

Book Review

By John Scanlon

Best Horses Of The Decade: 2010-2019

John Crofts

The Choir Press



I WAS delighted to receive for review recently a copy of this, the fifth book in the 'Best Horses of the Decade' series written by John Crofts, who worked for champion trainers Peter Walwyn and Sir Henry Cecil before becoming a professional horse racing photographer in 1981.

For many years, John contributed photographs to the much-missed Timeform Racehorses annuals, the absence of which these days has made Crofts' own works all the more welcome.

This particular volume has much to recommend it to readers looking for a decent racing read. While much of the interest lies in the quality of the fantastic images, as you would expect from a photographer who specialises in conformation photographs of the racehorse, the book contains a number of gems to ponder and to savour.

The foreword has been written by Freddy Tylicki, and it is followed by a thoughtful and well-reasoned article by Geoff Greetham, former Publishing Editor of the Timeform Annuals, regarding the events of October 31, 2016, when Tylicki suffered life-changing injuries in a four-horse pile-up at Kempton Park, and the subsequent legal proceedings in the case of Tylicki v Gibbons.

We are then treated to a series of guest articles by authoritative commentators on the racing scene. Greetham offers us his reflections on a wide range of racing topics of current interest; Tony Morris writes a personal view of the life and contribution of the late, great Lester Piggott to racing; while Nancy Sexton examines the personal passion

for racing which endured through the lengthy reign of the late Queen Elizabeth II.

And for good measure, in his own introduction to the volume, John Crofts doesn't hold back with his forthright views on topics such as televised racing, Champions' Day and the Racing League.

Of course, the main part of the book deals with the assessment of the racing careers of Crofts' selection of the best horses of the

decade, arranged alphabetically from Advertise to Workforce. These include, typically, a posed photograph of each horse, an assessment of its racing record including Timeform ratings, a pedigree chart, a note of principal performances and Crofts' own views on the merits of each horse. Helpfully, there is also a note of the principal progeny of each horse, where appropriate. With fans of Johnston Racing in mind, the selection includes Alan Spence's Jukebox Jury.

Some of the individual assessments are, inevitably, more interesting than others. For example, the essay on Moonlight Cloud has some interesting things to say about race day medication in North America, while the entry for Snow Fairy contains some fascinating notes regarding the care she received from controversial equine therapist, John Warwick.

As a whole, the book is a treasure trove of delights from start to finish, and suffice it to say I am looking forward already to Crofts' next annual, which will cover the decade 1960 – 69. I would thoroughly recommend this volume to any serious follower of Flat racing and breeding.

Readers looking to acquire a copy of the book (£39.95), which is available in a signed limited edition of 250, should contact The Choir Press on 01452 500016 to order by credit card. Please note that the book contains details of how to order John's previous books at discounted prices. ■



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