

THOSE GOLDEN MOMENTS

This month we turn back the clock to 2003, when Markus Graff's Darasim was one of the stars of the Johnston stable

ALTHOUGH he hadn't won since landing the Glorious Rated Stakes at Glorious Goodwood in 2002, the beautifully bred five-year-old Darasim had run some terrific races in defeat. Third in the Lonsdale Stakes at York, third in the Doncaster Cup and second in the Further Flight Stakes, Darasim rarely ran a bad race and his official rating remained at 107 across nine starts.

Naturally, Darasim was a major part of Mark's plans for that summer's Glorious Goodwood. Ridden for the first time in 14 starts by Joe Fanning, and despite carrying top weight, he kicked off his Goodwood campaign by landing the Prestige Stakes by three and a half lengths from Romany Prince. Turned out just three days later, and stepping down to a mile and a half, he attempted to repeat his win in the Glorious Rated Stakes; he was a little outpaced, but flew at the finish to take third behind Researched.

Connections decided that a French campaign might suit Darasim. Just three weeks later, he was sent to Deauville to contest the Prix Kergorlay, a Group 2 event over a mile and seven furlongs. This historic race was inaugurated in 1864 as the Prix de la Société d'Encouragement, and renamed in honour of Florian de Kergorlay, a former chairman of the Société des Course de Deauville in 1911. Over the years the race has proved a popular target for British stayers, its roll of honour featuring such names as Classic Cliche, Arctic Owl, Kayf Tara and Persian Punch.

The nine-strong field for the race was headed by Morozov, representing the Sheikh Mohammed/Andre Fabre/Christophe Soumillon axis. This four-year-old colt by Sadler's Wells, a full brother to In The Wings, had already won at Group 2 level and twice at Group 3 level, whereas Darasim was seeking his first Group win.

The early pace was set by Olivier Peslier on Paul Cole's Swing Wing. But Joe Fanning sent Darasim to the head of affairs after half a mile and never saw



Darasim and Joe Fanning

another rival. After pulling clear of the field in the final furlong, Darasim won by three and a half lengths from Westerner, who just edged out Swing Wing for second by a nose.

Encouraged by this success, a plan was hatched to return to France in September. Darasim was entered in the Prix Gladiateur at Longchamp, a race over a trip slightly longer than the Kergorlay. Reckoned to be France's oldest surviving horse race, dating back to 1807, the race was renamed in honour of the celebrated racehorse Gladiateur, 'the Avenger of Waterloo', in 1869.

In the 2003 renewal of the race, Darasim was required to concede 4lb to Westerner. As a result, the Wildensteins' star, later to finish second to Hurricane Run in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in 2005, started as favourite in a field of nine.

The race turned out remarkably similar to the Kergorlay. Asked to make all of the running by Joe Fanning, Darasim quickened a furlong and a half from home, and ran on strongly to score by two lengths from Westerner, with Soreze (who had finished sixth at Deauville), a further length back in third.

The natural step after this Group race double was to send Darasim to contest the Group 1 Prix du Cadran at Longchamp on October 5. Markus Graff's hope and Westerner raced off level weights, but the hot favourite was Gold Cup winner, Mr Dinos, having his first run since Ascot. Persian Punch, now a 10-year-old made the running, as Joe settled Darasim in third.

MOVING into second behind Germinis over three furlongs from home, Darasim was asked for his effort by Joe a quarter of a mile from home. Staying on at one pace to the post, and perhaps finding the two and a half miles on testing ground just beyond him, Darasim was run out of things in the closing stages, with old rival Westerner pulling clear to win by five lengths.

The Cadran defeat ended a fabulous streak of form for Darasim. Bred by the Aga Khan, he was by the Derby winner, Kahyasi, out of the Halo mare, Dararita. His flag would fly high again the following year, when he led home Royal Rebel in a fantastic finish for the yard in the Group 2 Goodwood Cup. ■