

Let's hear it for the 'oldies'



Having focused on some of the two-year-olds set to run for Johnston Racing this year in recent editions of the Klarion, JOHN SCANLON turns his attention to some of the older horses in the yard

IN THE early weeks of the Flat turf season, which got underway with the Lincoln meeting at Doncaster on April 1, there are two areas which attract much attention – the build-up to the Guineas meeting for the Classic generation, and the search for 'Royal Ascot' types among the juveniles.

Both of these narratives are enthralling in their own way. For the younger generation, there is, of course, no previous guide to form, and it's fascinating to see how the form book develops. Which first-season sires enjoy early success; which sires maintain or enhance their records in producing

winning juveniles; and how each individual is campaigned by his or her trainer.

Among the three-year-olds, there is the annual challenge of identifying which horses have developed over the winter and which have failed to 'train on.' Inevitably, trial winners are seized upon by the media as the greatest thing since sliced bread. And the sequence of the recognised Classic trials gives us the rhythm of the racing calendar – from Newmarket, to Chester, to York and so on.

But let's not forget that there are plenty of older horses we can look forward to seeing once again, despite the



Madame Ambassador, bred and owned by Kirsten Rausing



The Owners Group's Dutch Decoy



Dougie Livingston's Themaxwecan

worrying drain of talent abroad. Derisory levels of prize-money have resulted in many owners seeking to sell their horses to foreign owners rather than keep them in training in Britain; a trend highlighted last autumn when the yard's I'm A Gambler, owned by John Brown and Megan Dennis, was sold to the United States for a mouthwatering sum after a fantastic three-year-old campaign at Johnston Racing.

AT KINGSLEY PARK, we're lucky to have a clutch of decent older horses still in training, and we're fairly certain that, come the end of the Flat season, they will have contributed hugely to the yard's achievements, and to their owners' enjoyment of the sport, across the year. Indeed, as I write this piece, almost half of our winners in 2023 have been racked up by horses older than three.

There are some particularly interesting types among the four-year-olds in training. Kirsten Rausing's **Madame Ambassador** won twice at Newmarket in the autumn and, being by Churchill out of the owner's Group 1-winning filly Lady Jane Digby, she may have scope to progress still further. Similarly, it will be interesting to see what Middleham Park's **The Gatekeeper** can achieve after his remarkable comeback win at Newcastle last month,

following a lengthy absence from the track.

The five-year-old team includes **Military Two Step**, Chris Hirst and Dougie Livingston's Jukebox Jury mare. A four-time winner, she starts the season just a pound higher than her last winning mark and will be competitive in staying handicaps, while the lightly raced **Pillar of Hope**, related to the dam of Subjectivist, Reckoning, can make his mark for owner Chris Buckley.

Speaking of **Subjectivist**, the Gold Cup hero heads up the six-year-olds in the Kingsley Park string, with the Owners Group's **Dutch Decoy**, a winner five times in 2022, also representing that age group.

Let's not forget the seven-year-olds, too. The Owners' Group's **Asdaa** has already chipped in with two wins this year to date, and ran well at Newcastle last time out, finishing a close third on his 64th start. Dougie Livingston's **Themaxwecan** can be a trifle enigmatic, but the Maxios gelding provided one of the highlights of last year with his Shergar Cup win and can take his owner to all the big meetings again this year.

So while the unraced juveniles may provide much of the interest in the early stages of the campaign, remember that there's plenty still to come from the older residents of the yard. ■