

Charlie gains first Group win



By John Scanlon

Sacred Angel success sees him follow in father's footsteps

LIKE FATHER like son. Back in 1992, the upwardly mobile Mark Johnston secured his first win in a Group race when he trained Marina Park to land the Group 3 Princess Margaret Stakes at Ascot.

And at the end of last month, Charlie gained his first Group winner in his own right when Sacred Angel won . . . the Princess Margaret Stakes at Ascot!

The Dark Angel filly has enjoyed a fairly meteoric rise to fame in recent weeks. She made her racecourse debut in the colours of the Titanium Racing Club at Pontefract on June 25. There she produced a performance full of promise, chasing home two more experienced rivals after being forced to race wide for much of the race.

On July 13, she took a step forward from that when contesting a maiden fillies' event on Newmarket's July course. Prominent throughout, she readily asserted in the final furlong to score by a length and a quarter from Dubai Treasure.

Her smart performance did not go unnoticed, and the filly was subsequently acquired by Nurlan Bizakov, in whose silks she lined up for the Princess Margaret Stakes on July 29. The race, inaugurated in 1946, has held Group 3 status since 1986, and in addition to Marina Park's win in 1992, Johnston Racing also claimed a win in 2017 with Nyaleti.

Ten went to post for the race, with Godolphin's Dazzling Star and the recent York winner, Symbology, disputing favouritism. Jason Hart took the ride on Sacred Angel, with



Sacred Angel makes all under Jason Hart in the Princess Margaret Stakes at Ascot



Charlie joins Sacred Angel's winning connections to celebrate the filly's success

the filly drawn widest of all on the far side of the Ascot track.

She was quickly away from the stalls and set out to make all of the running, followed by Elinor Dashwood, racing towards the near side, and Symbology, racing on her outer. Always holding a narrow advantage, she was shaken up by Jason with around two furlongs to travel and increased her advantage over those rivals.

Pretty Crystal came with a late effort to claim second place, but Sacred Angel crossed the line three lengths ahead of that filly, with Symbology a length and a quarter back in third.

CHARLIE Johnston was, understandably, thrilled with the filly and delighted to have secured his first Group success since becoming the sole licence holder at Johnston Racing at the start of the year.

'Sacred Angel is improving dramatically,' he told the

Klarion after the race.

'I thought she was the best horse on the day on her debut at Pontefract where she was beaten by two more experienced horses. If you had told me then that within two starts we'd be at this level I wouldn't have been so sure, but she took a nice step forward at Newmarket and another step forward here.

'The owner sponsors the Prix Morny so I think he will want her to go there next and the Cheveley Park would be the obvious target for the end of the season.'

It's interesting to note that both of Johnston Racing's previous winners of the Princess Margaret Stakes ran in the Group 1 Prix Morny next time out. Marina Park fared the better of the two, finishing third behind Zafonic, while the Morny proved to be Nyaleti's last run over six furlongs as she stepped up to a mile in Doncaster's May Hill Stakes.

It will be fascinating to see how the exciting Sacred Angel develops as the season progresses. ■