

IT'S ABOUT QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

OLLY STEVENS



50
Goffs

Olly Stevens has been training at Sheikh Fahad Al Thani's Robins Farm in Surrey for the last two seasons and achieved his first Royal Ascot winner in his first year with a licence, courtesy of Extortionist's victory in the Windsor Castle Stakes. Prior to starting out as a trainer in his own right, he worked for Jessica Harrington, Andrew Balding, and James Fanshawe, as well as Kellyn Gorder in America, where he met his wife Hetta, who is a key member of the Robins Farm Racing team. Last year he worked with Alastair Donald and Ed Sackville to buy some horses for owners in the stable. "I tend to let agents be agents and to do their job rather than interfering too much, but with Alastair and Ed, and also with David Redvers who buys for Sheikh Fahad, it's nice to be given a short list and to then look at those horses with them," he says. "At the level we've been buying at, we're looking for quality animals but obviously they may have a fault or two and we try to work out if that's something we can cope with. Every trainer has conformation faults they can forgive and those they can't. I am

quite cautious in my approach. I'm a strong believer in the fact that there's always another sale. I won't buy unless it's a horse

I'm really happy with. As the market is rising, agents and trainers, we're all going to have to encourage owners to be bold and spend a little bit more money. Sales season is all about trying to find a balance between work at home and the opportunities that may present themselves when you're on site meeting people. That's where agents come in and they do it very well. They understand the market and can read an auction and look at all the horses in a sale much quicker than I can. We ended up with a few nice fillies from last year's Orby. It's really helpful to have an iPad with you at the sales so you can send lists and photographs to owners – it's great on the communication front. I feel there's scope with the online catalogues and something like Timeform to include all the ratings on a page – it seems the logical next step, though it's perhaps less relevant at a premier sale like the Orby where all the yearlings are out of nice black-type mares."

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AN AGENT IS ESSENTIAL

TOM DASCOMBE



ROD KIRKPATRICK

54
Goffs

Former jump jockey Tom Dascombe cut his teeth training under his own steam at Lambourn with some notable success, particularly via Classic Blade and Firth Of Fifth, who won the G2 July Stakes and G2 Superlative Stakes during a memorable Newmarket July Meeting in 2006. Having joined forces with owner-breeders Michael Owen and Andrew Black to train from the prestigious Manor House Stables in Cheshire, Tom's major flagbearer is now the Group-winning stayer Brown Panther. He used to buy for himself but now uses SackvilleDonald as it "just became too much trying to do it all" on his own. Building up a good working relationship with your agent is really important, he says. "Ed [Sackville] is very thorough and he knows what I'm looking for which is the most important thing. All trainers

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want different things. The Orby Sale is the premier Irish sale and it's very important to be there. We tend to buy quite a few there but with prices increasing it is getting harder to buy but that just means we have to work harder to find one that fits our budget.

There are always plenty of nice yearlings on offer there and the team is very helpful. They make it easy for you to get there and it's very well structured. It's pretty much the easiest sales ground to work as you can move from barn to barn very quickly. It's time-consuming being present at the sales but one of my jobs is to look for next year's horses. The owners appreciate that's where I have to be at that time of the year. When you're a one-man band it's a lot harder but I've got a very good team at home.”

SALES SEASON MEANS SHOPPING AROUND

ED WALKER



TREVOR JONES

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Goffs

ED WALKER, a former assistant to Luca Cumani, is in his fourth season training in Newmarket and last winter moved his burgeoning string of horses to the historic Warren Place to train from a yard adjacent to Lady Cecil. Last November, he made a successful international raid on Flemington's Spring Carnival when the Irish-bred Ruscello won the G3 Lexus Stakes. Walker buys through agents Ed Sackville and Alastair Donald of SackvilleDonald and with their help he tries to look for some value. "They both know the kind of horses I like to train," he says. "It's massively time-consuming to be at the sales. At this time of year it's hard to spend so many days away at sales, but with their expert help I really only need to be in Goffs for a day or two. I can't say I really enjoy the sales that much, mostly from the point of view that I get rather frustrated not having enough money to spend. You go round looking at all these horses that you'd love to train and find that you have nowhere near enough to buy them, especially in recent times with

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the market so strong. But hopefully one day I'll have millions to spend and I'll enjoy the sales much more! That said, it's always a very sociable experience and there's plenty of good banter with the consignors. The Goffs party at the K Club is great fun and a good chance to catch up with the Irish guys. Goffs is a very practical sale to work. Everything is really well laid out and it's easy to look at horses and pop back in to the ring to bid. Irish Thoroughbred Marketing does a great job looking after us all. I still approach the sales in a fairly old-fashioned way. I'm a catalogue man and don't really use an iPad. I love being able to go to the bookshelf and look back at my notes when I see a two-year-old bolt up in a maiden to see what I thought about him as a yearling. But I've seen plenty of the more senior agents using tablets now instead of catalogues so perhaps it's something I should look into. Mind you, Ed Sackville presents me with a hardback copy of the catalogue for the sale which is great – it's just one of his many uses!”