

THOSE GOLDEN MOMENTS

The fastest-ever Guineas,
Newmarket, April 30, 1994

As Johnston Racing enters the new decade on the crest of a wave after another record-breaking season, we are reviving our popular feature looking back at some of the highlights for the stable over the years. We begin with a reminder of Mark's first Classic win.

MISTER BAILEYS, a colt by Robellino out of the Sharpen Up mare, Thimblerrigger, was foaled on February 14, 1991. He was bought by Paul Venner, of G R Bailey Ltd (Baileys Horse Feeds) for 10,000 gns as a foal. After failing to meet his reserve at the yearling sales, the colt was sent to Mark Johnston to train.

The horse gave notice that he was a significant talent by slamming a field of maidens by seven lengths at Newcastle on his racecourse debut towards the end of June in 1993. After suffering defeat at

Newbury next time out under Dean McKeown, Mister Baileys landed his first Group win when landing the Vintage Stakes at Glorious Goodwood, then a Group 3 race, at the end of July.

After a reverse in the Gimcrack Stakes at York behind Turtle Island, Mister Baileys reaffirmed his position as one of the leading colts of the year by winning the Royal Lodge Stakes (Group 2) at Ascot under a confident Frankie Dettori ride.

Over the winter, connections decided that the colt's first run of his three-year-old season would be in the 2,000

Guineas. It was presumed that Frankie Dettori would again partner Mister Baileys, but as race day approached it emerged that he would be required to ride the Dewhurst winner, Grand Lodge. The up-and-coming Jason Weaver took the ride on Mister Baileys.

A field of 23 went to post for the race, run on ground described as good to firm. The ante-post favourite, Turtle Island, was withdrawn on account of the firm surface, leaving the Racing Post Trophy winner, King's Theatre, as the market leader. King's Theatre had also made a winning reappearance in the Craven



Mister Baileys, right, wins the Guineas under Jason Weaver



Owner Paul Venner hugs groom Gary Ritchie in the winner's enclosure

Stakes on April 14, just holding on from Colonel Collins by a short head with Grand Lodge back in sixth on that occasion. In all, six of the top 15 of the International Classifications for the juvenile colts lined up in the Guineas.

This was one of those races where the field split into two distinct groups. On the nearside of the Rowley Mile track, King's Theatre was always prominent. Mister Baileys was one of a group of runners who held their position towards the far side. After disputing the early running with the complete outsider Star Selection, Mister Baileys took a clear lead three and a half furlongs from home.

Challenged throughout the last two furlongs by Grand Lodge under a determined Dettori drive, Mister Baileys ran on well to hold the challenger by a

short head, and in winning the Guineas he became the first classic winner trained north of the Trent since Mrs McArdy won the 1977 renewal of the 1,000 Guineas, and Middleham's first classic winner since Dante's Derby in 1945.

It was a victory which was to prove of huge importance, not just to Mister Baileys' ambitious young trainer but also to his young jockey and to his owner, who had turned down several offers to sell the colt after his Royal Lodge success.

Legends

Timeform notes that Britain had endured 'an unusually cold, wet spring' that year, and also that the course had been watered earlier in the week before

the Guineas. Yet, remarkably, both Mister Baileys and Grand Lodge recorded times inside Zafonic's previous record time for the race. Even more remarkably, Mister Baileys winning time of 1m 35.08secs remains the fastest time ever recorded in the race,

notwithstanding that it has been won since then by such legends of the turf as Sea The Stars, Frankel (Racing TV's Racehorse of the Decade) and Camelot.

While it's true that a number of factors contribute to the time achieved by the winner of a race, including the state of the going, wind direction and speed and quality of the opposition, it surely underlines the merit of Mister Baileys' performance that there have been 25 renewals of the race since he won it and not one has covered the Rowley Mile course in the Guineas in a faster time. ■