



1994 - 2022

Record-breaking 29 consecutive
centuries of domestic winners

Our Winners Tell the Tale

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Five years ago, after Mark Johnston became the winningmost trainer in British racing history with his 4,194th winner, the Klarion carried an article by William Lefebve about Mark's first win in 1987. He ended the piece by asking: 'Can he hit 5,000?' Mark duly delivered the landmark figure last year, prompting William to re-visit that first success of 36 years ago this month, and to try to track down the principals involved in the race. Here is what he discovered.

THE HISTORIC first win that set Mark Johnston on the path to future glory came at Carlisle on July 1, 1987, when Hinari Video 'made all' under jockey Bobby Elliott to win a five-furlong dash.

I was there to see 16 runners line up for the Silloth Maiden Stakes, with £1,305 to the winner. For the record, Hinari Video was chased home by David Nicholls on the George Mervyn Moore-trained Lono Tiki; but what I witnessed that day was the launch of a new trainer on the scene who was to become a sporting legend.

The record books are testament to Mark's outstanding achievements. But I thought it might be interesting to try to establish what happened to those 15 horses seen off by Hinari Video, and to their trainers and jockeys. It was quite a task.

The winner, owned by Brian Palmer, recorded 11 victories and was second or third 25 times in a 128-race career, competing until he was 10. Did any of those beaten hit the big time? Well, no, to be honest. They managed just six wins between them as juveniles, all on the northern circuit, and there was little success beyond that.

As for the trainers, only two still hold a licence; the evergreen Mick Easterby and Fred Watson, aged 92 and 78 respectively. George Moore, who trained the runner-up, went on to record 933 winners in 32 years, mainly jumpers. He told me of that Carlisle race: 'I thought at the time, who is this new kid on the block that's beaten me? I know now. At least I got done by a history-maker!'

George is married to Carol (nee Nesbitt), whose father Steve, as it so happens, lived and trained at Kingsley House in Middleham from 1978 until 1986 -- the house and yard now occupied by Mark and his wife Deirdre, who bought it on the recommendation of Hinari Video's jockey, Bobby Elliott, who had spotted its potential.

Another quirky coincidence involving George is that five months before the Hinari Video win he trained the winner, Dhoni, of a Wetherby novice hurdle -- the very race in which Mark saddled his first-ever runner, Rosie Oh (under Jeff Barlow), who was 18th of 19 finishers.

The trainer of the third at Carlisle, Blue Bell Lady, was the permanently red-shirted Jack Berry, a phenomenal charity organiser for the Injured Jockeys Fund, who said of Mark: 'His arrival in the training profession put northern racing firmly on the national map, and he has set a brilliant example to guys such as Kevin Ryan, Karl Burke, Tim Easterby, David O'Meara, Richard Fahey and John Quinn, who now sit at racing's top table.

'I trained 1,657 winners, but Mark makes me look small fry!'

Of the other trainers, doubly-represented Classic winner Bill Watts had to settle for fifth and tenth in the race. He lives in retirement near Haverhill. One of Bill's jockeys that day was Alan Mercer, who never had a racecourse mount for Mark but now rides out six days a week at Kingsley Park.

The amiable golf-loving Ernie Weymes saddled Paresse to finish seventh, and recalled: 'I don't think he turned out any good.' (Well, Ernie, he did win a Redcar seller!).

Ernie, now in his late 80s, sent out 600 winners from his historic Ashgill yard in Middleham. He said he was amazed at the achievements of the Johnston yard since 1987 -- and he now escorts groups of racing enthusiasts on tours of Kingsley Park.

Other trainers still alive whose horses were beaten by Hinari Video are Lynda Ramsden, Sally Williamson, and Dudley Moffatt. Sadly, the racing world has since lost the other five -- David Thom, David Chapman, Mel Brittain, Norman Chamberlain and Reg Hollinshead.

Of the jockeys, four have died: David Nicholls, Lindsay Charnock, Mark Birch and Steve Perks. It was former Royal apprentice Bobby Elliott who had the honour of steering Hinari Video to a pillar-to-post triumph over Nicholls, with Jack Berry's claimer John Carroll third, apprentice Rikki Morse fourth, and Nicky Connorton fifth.

Which takes us to sixth-placed Dean McKeown, who later enjoyed 96 victories for Mark, headed by the 1992 Ebor on Quick Ransom and the following year's Goodwood Vintage Stakes aboard Mister Baileys. He also scored three times on Hinari Video.

Eddie Guest came seventh for trainer Weymes, Charnock eighth, and ninth was Kevin Darley, who admits he cannot remember the landmark occasion. He later became one of Mark's most successful jockeys, but could never at the time have dreamt of his later triumphs on the legendary Johnston horses Attraction and Shamardal.

Kevin, who lives in north Yorkshire and is northern representative for Qatar Racing, says: 'Ten of my 16 Royal Ascot wins were for Mark, a record I am very proud of. I rode some wonderful horses for him, and I had a particularly great affection for Attraction. And, of course, Shamardal was another brilliant horse.'

OTHER jockeys involved were Martin Fry, Stuart Webster and John Lowe, while George Duffield beat only one rival home aboard Fred Watson's John Nick. George recalls how he won on a three-year-old maiden at Musselburgh for Mark and received the trainer's ultimate accolade of 'that's the way to ride a maiden!'

George added with a grin: 'Come to think of it, I did quite well for trainers called Mark . . . Prescott springs to mind, along with Tompkins and Tregoning!'

Finally, the major disappointment in assembling this article was the failure to locate the racecourse commentator who called Hinari Video home that July afternoon at Carlisle. He might, of course, have passed on, but he might still be alive and well.

Who knows, could he even be a Klarion reader? I'd love to find out! ■