

A memorable month for Joe

SEPTEMBER 2023 turned out to be a memorable month for jockey Joe Fanning.

The popular Irishman celebrated his 53rd birthday on September 24, the day after he secured his first win in the Ayr Gold Cup, having produced Julie Camacho's Significantly to land a dramatic victory in the final strides of one of the season's most competitive sprint handicaps.

In many ways it was a fitting success. There are few jockeys whose record on the Craigie course can compare with Joe's; he is currently the leading jockey at the course this Flat season, and he has in the past ridden the winner of the consolation race, the Ayr Silver Cup.

As ever, Joe was quick to deflect the credit for the win away from himself and to direct it towards Significantly.

'He's a nice horse,' Joe commented after the race, 'and he'd have been unlucky had he got beat, so he got me out of trouble.'

Significantly's win had a broader significance beyond the Ayr race. It provided Joe Fanning with his 2,810th career win, allowing him to match the number of career wins recorded by the great Joe Mercer. And when Joe landed the concluding handicap on the Ayr card on Dr Jim Walker's Capital Theory, he took over in seventh position outright as the winningmost Flat jockey in British racing history.

TAKE a moment to ponder that achievement. Think of some of the great jockeys you have watched across the years, and then realise that, of them all, only Sir Gordon Richards, Pat Eddery, Lester Piggott, Willie Carson, Frankie Dettori and Doug Smith have ridden more winners than Joe Fanning. Just to cap it all, numbers nine and ten in the all-time list, languishing behind Joe, are none other than the legendary Fred Archer and the late Edward Hide.

Despite his age, Joe has no plans to retire just yet.

'We'll just keep kicking on,' he told the Racing Post in an interview marking that Gold Cup success.

'We're not far off the all-weather season now. I'll have a break over Christmas and into the start of January and then we'll kick on for another season.'

So what qualities have enabled Joe to reach that lofty position in the pantheon of jockeys?

Put simply, horses run for Joe Fanning, and, in turn, he understands how to get the best out of them. Famed for his exploits in winning races from the front, he seems to have a clock in his head which allows him to be an excellent judge of pace.

And, of course, he has good hands and a sympathetic riding style, a style

which is clearly effective given the number of winners he has amassed.

Joe is within sight of another target – that of clocking up 3,000 wins. Is he motivated to reach that goal?

'A little bit, yeah,' he said.

'But you never know in this game. You just have to keep trucking along. We'll see how it goes. It's still a good few winners off, so I'll take it day to day.'

It goes without saying that staying injury-free will be important in Joe's push towards his new target. He has endured his fair share of injuries in recent times, so let's hope he can enjoy a trouble-free run in the years ahead as he closes in on that 3,000th win. ■



Joe with the Ayr Gold Cup



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