

Dante . . . 75 years on

ON Saturday June 9, 1945, a three-year-old colt, bred and trained in Middleham, became the first Middleham-trained horse to win the Derby since 1869, when Pretender won the 'blue riband' of the turf for trainer Tom Dawson.

That colt, the 'Hope of the North', was Sir Eric Ohlson's Dante. He remains the last Derby winner to have been trained in the north. In next month's Klarion, we will remember Dante's remarkable career in full, culminating in his splendid victory in the Derby itself.

Looking back at the original sources, Dante's career appears to have been the source of much controversy.

Firstly, the founder of Timeform, Phil Bull, cottoned on immediately to the potential of the horse when he made his debut as a juvenile at Stockton. Bull was certain that Dante was 'the fastest two-year-old we have seen for a very long time', and became the horse's biggest backer, both in terms of gambling on him

to win Classic races, but also in advertising his ability.

Indeed, 'the sage of Halifax' urged William Hill to seek to buy Dante; having suggested to Hill that Sir Eric Ohlson might accept a bid of £10,000 for the colt, Bull was frustrated when Hill offered just £7,000. Dante's win in the Coventry Stakes sent his value soaring.

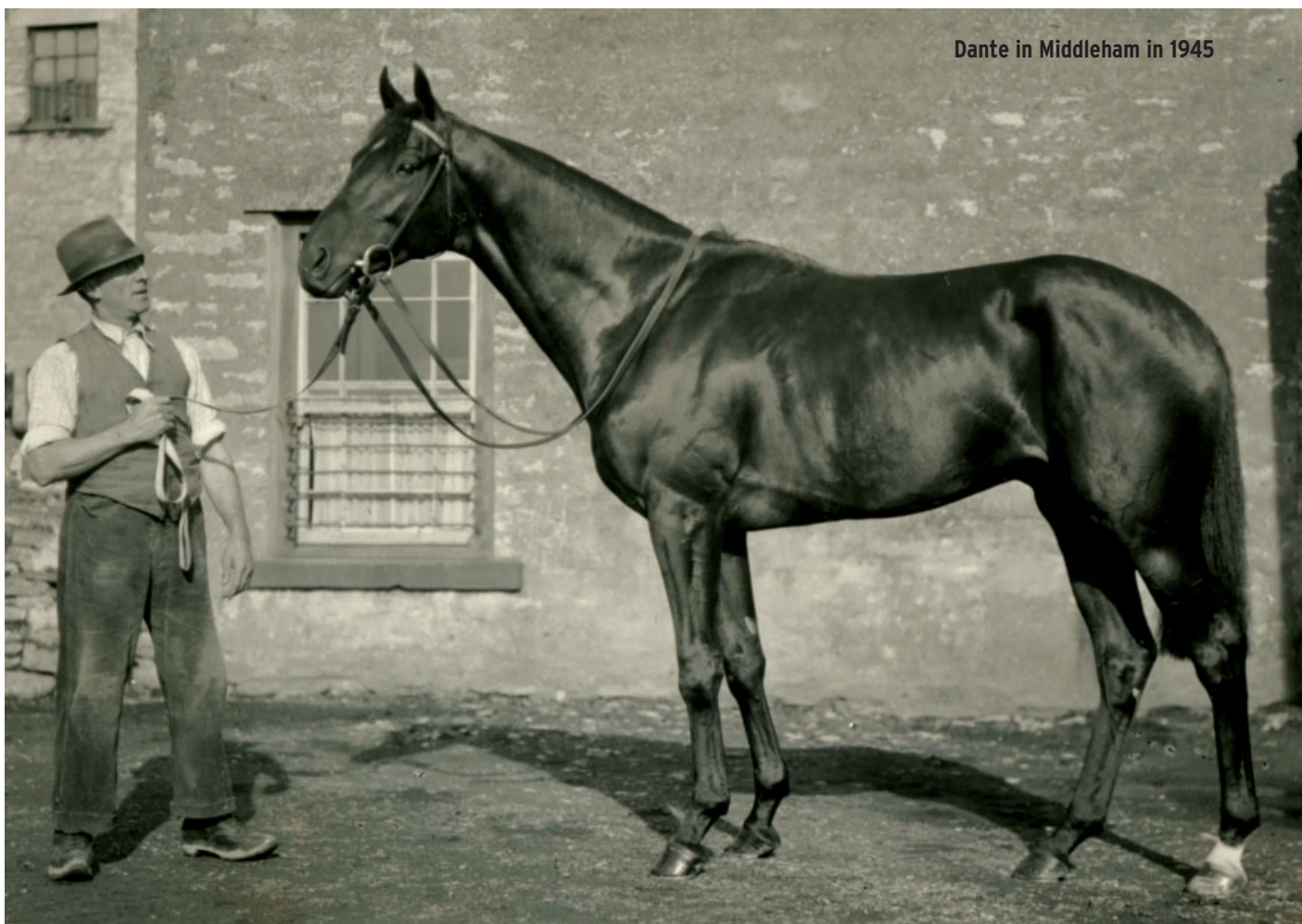
Bull's support of Dante seemed to provoke an opposition to the horse's claims by, what Bull referred to as 'southern racegoers'. As we will see in next month's article, some of the press seemed to go out of their way to play down the horse's achievements.

Secondly, much has been written about the eye condition which afflicted the horse and hampered his preparation for the 2,000 Guineas. It appears that the horse suffered from 'moon blindness' or equine recurrent uveitis (ERU). It's thought that the horse's draw at Newmarket meant that Dante could not see the majority of his rivals, and indeed the condition was eventually to lead to

the horse going blind.

Lastly, the fact that Dante's Derby win was achieved at Newmarket rather than at Epsom means that, to some extent, his achievement has been downgraded by some commentators. We may call this the 'Tregoning effect', echoing the views of Derby-winning trainer Marcus Tregoning, who commented recently that, after the Jockey Club had announced that the Derby fixture would be rescheduled in the light of current events: "The Derby is unique. Of course, you could run a Group One over the distance somewhere else and call it something else, but it will not be the Derby".

The Klarion would be delighted to hear from our readers about their own experiences and memories of Dante and about the celebrations in Middleham which followed his Derby win. It would be wonderful if our celebration of the great horse's success on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his Derby win could be accompanied by some contributions from our readers.



Dante in Middleham in 1945