attitudes.

I should state that this review was based on a proof document kindly supplied by the publisher; it is to be hoped that a number of minor typographical errors have been rectified before the print process was completed.

Nonetheless, this is a book which I would heartily recommend to anyone interested in Mark Johnston and his remarkable training operation. While drawing on the past for much of the content, it also has some important things to say about the continuing success of Johnston Racing, now and in the future. ■