

Subjectivist bows out

Injury forces star stayer into retirement

By John Scanlon

SUBJECTIVIST, the dual Group 1 winner who thrilled the racing world with a dazzling display in winning the Ascot Gold Cup in 2021, has been retired after pulling up lame after a routine piece of work last month.

Owned by Dr Jim Walker and bred by Susan Hearn's Mascalls Stud, Subjectivist was purchased by Mark Johnston Racing for 62,000gns at Book 2 of Tattersalls October Yearling Sale in 2018. The Teofilo colt, foaled on March 30, 2017, was of obvious appeal to the stable, as he was a half-brother to the yard's classy Sir Ron Priestley, being out of the Danehill Dancer mare, Reckoning.

Snapped up by Dr Walker, the colt made his debut in a seven-furlong novice event at Haydock in June 2019. Run on unseasonably heavy ground, Subjectivist showed huge promise, pulling clear of his field before being caught in the closing stages by the Frankel colt, Juan Elcano, a 360,000gns yearling.

Next time out, Juan Elcano franked the form when he was narrowly beaten in the Group 2 Superlative Stakes. Meanwhile, Subjectivist returned to Haydock a fortnight later for a seven-furlong maiden.

Again he took the lead a quarter of a mile out, only to be caught by Mystery Power, the colt who went on to beat Juan Elcano in the Superlative!

Still somewhat green, Subjectivist opened his winning account on his third start, slamming a small field in a Chelmsford novice event by seven lengths. Thereafter, clearly not bred to be at his best as a juvenile, he contested three Listed events without success before ending his first season with a disappointing run when stepped up in trip in the Group 3 Zetland Stakes at Newmarket.

But on his first start at three, in the King George V Stakes at Royal Ascot, Subjectivist acquitted himself well, finishing third to Hukum, who last month won the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Ascot. After narrowly failing to concede lumps of weight to Favourite Moon in a decent Haydock handicap, Subjectivist landed his first Pattern race when comfortably winning the Listed Glasgow Stakes at Hamilton Park in July 2020.

Sent to contest the Group 3 Gordon Stakes at Glorious Goodwood, over a mile and a half, Subjectivist attempted to make all, only being headed by Mogul and Highland Chief (both subsequent Group 1 winners) in the closing stages. Strangely, he then disappointed in the Great Voltigeur Stakes at York, finishing seventh of the eight runners.

Stepped up to a mile and three-quarters in anticipation of a Leger attempt, Subjectivist ran away with the March Stakes at Goodwood, scoring by 15 lengths from Cabaletta who had previously finished second in a Group 2 over course and distance.

Sadly, he failed to fire in the St Leger itself, finishing seventh behind Galileo Chrome. That defeat and his reverse in the Great Voltigeur caused some observers to question his effectiveness on good ground.

The St Leger gloom was lifted just a month later when Subjectivist defied heavy ground and a strong field to land the Group 1 Prix Royal-Oak at Longchamp. Regarded as the French equivalent of the St Leger until the race was opened up to older horses in 1979, the Prix Royal-Oak has been won by some stellar horses over the years (Sassafras, Gold River, Ardress, Vinnie Roe and Yeats to name but a few).

In winning the race Subjectivist took some noted scalps: the favourite, the Aga Khan's Valia, was fresh from winning the Group 2 Prix Chaudenay on the same track, while the third

horse, Holdthasigreen, had already won an earlier renewal of the Prix Royal-Oak as well as the Group 1 Prix du Cadran.

With his potential to becoming a leading 'Cup horse' advertised by these first-class wins as a three-year-old, the decision was taken to send the horse to Dubai to contest the Dubai Gold Cup (Group 2) at Meydan, run over a distance of two miles.

The opposition was strong. Secret Advisor had finished third to Stradivarius in the Queen's Vase, and won a Group 3 in Dubai; Spanish Mission had won the previous year's Doncaster Cup; Red Verdon had already won the Prix Maurice de Nieuil at Longchamp (Group 2), while the Godolphin pair Volcanic Sky and Global Heat had just finished first and second in the Group 3 Nad Al Sheba Trophy at Meydan.

NONETHELESS, Subjectivist turned in a stunning display, destroying the field to win by five and three-quarter lengths in course record time!

