

KINGSLEY KICKBACK

Let's see owner power!

As always I am delighted and grateful to receive the Klarion each month. I read it from back to front and sometimes I can even understand some of James Willoughby's amazing research and evaluation data!

However, what never ceases to amaze me is the continual angst and complaint, from many quarters, at the way racing is run and administered. Year after year it is either the bookmakers, the racecourses or the industry's governing bodies, all of whom have their own, and only their own, interests at the top of their agendas.

These bodies have, habitually, treated both owners and trainers as their entree into making money, as if they have a God-given right to exploit so that their coffers remain healthy and full. ARC's refusal to divulge how much they receive from media rights is a prime example of this. How dare they refuse this information when, without the existence of those asking this question, there would be no media rights at all (or racecourses for that matter).

There is only one, final way to correct this longstanding belief that trainers and owners are merely a 'means to an end' in the pursuit of profit by bookmakers and racecourses (ably assisted over the years by whichever governing body happened to be in situ at the time). And that is to remove for a period of time the one ingredient that generates those profits and those media rights – the horses!

Owners (and I was one for more than 20 years) who complain about poor prize-money and the amount that bookmakers put into the industry have only themselves to blame. Just refuse to let your horses run anywhere for two weeks (preferably at a time when there are one or two big meetings, interspersed with some weekly all-weather dross). And threaten to do it

again if things do not improve. Then you will see how quickly the 'money men' will want to engage.

Remember that three of the top ten taxpayers in the UK, as announced recently, were bookmakers!

This whole issue is something I raised when applying to join the ROA committee some years ago. Their response was that 'the majority of owners do it for the love of the sport, and prize-money is not a top priority'. The fact that so many owners are switching their horses to other countries, where prize-money is considerably better, rather seems to disprove that argument now.

*Anthony Latter,
Hampstead, London*

Building on shaky foundations

The more I hear and read of differing factions trying to improve the attraction of our sport, the more I despair. Worrying about getting Generation Z to spend their money on the racecourses' pricey culinary outlets and getting inebriated should be last on the 'to do' list.

When you build a house it's generally accepted that good foundations are essential, and then you build upwards from there. At the current rate of momentum, there won't be a racecourse building to invite anyone into within a few years.

Mr Cruddace of ARC is showing his own economic naivety by not fully integrating with the very people who provide his racecourses' business. Instead of insulting the very people who, alongside the owners, are producing the ingredients for him to blend into a product to sell at good value, he/they should interface with them and sort out the financial problems that confront them as an industry, and not just be concerned

about the impact on ARC.

Overwhelmingly, the betting industry benefits from this alliance and should be a senior partner in the conundrum. When you hear of the CEO of Bet 365 earning £221 million (not all from racing) the picture comes into focus. Also, the elusive and opaque Media Rights payments are another subject that seems to be taboo. Why? My instinct tells me that it's because the details would be an embarrassment to the racecourses.

Mark Johnston's depiction of the true cost for trainers in the February edition of the Klarion is frighteningly illuminating. The public only get to hear the asides from the differing factions, but Mark's in-depth, forensic breakdown of costs brings into stark relief the definitive overheads involved, which for many are not sustainable.

Further, we should reflect on whether the staff choose to live a nomadic life of several disruptive shifts, no matter how much they love horses and what they are paid. They are entitled to a proper work/life balance, and the current experiment of Sunday evening racing can only make the recruitment of stable staff harder.

Let's hope this can/will get resolved amicably and while there is still a healthy owner/trainer database. Thank you for your frank and informed article. It was much appreciated.

*David Winter
By email*

Time's up for ITV ads and intro

I agree 100% with John Scanlon's plea, in the February edition of the Klarion, for ITV to stop the interminable repetition of Paddy Power's 'talking horses' advert at every commercial break. It just isn't funny anymore.

May I also suggest that it is time for a new introduction to their racing programmes.

The image of people going into a theatre to watch War Horse, accompanied by music and race commentaries, is well past its sell-by date, and it was never going to be an iconic piece of sporting intro.

If ITV do indeed put these items out to grass, I don't suppose there is any chance that Matt Chapman could accompany them?

*Graham Uttley
Pocklington, Yorkshire*

How times have changed

Unfortunately, I can go further back than most when remembering racing in days gone by as I used my father's badges for Lanark for quite a number of years before it closed in 1977.

In those days 'sellers' were an integral part of most mid-week meetings and some Saturdays as well. For the casual, or occasional racegoer, these provided a bit of additional entertainment, as they could on occasions be contested by horses capable of winning outside this basement level.

The present programme now caters

for such 'moderate' horses by way of what are called 'classified' contests for horses rated 50 and below – horses who years ago, when sellers were much more prevalent, would have struggled to win a 'seller'. Now such 'classified' races can be won by a horse rated 45, (or on occasions even lower), for prize-money greater than the maiden race.

Every horse, no matter how modest, is loved by his or her owner(s), who are no doubt delighted by a victory in such a contest, but with the advent of such contests, seven and eight-race cards, (six is generally enough for most people – maybe at 35 minute intervals), post-racing 'entertainment' and Sunday evening racing, I feel that we are grasping at straws in an effort to popularise the sport.

From my own perspective, I wouldn't mind a return to six-race cards, which would allow an increase in race purses and probably more competitive fields; the replacement of at least some of the classified contests with 'sellers', perhaps limited to

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horses rated up to a mark of 60; and to see racecourses limited to no more than 10% of the surplus where a realistic figure is set for the proposed selling price of the winner.

Would this bring more people through the racecourse doors? Maybe not, and maybe I am out of touch with the people that racecourses now seek to attract.

But one final thought: I have noticed in recent years an increase in the number of groups of girls having a night out at evening meetings. Could this be because a racecourse is seen as a safe(r) environment than some other venues?

*Robert Macgregor
Wishaw, Lanarkshire*

MIDDLEHAM STABLES OPEN DAY

Once again Johnston Racing is participating in the popular Open Day which this year will be held on Good Friday, March 29. Turn to page 30 for further details

www.middlehamopenday.co.uk

