

That makes it 100 up . . . yet again!

By John Scanlon

WHEN Edge of Darkness coasted home in a mile and a half handicap at Thirsk on August 5 he became the 100th winner of the year for Johnston Racing.

It was a victory which extended one of the most astonishing records in British racing, for the gelding's success meant that the yard had saddled at least a century of winners every year for a remarkable 30 years in succession. And in nine of those years the stable

had more than 200 winners! That is an enviable story of consistency in winner-finding which is unequalled in the history of the British turf.

For those who follow the fortunes of Johnston Racing closely, it is all too easy to take those records for granted as Mark and Charlie have turned out winners in such numbers that clocking up another century does not always register as an exceptional achievement. But it should.

An examination of the records of

their competitors proves the point. Of the current top British trainers, which includes Charlie, one has yet to train a century of winners, while another has trained a sole century, and a third has just two to his name. John and Thady Gosden have had 11 centuries; William Haggas has had 10; Roger Varian is on course to extend his current streak to seven; and Andrew Balding has just completed a sixth successive ton.

Charlie Appleby has secured five centuries in all, two being consecutive, while Richard Fahey has compiled a run of 15. Richard Hannon is currently on a streak of 9 wins, to add to his father's run of 16 up until his retirement.

Those figures prove just how impressive an achievement it is to chalk up 30 successive centuries. Here we look back on 1994, the year the record run began.

ASK anyone who knows a little about the history of Johnston Racing about 1994 and they'll probably tell you it was a good year for the yard. They'll probably recall that it was the year Mark Johnston trained his first Classic winner; they'll almost certainly recall that Mister Baileys was that Classic winner, and, if they know their stuff, they may even know that 1994 was the first year in which Mark trained a century of domestic winners. But, as I found out when researching the yard's 1994 campaign, there was so much more to savour about that year's racing than just those memorable highlights.

Where to start? Well, what about the juveniles? That year saw Double Eclipse among the Johnston juvenile team. He made a pretty handy start to his career too; a winner at Pontefract first time out, he emulated his older brother by landing the Listed Zetland Stakes at Newmarket before closing his two-year-old campaign by finishing second in an Italian Group 2 at Capannelle.

1994 was the first season in which Sheikh Mohammed had sent juveniles to Mark Johnston to train. His faith was

repaid in spades as Mark trained Jural to win the Futurity Stakes (Group 3) at the Curragh and the Sweet Solera Stakes at Newmarket, while Millstream won the Curragh Stakes and Cornwallis Stakes, both Group 3 races.

The three-year-olds in the string that year were dominated by Mister Baileys and Double Trigger. Mister Baileys had won the Royal Lodge Stakes as a juvenile and lined up at Newmarket for the 2,000 Guineas without the benefit of a prep run. Jason Weaver took over in the saddle from Frankie Dettori, and in a memorable and thrilling race Mister Baileys just got the better of Grand Lodge (with Dettori up) in record time.

Much has been written about the decision to follow the Dante/Derby route with Paul Venner's star colt. Ultimately, Mister Baileys didn't stay, but both races provided huge excitement and the sight of the Robellino colt bowling along at the head of the Derby field will remain printed in the memory of many of us who saw it.

Double Trigger met with some setbacks early in his three-year-old

career and wasn't seen out until the Ebor meeting. He did manage to race in the St Leger, however, but finished third behind Moonax. From there, he travelled to Turin, where he won the Leger Italiano in good style. The great horse went on to add another 11 Group races to his remarkable Roll Of Honour.

At a slightly lower level, Surprise Guest was another flagbearer for the three-year-olds. The son of Be My Guest won no fewer than six races during the season, ridden on each occasion by Jason Weaver.

Among the older horses, there were some truly remarkable performances. Branstion Abby, a five-year-old, won three races, including a Listed fillies' event at Lingfield and the Listed Prix Contessing at Evry. Double Blue, also five in 1994, won six races during the year, including the Listed Remembrance Day Stakes at Doncaster.

Talking of prolific horses, Star Rage, then a sprightly four-year-old, ran 33 times, winning nine, finishing second eight times and third seven times. Those nine handicap wins equalled the 20th

century record for the number of handicap wins by any horse in a calendar year. He was, in retrospect, a one-horse argument against the introduction of 48-hour declarations, often taking advantage of opportunities to run again quickly over a short period of time.

And, not to be outdone, Quick Ransom, then a six-year-old, produced a fabulous run to land the Northumberland Plate at Newcastle in June, in the process becoming the first horse to land the treble of the November Handicap, the Northumberland Plate and the Ebor Handicap.

EVEN old Hinari Video, who started the Johnston success story as the yard's first-ever winner (at Carlisle in 1987), was still around as a nine-year-old and chipped in with two wins across the year.

What a tremendous performance across all sections of the string. And in every year since 1994, Johnston Racing has sent out a minimum of 100 winners.

Just fantastic! ■



Edge Of Darkness



Mister Baileys



Branstion Abby