After Dubai, the focus was firmly on the Gold Cup at Royal Ascot. The 2021 renewal of the great race was eagerly anticipated, not least because Stradivarius was attempting to emulate the feat of Yeats in winning four successive runnings of the race. The quality of the supporting cast was also pretty special.



The field included Serpentine (2020 Derby winner), Santiago (2020 Irish Derby and Queen's Vase winner), Twilight Payment (2020 Melbourne Cup winner), Spanish Mission (Group 2 Yorkshire Cup winner), Princess Zoe (2020 Prix du Cadran winner), Amhran Na Bhfiann (2020 Derby third) and our own Nayef Road (2020 Sagaro Stakes winner).

If you haven't watched the replay of the race for a while, give yourself a treat and look it up. Subjectivist travelled strongly for Joe Fanning throughout, and when he struck for home turning into the straight he never looked likely to be caught. A five-length win (from Princess Zoe) in the fastest time recorded in the Gold Cup since 2010 announced his arrival on the stage as Europe's Champion stayer.

Sadly, three weeks after the race, Subjectivist was found to have filling in his right foreleg. The underlying tendon injury was career-threatening, but connections

were determined to give the horse every chance of recovering from the injury. It was announced that Subjectivist would miss the whole of 2022, but a plan to do everything possible to race him again in 2023 was hatched.

After a 618-day absence from the track, the great horse ran in the Red Sea Turf Handicap at Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. Giving away weight all round, and taking a keen hold under Joe Fanning, he faded in the latter stages but nonetheless acquitted himself well, and he took another step forward when running third behind Broome in the Dubai Gold Cup at Meydan in March. Could he possibly be able to repeat his Gold Cup success in June?

Well, as we now know, he showed the utmost bravery in this year's Gold Cup, and was in no way disgraced in finishing third behind Courage Mon Ami, when, as Charlie has described it, he 'was basically on three legs'.

Subjectivist was being prepared for a swansong in the Goodwood Cup when he pulled up lame on the Kingsley Park gallops.

Immediate retirement is the right choice for a horse whose six career wins include two at Group 1 level, a Group 2, a Group 3 and a Listed race. One can only speculate how many more might have been added to that tally had injury not intervened.

For Jim and Connie Walker, Subjectivist has been the horse of a lifetime.

'He has been all our dreams come true rolled up into one,' Jim told the Klarion.

'The worst of it was that for most of his pattern victories we weren't even allowed to see him run because of Covid, but that's life – at least there are recordings.'

He said there had been two particularly thrilling occasions.

'First was the night he won the

Glasgow Stakes, because he was the first horse we had owned that had won a pattern race, even if it was only at Listed level,' he said.

'It was also a race that I really wanted to win given its name, as Glasgow was where my dad was born, where I went to university, where I met my wife and where I lived when I left home.

'Secondly was the day he won the Prix Royal-Oak at Longchamp. For both wins we were in a serviced apartment in Hong Kong, but I think I woke the building up with the French victory. Connie kept saying to me, what is all the celebration for?

'It took a while for me to explain to her just what a Group 1 winner meant. I bought the whole bar downstairs champagne just after it. Fortunately, they were forced to close at 10pm during Covid so I didn't get to spend all the winnings!'

ASKED about the downside of Subjectivist's career, Jim instantly recalls getting the news of the injury after the Gold Cup victory.

'The obvious real low point was July 4, 2021 when, two weeks after the Gold Cup win, the news came through about the tendon,' he said.

'I don't think I looked at a Racing Post for two weeks and that is saying something. I could hardly watch the Goodwood Cup that year.'

So how did Jim react to the news of the recurrence of the injury, and the need to retire the horse?

'Mixed emotions really,' Jim told us.

'I have spent more sleepless nights of late worried about how he will come out of the races rather than dreaming about him romping home.

'The result is that retirement is a bit of a relief to be honest. But it was great to see him in full flight again this year, regardless of the results in Dubai and Ascot.'

'He might not have exited with a win, but the Dubai and Ascot runs this year were gigantic efforts. I'll never have a more honest, genuine horse than him – and with a gigantic heart and will to win as well.' ■

