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The David Allan Column

## Racing needs its greatest stars - the lure of steeplechasing



*The great Arkle is a legend among legends. Here he is jumping a fence (left), and defeating Millhouse (right).*

THE greatest racehorse of all time? A one-word name? Two syllables? Of course. He's ARKLE.

This would be the answer of tens of thousands of racing fans in Ireland, UK and around the world and is testament to the perennial sporting popularity of steeplechasing and hurdling.

The safe route is to say that you can't compare flat and jumping horses. "*Greatest steeplechaser*" as applied to ARKLE is undisputed, at least post-war and arguably ever. Greater than FRANKEL? In popularity over time, yes.

Racing's fans are now anticipating the jumping season. Champions Day at Ascot is done. The Champion Flat Jockey is crowned. Yes, there is winter flat racing on artificials, but most flat horses are being put away now for their winter break, to return to training in early January for March/April turf onwards.

Yes, there has also been summer jumping. But nei-

ther "filler" is of national interest.

Few horses on the flat evoke such emotion as the best steeplechasers.

DESERT ORCHID is described in Wikipedia as "*a national icon and beautiful grey loved by children*". "Dessiemanía" was known throughout the nation to apply to a thrilling chaser who won four King George VI Chases, as well as a Cheltenham Gold Cup.

Dessie's lass Janice Coyle was almost as well known as the horse. The roar of the King George crowd on Boxing Day as they come over the second last at Kempton near London Heathrow is one of the great events in sport. For Dessie, the roar

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made emotional wrecks out of many of the huge Christmas throngs.



*Desert Orchid.*

RED RUM won three Grand Nationals and was second in two more. His five years of national adulation continued in retirement and beyond with many people knowing exactly where little "Rummy" is buried.

Famous steeplechasers make public appearances in retirement: opening a new shopping complex; switching on Christmas lights; cantering in front of adoring crowds on big race days.

More recently KAUTO STAR took on the "people's favourite" mantle but without the cult status of Arkle, Rummy and Dessie. The list goes on. GOLDEN MILLER, DAWN RUN, DENMAN, L'ES-

CARGOT....

**ARKLE surpasses all. If Timeform is the arbiter, just as Frankel (147) out-rated Sea-Bird (145), so did the highest rated steeplechaser of all time (212) out-rate his brilliant stable companion FLYING-BOLT (210). Top steeplechasers usually rate around 180. Those two were freaks of nature.**

ARKLE "was Ireland". The 1960s nation was a shadow of the present Celtic Tiger, full of difficulty and self-doubt but of deep-seated pride. ARKLE, owned by Irish-born UK peeress Anne, Duchess of Westminster, was trained by Tom Dreaper and was Irish Pride writ large.

Known throughout the Emerald Isle as "Himself", the horse was also adopted as a hero by his British fans. Even if he did signal his own greatness by beating the great English chaser MILL HOUSE who was never the same again but lives on in admiration for a great athlete.

When ARKLE reversed 1963 form with MILL HOUSE at Cheltenham, eyes in UK and Ireland were out on stalks, so glorious was his jumping, so majestic was his victory over another great horse.

ARKLE's 27 wins, all under Pat Taafe, included three Cheltenham Gold Cups, plus a King George, two Hennessys and an Irish National with many other stirring victories.

He ruined the handicap system. There would be



two handicaps: one with ARKLE running and one without.

In many of his great victories, he carried up something like 2½ stone more than the next in the weights. That means 16 kg more than all of them, over a distance of 3 miles or more (5 km).

Perhaps above all, the thrill for people was in his jumping at speed. Where Dessie would attack fences making every one a thrill, and butcher the fields behind him, ARKLE cruised until it was time “to go”, treating big fences with imperious disdain, soaring high and fast. He would walk around parade rings, head high, ears pricked, looking back at the crowds as if nodding to them regally.

From all over the world, ARKLE would receive actual fan mail by the sack full, often addressed to “Arkle, Ireland” or even “Himself”. The Irish Post Office knew exactly where to deliver it. There was no internet. ARKLE would have exploded Twitter.

