



Mark Johnston's

Straight Talking

Delight as Paddy receives due recognition

I COULDN'T be more delighted by Paddy Trainor's success at the Godolphin awards. I have nominated Paddy several times before and I think he has reached the top ten once, but never the final three. Frankly, I could never understand why, as I always thought that he epitomises all that the awards are about.

His dedication, enthusiasm for the sport and the horses, and loyalty to Johnston Racing cannot be overstated and it is this that makes him such a valuable member of staff.

As usual, James Willoughby takes a different approach in his column to assessing Paddy's success and wonders how much – measured in pounds – might skilled handlers, riders and grooms contribute to a horse's performance on the track. Of course, as James points out, most of the success is down to the inherent ability of the horse: the contribution from the jockey is relatively small by comparison, and the same is the case for other humans on the team, but nonetheless vital.

I recognised this at a very early stage – at least in part due to my inability to secure sufficient numbers of highly skilled and experienced all-rounders to operate the old traditional method of

every member of staff's skills and unique attributes. It was clear to me that there is a shortage of light-weight riders in the world and to have these people mucking out boxes was a desperate waste of

human resources. I also immediately saw, and still see, that performances can be affected and races lost by having the wrong person leading up at the races.

PADDY is one of our main handlers at the races now, but other members of racing staff and those thinking of entering the industry should consider how he came to be in that position.

Of course, his size now means that we have fewer horses for him to ride and bigger people can have an advantage when handling horses from the ground but, above all, they need to be skilled and experienced if handling difficult horses. Paddy didn't enter racing with any experience of working with horses and, it

must be said, in the beginning, we thought he was rather accident-prone. Paddy's head always seemed to be more likely than others to get in the way of



Paddy with Watersmeet, one of his all-time favourites

having one person who mucked out, groomed, rode, and led up three horses – and I immediately adopted a system whereby we tried to make the most of

flying hooves and he even jumped out of a horsebox while it was still moving – itching to get the horses unloaded – and somehow managed to get his foot under the wheel. But Paddy didn't let these little setbacks dampen his resolve. Maybe it was his initial desire to be a soldier that made him automatically be the one taking a step forward, and volunteering, rather than a step back, when there was an unpleasant job to be done.

For a long time now, Jock Bennett has taken most responsibility for allocating the staff to go racing. It can be a thankless task, with many people complaining that they don't get to go racing often enough but then being unavailable to go when the opportunity is offered. Few want to go to Wolverhampton on a Friday night and Jock might find himself having to approach a number of people and maybe change his plans several times. It is easiest to ask those he knows won't refuse in the first place. Paddy was always one of those who was willing to go anywhere, any time. It paid dividends for him.

IN the many interviews Paddy has given since winning the award he has been very humble and has been at pains to say that anyone can make it in the racing industry if they want to. They can, if they give their all, Paddy-style.

Yearling inflation

BRIAN YEARDLEY, one of our longest-standing owners, recently sent me a couple of pages from a 1992 Kingsley Klarion and one headline immediately caught my attention. It said: '6,600 Guineas – Kingsley's Priciest Runner' and underneath it explained that the costliest 2yo in the yard that year had been a 6,600 guinea purchase as a yearling, and that three of our other winners that year, including the prolific Double Blue, had cost just 2,000 guineas each.

It got me thinking of how that compared to the average cost of a yearling at that time and what it would be in today's terms. I also can't help wondering how it compares with what was being spent by our competitors at the time and what they are spending now. I don't know the answers or where to find them, but I do know that there were seven-figure yearlings being sold long before 1992.

The Bank of England inflation calculator tells me that 6,600gns in 1991 (the year those animals were yearlings) equated to 14,500gns in 2020 and 15,000gns in 2021. That means that I have more than doubled what I spend on yearlings as, in 2020, I bought 57 yearlings for an average price of just over £32,000

and a median price of £31,500. In 2021 I bought 71 yearlings for a whopping average price of £48,425 and a median of £44,100.

It is a very significant increase but something tells me that it might still be well below the average overall cost of yearlings in those years and a long, long way behind the spending of most leading trainers.

Another interesting topic that James Willoughby might well give us his insight into one day.

THAT 1992 Klarion got me searching for other old Klarions and, during the search, I stumbled on a letter from the late, great, Peter Willett, written on December 18, 2005. Reference to last month's Klarion will show you that James Willoughby considers Peter Willett to be 'one of the greatest racehorse writers ever' but, back in 2005, without the editorial backing and expertise that we now have in the Klarion, we didn't publish letters even when they came from one as esteemed as Peter Willett. Thankfully, I kept it and it now appears, finally, in Kingsley Kickback on page 7. Better late than never.

ANDREW FRANKLIN (see letters, p. 7) takes exception to John Scanlon's last Off The Bridle column in which he was scathing about RCA Chief Executive David Armstrong's suggestion that 'we need to make racing more exciting' through 'innovation'.

Andrew sarcastically suggests that John is saying that we should not 'move

OVERLOOKED EXPERIENCE

with the times' but he has conveniently overlooked the main thrust of John's piece, which is clearly based on his experience of racecourses' attempts at innovation in recent years which have

largely been based around food, beverage, and alternative entertainment sales.

Coincidentally, in the Racing Post on February 18, the legendary sports promoter Barry Hearn also said that racing had to 'move with the times' but he explained that, to him, that meant making more of the sports' personalities, whether they have 'four legs or two'.

GEOMETRY IN ACTION?

A FEW QUESTIONS for the boffins. Are winning lines at right angles to the track? We assume that they are although, to the naked eye, it often appears that they are at a less than perfect angle and there is a bias favouring one side or the other.

On the rare occasions that racecourses are re-measured we often find that significant discrepancies have crept in. Could the same be true of winning line angles?

And the same applies to starting stalls. On a straight

track the starting stalls should, presumably, be parallel with the winning line and at right angles to the rails but few, if any, tracks are perfectly straight and I wonder if the angles were ever measured or if those constructing the track and the camera equipment, or wheeling out the stalls, simply do it by eye.

At Chester it sometimes appears to me that the angle of the stalls is actually increasing the disadvantage of a wide draw. I accept that, in horseracing, we cannot stagger the start to allow for the wider draw as in athletics, where runners are held to their lanes, but are we certain we haven't got it 'staggered' in the wrong direction?