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The David Allan Column

The greatest ride ever



Mandarin, with Fred Winter up. Note no reins on him, post-race.

IN the annals of the greatest racehorses, they write about Arkle, Mill House, Flyingbolt and Desert Orchid – as did I in an earlier column. The YouTube précis of Desert Orchid’s career demonstrates vividly why people go so bonkers about a great steeplechaser running time after time in the enduring popularity of National Hunt racing.

But it took a *Racing Post* poll conducted about 10 years ago to remind us all about the incomparable feat achieved in 1962 by Mandarin with Fred Winter in the saddle. The result of that poll, 44 years after the event, was that Winter’s ride on Mandarin was voted the greatest ride EVER – flat or National Hunt. “THAT ride first, the rest nowhere”.

The greyness of an English winter – never really noticed while going about the business of growing up – was bright for this very young lad by National Hunt racing on black and white TV – more greyness, come to think of it - plus the exciting newsreels of British Pathé seen on frequent visits to the cinema when there was always a racing feature of some sort.

Shortly before Mill House and Arkle, the Cheltenham Gold Cup winners were crowd favourites Pas Seul, Saffron Tartan and the smallest of them all, Mandarin in 1962. Mandarin had won two Hennessys and two King Georges but had a spell off after a fracture, thus making his Gold Cup all the more meritorious.

Fred Winter – Champion jockey four times and Champion trainer eight times – legend is too underwhelming a word for him— rode the last two named. He also won the National in ’62 on Kilmore. But the incredible, otherworldly ride came in Paris a couple of months later.

It is important to know that Fred Winter had extraordinary strength. They said that he could walk round the changing room on his two hands as naturally as most on two feet, but more to the point he was a champion race rider, powerful in the drive, whose whip was often waved but rarely used. To meet him later through the bloodstock business was to marvel at the opportunity.

The Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris is run in June at Auteuil in the Bois de Boulogne. Its lack of rail and its fences unlike those in England created a stern test for a ‘chaser’ visiting from (to p.2)

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across La Manche, not to mention the race distance of 6,500 metres (nowadays 5,800 metres) – in between that of the Cheltenham Gold Cup and The Grand National.

On a hot and humid afternoon, Mandarin – who had run in the race once before but shied at one of the weirder fences - looked perfectly tuned up. Always a puller, the little horse wore a rubber bit to stop him hurting himself and it was at the fourth fence, a flimsy but very tall privet hedge, that the bit snapped clean through!

Winter no longer had any contact with the mouth or control over Mandarin's head. He had only the neck strap of the breast girth to hold on to with any purchase. Of course the counter-balancing effect through the reins that creates the rider's "seat" was gone. The test of leg and upper body strength was to be immense.

More than twenty fences remained to be negotiated by an 11-year old who would have felt very strange receiving a different form of signalling from the saddle, not to mention having no restraint to his head. If anything, though, the fences were the least of the rider's worries.

The track is a repeated figure of eight with, therefore, several 180 degree bends. French jockeys could have taken advantage of a problem they could see for themselves, but they were helpful – one especially so, leaning on Mandarin on a bend when otherwise he might have headed for the woods.

The man in the saddle used every ounce of his prodigious leg strength to steer, especially when ducking past a peculiar bush that could be passed on either side giving Mandarin a confusing set of alternatives. Having to coast round all the turns,

Mandarin repeatedly made up ground in the straight sectors.

Until jumping La Rivière des Tribunes (the water jump) for the last time, the crowd had no idea of the situation but then they realised it as one. From that moment on, those who were there say that they have never experienced such a roller coaster of emotions in a crowd as each remaining obstacle was approached anticipating the worst then crying out with relief at each clearance.



Fred Winter, the ride of all rides!

Mandarin in fact "did a tendon" about three out, probably when Winter used his body to swerve him onto the right line. Not that his tiger-like efforts on the remaining three legs would allow him to show it. The National Hunt community had become used to the little chap's huge heart and were convinced that he knew absolutely everything about the concept of trying hard to win.

After the last turn, losing ground inevitably, the combination made a bee-line for home. They passed three in the last hundred yards and fended off a rival at the line after an extraordinary hands, heels, legs and body drive on a brave horse who gave everything.

There have been roars for perennial jumping stars

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La Rivière des Tribunes (the water jump) at the Grand-Steeplechase de Paris.

on racecourses to rival acclamation at any sporting theatre in the world. Listen to the emotion of some commentators describing the crowd raising the roof for “Dessie”. But they say that the crowd in Paris was full of people breaking down in tears as they cheered and howled their celebration at being there to see this extraordinary feat of horsemanship and equine courage.

Mandarin was mobbed like a film star, dog tired but surely aware and surely cherished by everyone present, forever to remain in the memory. For Fred Winter, a jump jockey’s fitness saw him recover the power of speech after a time and then some strength. And he proved it by winning the next race on Beaver II.

Mandarin, owned by Peggy Hennessy, retired to become his trainer Fulke Walwyn’s much loved hack. - tt.