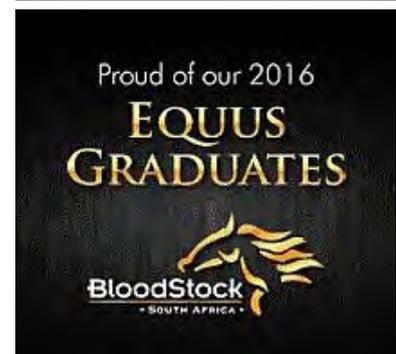
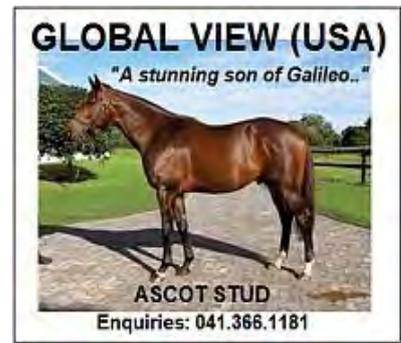
Stars are needed in sport. Why was POCKET POWER so popular and known beyond racing? Because he came back again and again. Crowds flock to see the stars in the flesh, not on TV. BLACK CAVIAR and FRANKEL did that in their different ways. The great flat stayers like YEATS and PERSIAN PUNCH did that. Every one of those chasers mentioned above and many more did and do exactly that.

So here's to the jumping season of wrap up warm in your favourite coat, scarf and gloves, have a hot whisky and enjoy the friendly crowds, the utterly magnificent athletes and their riders, perhaps the bravest of sports people. Big festivals and small. Like Taunton, Fontwell and Market Rasen, nestled in beautiful winter countryside, where the local community has been waiting for weeks for each race day and you can't get within a mile of the full car parks.

By the way, knock the F and the N out of FRANKEL and you have an anagram of ARKLE. - tt



Red Rum, who lived until 30, is buried at the Aintree winning post. Here is his late trainer, Ginger McCain, paying tribute.



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# Phumelela pleased with 52% increase in profit for year ending July 31

Racing's sports betting operator, Phumelela Gaming and Leisure, reported a 52% jump in after tax profit to R121m for the financial year ending 31 July 2016.

The sports betting operator declared a 70c final dividend, taking its total dividend for the year to end -July to R1.04 – up 18% from last year's 88c. Their total income is up 19% to R1.5bn, with the fastest growth coming from the Group's international operations, which grew 38% to R274m, with domestic operations showing a growth of 15% to R1.2bn.

The Group ended the year with 75 fixed odds retail shops, up from 66 as at January 2016. A 51% investment in Afribet, which operates in the Eastern Cape, became unconditional with effect from February, adding to the Group's retail footprint. Total capital expenditure in Betting World amounted to R23 million in 2016.

**Phumelela deemed the results 'pleasing' and 'reflective of a strategic imperative in place more than a decade to internationalise and diversify its activities outside of the company's traditional roots.'**

Their annual report stated, "Diversifying and taking South African thoroughbred horseracing to the world has sustained our horseracing business in the face of strong cost pressures and despite the ongoing funding imbalance in respect of horseracing that exists between tote operators and bookmakers. Growth in tote betting on sports other than horse racing, fixed-odds betting and a substantial increase in contribution from international operations, were the drivers of this year's result."

While sports betting has proved lucrative, traditional horse-racing operations was cited as contributing a pretax loss of R104m. However, the company stated, "Phumelela continues to invest in South African thoroughbred horseracing. Tote betting volumes are stable, a quality racing experience encourages on-course attendance, particularly for high-profile race meetings.

Horseracing is the foundation of our business and despite an economic playing field that is manifestly

unfair, we are resolute in playing a key role in ensuring South African racing remains top class. This year we invested a further R51 million on our betting and racing facilities."

Phumelela called for a 'fairer funding dispensation for the sport of thoroughbred horseracing', referring to rival bookmaking organisations, some of which have gone to court claiming Tellytrack overcharges them.

Their annual report stated, "Flagrant piracy of the group's intellectual property by certain bookmakers is unconscionable. Civil and criminal lawsuits have been filed and will continue to be filed against bookmakers unlawfully displaying Tellytrack.

As of the date of this report, 274 bookmakers have subscribed to Tellytrack for live horseracing televisual and audio rights whilst 255 bookmakers have subscribed to the live international horseracing televisual and audio rights."

Phumelela reported that fixed odds betting on horseracing has shown a very pleasing improvement, a 35% increase since 2014. Other sports and in particular numbers betting, which increased by 54%, continue to grow in popularity.

A full copy of the report is available [here](#).

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## CTS Lanzerac R2R Sale tops R28-million

A pair of colts, sired by What A Winter and Excelsior respectively, fetched R900 000 apiece to jointly top Saturday's CTS Ready To Run Sale Presented by Lanzerac Hotel & Spa.

Top priced filly was a daughter of former Gr1 Prix du Jockey Club winner Lope De Vega, who was sold to Form Bloodstock for R525 000.

The gross aggregate for the 2016 Ready To Run Sale was R28 120 000 – down on last year's total of R39 180 000. However the 2016 catalogue was noticeably smaller. –tt

