



Mark Johnston's

I STAND to be corrected but, as I understand it, it has always been accepted that mature colts and 'entire' horses should not be turned out with other horses except for stallions which are 'running' with their mares. In the thoroughbred world it is quite rare for a stallion to run with mares and so, for the vast majority of male thoroughbreds, there will be little or no contact with other horses after the age of two until they are gelded.

Of course, in wild herds of horses, there will be generations of males running together but we assume that they fight, with the risk of serious injury, and that cannot be tolerated among valuable thoroughbreds. Bulls and rams are commonly kept in groups outside of their breeding season, but never stallions.

For many years after I became a trainer I held with this policy and never turned a colt out with another horse, but then a few things happened which made me start to question the accepted doctrine.

Firstly, one year, having bought a few yearling colts at early sales in August, I decided for myself that it was only a matter of weeks since the young colts were running together in groups, and I decided to turn my new purchases out until the busiest part of the season was over. They came to no harm but we found that when we brought them in at the onset of winter, they were big and strong and much more difficult to break. After that we established a policy whereby we break

TWO'S COMPANY

our early (August) purchases and a few home-breds as quickly as we can and then turn them out with a group of others of the same sex until December. We feed them as much as they can eat and they do extremely well.

Then there was Shamadan, a three-year-old colt we turned out with Deirdre's hunter mare that she had been struggling to get in foal. Shamadan did the job without any fuss and so, for a few years, he ran out with a couple of mares in

summer and in the winter he went into Deirdre's barn with her horses of all ages and both sexes. He was quiet as a lamb and fitted in without any fuss. You wouldn't have known he was a stallion. Eventually, when Deirdre decided that she didn't want any more foals one year, we couldn't bear the thought of the horse being in a paddock on his own and so we turned him out with a gelding. Again, no fuss.

And then, when visiting Jukebox Jury



Subjectivist, right, and Fire Fighting at Kingsley Park

A man sorely missed

WE MAY be one of those cut from the Shadwell roster of trainers but we have not entirely severed all connections with the late Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum's breeding operations. Last week, at Skipton market, Mikaelle, our estate manager and key cog in the Klarion machine, bought Shadwell Elandia, a nine-year-old Aberdeen Angus cow with a heifer calf at foot. She will be added to our Caledonian herd that Deirdre and I share with John and Susan Dawson, friends from my days at Glasgow Vet School. She joins Shadwell Blackbird, a cow that we bought through Richard Lancaster when Sheikh Hamdan was still alive.

In all seriousness, the complete dispersal of the Shadwell Aberdeen Angus herd marks the end of an era for the breed and is a stark reminder to me of how important Sheikh Hamdan was to so many people in different walks of life. We in racing are not the only ones by whom he is sorely missed.



Shadwell Elandia and her heifer calf at Friar Ings

Straight Talking

at Gestut Etzean in Germany, I discovered that the lucky stallions there each have one or two 'wives' who live in adjoining stables (separate bedrooms) and go out in the paddock with them each day. The stallions go off to do their duties with the other mares and then go back to their wives who, surprisingly, don't seem at all concerned about what they have been up to. They are the most contented, best behaved, stallions I have ever seen and they are led around in headcollars with no bit in their mouths.

SO, when we were recently faced with trying to give Subjectivist the best possible chance of recovery from his tendon injury, we decided that he should be turned out for the summer and I decided that he would be happier and better tempered if he was not alone. He is a five-year-old entire and he was already becoming a bit 'cranky' having not been ridden since last June and I didn't want him to become bad-tempered. We put him out in a cage most days for a few weeks, then we put him in a cage in close proximity to another cage containing the retired Fire Fighting. Fire Fighting was then released to wander around the paddock containing Subjectivist's cage, and then the pair were turned out together in a small paddock. They are doing splendidly and I am absolutely convinced that Subjectivist is better off with a companion.

Missing out on Emily

PEOPLE ARE often lauded as being a 'good judge' of horses at the sales, presumably based on the success of previous purchases, but I have always thought that it is almost impossible to evaluate the abilities of different buyers as there are so many variables, in particular the different budgets that they are working to.

I have often pointed out that the yearlings I buy at the sales are certainly not those that I wanted most. They are the ones that I wanted and could afford to buy. I don't keep any record of the ones that 'got away' or those that I rated highest, only to see the bidding open at above my limit. Although I do often jot down on my catalogue a record of my final bid – that can come in useful if we later find that the lot is unsold and I was going head-to-head with the vendor.

Occasionally someone does point out that I was underbidder on a particularly successful horse, like way back in 1997 when, after Classic Park won the Irish 1,000 Guineas, Seamus Burns said in his post-race interview that he had thought she was exceptional value when he bought her for 30,000 guineas and that Mark

Johnston had been the underbidder. I did not remember.

And just last week, Charlie asked me to look up lot 852 in Tattersalls Book 2 yearling sale of 2020 in my catalogue. I found it was a Sea The Stars filly out of Hidden Brief which had sold to Blandford Bloodstock for 60,000 guineas. I had rated her very highly in my assessment of her conformation and the post-it note I had added stated 'my bid 55,000'. 'That's Emily Upjohn', Charlie said, 'winner of the Musidora and favourite for the Oaks'. 'Why on earth did I stop at 55,000?', I asked. 'Because', he reminded me, 'Markus had given us a budget of 50,000 and you'd already overstepped it by five grand'.

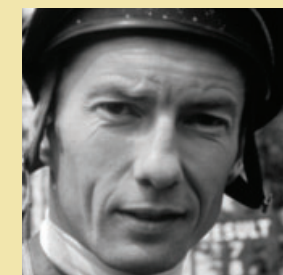
ALL was not lost as a few lots later we bought for 48,000 guineas Five Stars, a Sea the Stars daughter of Group 1-placed Kissable, whose half-sister Loving Dream won the G2 Ribblesdale at Royal Ascot and the G1 Prix de Royallieu. Five Stars won her first two starts and then fractured her pelvis jumping out of the stalls on her third start. We have recently decided to retire her.

Lester the legend

THERE IS nothing I can say that would do justice to the memory of the legendary Lester Piggott and no story about the great man that I could tell which would match the many wonderful tales recounted by those who knew him well or worked with him during his career. My favourites are the one which claims that he whispered, 'missing me?' to the connections of El Gran Senor (his former employers Coolmore) in the winner's enclosure at Epsom after they had been beaten by Secreto in 1984; and Sir Mark Prescott's tale of the journey to Longchamp when Lester drove the wrong way round a roundabout on the way

to Heathrow and then, on arrival at the airport in France, told a driver who was waiting for Jeremy Tree, 'that's me' and jumped into the car.

Lester had only a handful of rides for me when I was starting out on my career as a trainer and he was coming to the end of his as a jockey, but then I had the pleasure of spending some time with him on a few occasions when he was a guest of honour at the White Turf in St. Moritz. In reality, I cannot pretend to have known him well but, like everyone else who ever watched a horse race, I feel like I have known of him all my life.



Lester Piggott