Gavin Lerena rode another treble at Turffontein on Saturday, including feature winner Patchit Up Baby for Ormond Ferraris. He leads Greg Cheyne by two winners on the National Log, and has taken his career tally to 1500.

Flamingo Park racing is off, again

Please note that following a track inspection by the Phumelela representative and track management at Flamingo Park at 4pm on Sunday and the prospect of further rain on Sunday evening and Monday, the race meeting scheduled for today at has been abandoned.

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HEARTY congratulations this morning to Justin Vermaak and his team at Green Street Bloodstock, who broke new ground for a South African racehorse syndication company with a winner from only their second runner on overseas soil. Deadline Day, a powerful gelding by Rip Van Winkle, won his Kranji debut, Sunday, with a sweeping run and looks to have a few more victories to come. GSB's other Singapore runners are Risky Rockefeller, who is about ready to win after three warm-up sprints, and Vanderbilt, who is yet to race for his new owners. They're all in the care of young trainer James Peters (next to Justin on the far left), who has a 16% strike rate of winners to runners, and they are all owned by partnerships including predominantly South African owners. Deadline Day earned the equivalent of R330,000 for his Maiden win, roughly a full year's training fees. - tt.

Summerhill R2R updates

THE Emperors Palace Summer Ready To Run Sale will be held at Summerhill on Tuesday 21 February. Download [catalogue here](#).

Herewith some important pedigree updates:

- Lot 2** Ahead Of Traffic – Now 2 wins and placed twice
- Lot 18** Anna Pavlova – Now 4 wins Including THREE TROIKAS STAKES (Grade 3)
- Lot 35** Bay Style – Now a winner
- Lot 37** Banking April – Now 6 wins
September Bloom now a winner
- Lot 46** Red Special – Now 7 wins
- Lot 59** Flipflash – Now placed twice
- Lot 80** Hyaku – Now 6 wins
- Lot 84** Cockade – Now 2 wins and placed 11

times.

- Lot 94** My Boy Willie – Now placed twice
- Lot 100** Moonlite Mist – Now 2 win
- Lot 105** Midnight Man – Now a Winner

The events start at 8am with viewing until 11.30, followed by recorded gallops at 11.30, lunch at 1 and the sale at 1.30pm. - tt.

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by Rob Champion

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Innovative Sales Companies, good prize money credited with racing's success in Australia

AS the Australian yearling sales caravan rolls on from Sydney to Melbourne this week, the thoroughbred marketplace has been aligned to the booming housing sector.

Against all general economic trends, the housing bubble refuses to burst with growth in Sydney (15%) and Melbourne (13%) in the last quarter. The Consumer Price index is running around 1.5%. Try racehorses then, or yearlings that haven't raced yet, but carry the hopes, dreams and expectations of a buyer who think they have just snared the next Winx or Black Caviar.



Last year there was 4241 yearlings sold in Australia at an average of \$88,540 a 7.92% increase on the previous which was up a thumping 18.16% on the year prior. And there is no bust in sight.

The recently completed Inglis Classic Sale in Sydney saw a 25% increase on average (\$71,593), surpassing the gains at Magic Millions where it costs on average \$206,000 to buy a ticket in racing's great lottery.

Coming up from Sunday week Inglis will sell 771 yearlings under the Premier banner at Oaklands Junction where last year's average was \$110,000.

Yet the true economics should be challenging to anyone outside of racing.

There were 76,767, or one in 310 Australians, racing a share in a horse last year but 4091 of those horses failed to earn a cent in returns while only 786 earned between \$10,000 and \$99,000. It's a unique industry, and seemingly right now, quite

unique to Australia. Trying to explain the Australian thoroughbred trading market and how it defies the broader economics of the world is an interesting discussion.

Bloodstock agent Damon Gabbedy from Belmont Bloodstock is adamant prize money and return on investment underpins the inordinate growth in the trading market. "We tend to be in a very unique industry. The general economy might be tough but there is a good reason people are paying money for horses, our prize money depth is incredible," he said.

Is it sustainable? "As long as racing stays positive and stakes continues to be strong, there is no reason to doubt the strength of the market," Gabbedy said.

He highlighted the plight of New Zealand, where prize money levels are poor in comparison, but dismissed suggestions the soaring yearling market squeezed out the smaller players. "Syndication keeps the little players in," he said.

Fellow-agent Sheamus Mills agreed that "investors' were happy to get in at various levels and syndication was an affordable option. "We have seen syndicators looking after the mum and dad investors, they keep buying enough horses to keep them in play," he said.

Mills was quick to praise the yearling sales companies, – Inglis, Magic Millions and New Zealand Bloodstock, -as another reason the market remain strong via credit terms to buyers.

Vendors are paid on 45 days, so Inglis will fund the \$35m gross from Classic to sellers at that point while waiting as long as 12 months themselves to be paid.

"The sales companies are very under-rated in how they keep the industry alive. If we are in a bubble – how much credit is given may be of concern, we don't want a situation like the American housing market that goes bust eventually. To some extent the companies are controlling the bubble," he said.

-Article originally published on glx.com.au, and written by Bruce Clark.

