

# SALE SEASON IN FULL SWING

## Mark and Charlie searching for value

By John Scanlon

**I**T'S said that nothing in this world is certain except death and taxes, but for those of us embroiled in horse racing there is a third, annual hallmark of certainty – the yearling sales.

From the outset of Johnston Racing, there has always been a policy which marks out the yard from most of their rivals. As Mark Johnston told his biographer Nick Townsend in 2006: 'I put my neck on the line at the sales.'

Simply put, Johnston Racing buy the vast majority of their horses themselves on spec. Even back then, Mark was able to demonstrate the scope of the financial gamble involved.

'There have been times,' he confessed to Townsend, 'when I've been £500,000 down on purchases, and still have to find buyers.'

Thankfully, an understanding bank manager and a fantastic record of unearthing equine talent at value-for-money prices have ensured the continuing success story of Johnston Racing.

Earlier this year, Charlie Johnston explained to the Thoroughbred Daily News how the stable's approach to the yearling sales works.

'In its simplest form, we look for progeny out of mares who have achieved black type themselves or from mares who have produced black-type horses,' he said.

'But we have moved away from black type a little bit in recent years and concentrate more on the ratings of these horses because there will be some very good horses who don't get black type and some pretty moderate ones who do. The official ratings can often be a more accurate reflection of ability and a rating of 90 is seen as a cut-off point for us. The majority of our two-year-olds are bought for a hundred grand or less.

'There are more nuances to it. For example, we look at how frequently the mare is producing good horses and

winners, and what sort of stallions the previous horses are by versus what stallion the yearling we are looking at is by, and of course we always have a tendency to go for the horse who is by the middle-distance stallion. I think a mare with a slightly lower pedigree might get away with it if she's by Teofilo or something like that rather than being by a sharp and

precocious stallion. But in its simplest form, we like to see a horse rated 90 or more in that first dam.'

In his conversations with Nick Townsend, Mark cited the example of Bijou d'Inde as one such 'nuanced' purchase. He paid just 20,000gns for the subsequent St James's Palace Stakes winner and Eclipse Stakes second.

'In hindsight,' he told Townsend, 'I was very proud of buying him. His pedigree had no black type in the first dam, and she's had several foals. Yet I did my research and I discovered that three or more of these foals were rated over 100 and deserved to have black type. Two or three were the best sons of their sire. The mare had produced the best son of Electric and Norwick. She'd been to moderate sires . . .

and here she was going to Cadeaux Genereux.'

Over the years, the list of horses bought by Mark and Charlie for bargain basement prices which have gone on to excel on the track is an impressive one.

For example, the nine-time winning top handicapper Quick Ransom was acquired by Johnston Racing for just 6,000gns; the Cesarewitch winner Spirit of Love IR £1,000; the Ascot Gold Cup and 12 Group-race winner, Double Trigger, IR £7,200; the triple Group 3 winner, Rose Of Kildare €3,000; March Stakes winner, Dancing King, 18,000gns and Group 2 Vintage Stakes winner, Dark Vision 15,000gns. The list goes on.

Last year, Mark and Charlie set out with a goal of buying 70 yearlings. 'We ended up buying 67,' Charlie told the TDN, 'so got pretty close to what we were aiming for. We always say in these situations, we're not always buying the horses we want, but the ones we can afford. But, flicking through their pedigrees, it shows that you can still get value on horses with great pages.'

This year's search for value began at the Arqana August Yearling sale in Deauville, followed by Goff UK, BBAG Premium Yearling Sale in Germany and Tattersalls Somerville Yearling Sale. It's intended that Mark and Charlie will also visit Tattersalls Ireland September Yearling Sales, Goffs Orby Yearling Sales, Tattersalls October Yearling Sales, Arqana October Yearling Sales and Tattersalls December Yearling Sales.

While the same policies and principles will be applied which have stood the yard in such good stead over the years, Charlie and Mark would welcome commissions in advance from owners looking to take advantage of their expertise at the sales.

With the current travails over prize-money and the wider cost-of-living crisis, there has never been a more urgent need for owners to seek proper value for money in purchasing their bloodstock. Get the strength and experience of the Johnston Racing sales operation working for you! ■

## YEARLING FOR SALE

On Friday September 1, Baden-Baden's Premier Yearling Sale took place. This sale is a one-day sale which Mark attends every year.

This year he purchased this chestnut filly by Pinatubo out of Hargeisa, for €55,640\*.

Pinatubo, who stands at Dalham Hall, is a son of Shamardal and out of the Dalakhani mare Lava Flow. As a two-year-old, Pinatubo won six races, including the Dewhurst Stakes (G1), the Vincent O'Brien National Stakes (G1), The Vintage Stakes (G2), The Chesham Stakes (L) (setting a new juvenile course record) and the Woodcote Stakes. At three he won the Prix Jean Prat (G1), was second in the St James's Palace Stakes (G1) and the Prix du Moulin de Longchamp (G1), and finished third in the 2,000 Guineas.

Hargeisa, by Speightstown, is a Group 3 winner and Group 2 and 3-placed. At stud she has produced two foals of racing age, both winners, including Habana, by Kingman, winner the German 1,000 Guineas (G2) as one of her three wins to date.

\*Price includes the sale company buyer's premium  
No commission, profits or expenses are taken on purchase if the horse is to be trained by Charlie. The above prices are subject to VAT. Cost of training, transport and keep from time of purchase at the sales to time of re-sale will be charged. All horses are sold as they stand. The Purchaser is not to rely on any physical description of the horse contained in any sales catalogue, or any description given by Johnston Racing or its employee as to conformation, health or soundness, but is to rely on the Purchaser's own examination and/or judgement in relation to those matters. Title and possession will be deemed to have passed to the Purchaser when the sale is agreed, whether verbally or in writing, when all risk shall pass to the Purchaser.



Lot 165 from Baden-Baden, a chestnut filly by Pinatubo out of Hargeisa



Bijou d'Inde