



Words **Howard Wright**

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BREEDER OF THE MONTH (September 2022)

ROCKCLIFFE STUD

Sound advice is worth its weight in guineas galore in the bloodstock world. Hence Ben Keswick, who masterminds the family's Rockcliffe Stud for parents Simon and Emma, credits nomination as TBA Breeder of the Month for September, for the exploits of half-sisters Trillium and American Kestrel, as much to agent Ed Sackville as anyone on the Gloucestershire farm.

Sackville's finest achievement for the Keswicks has been to buy Sky Lantern, the Group 1-winning filly whose third produce Snow Lantern emulated her dam. However, Sackville's involvement has more basic antecedents; he was in at the beginning of Rockcliffe's foundation in 2008.

Ben Keswick explains: "Ed has been an absolutely key part of the team. He's been amazing and made the whole experience a wonderful journey. He bought three foundation mares, one of whom was Asaawir, the grandam of Trillium, so none of this could have happened without him.

"He deserves to share the TBA award, which means a lot for a small stud of around 12 horses."

Keswick relates: "Asaawir is still with us but she's not carrying anything this year and at the age of 19 she may be coming to the end of her time as a broodmare, although she will carry on looking after the yearlings. She owes us nothing."

Indeed, since being bought from Lanwades Stud for 155,000gns at the Tattersalls December Mares Sale, Asaawir has kept the tills ticking over, through Rockcliffe's policy of selling colts and racing fillies.

The strategy was summed up by Julian Muscat when in his June 2021 Owner



Trillium (left) denies The Platinum Queen to win the Flying Childers Stakes

BILL SELWYN

Breeder profile of the stud he wrote: "Adhere to budgets, sell the colts and maintain tight controls on the broodmare band."

"They were my words!" Keswick says, with a smile. "There's nothing like having rules that you can break when you feel it's right, but you have to have a game plan. It's about the stud and the next generation and getting black type for your best horses."

Into the bracket of retaining fillies to race comes the Invincible Spirit mare Marsh Hawk, who streaked home by seven lengths from a 220,000gns purchase on her Newmarket debut and has produced three two-year-old winners, each with black-type to their name, from her first three foals.

Keswick recalls Marsh Hawk's racing career: "She didn't come to hand early but she was a rocket. After Newmarket, she was beaten a short head in the final stride in the Dick Poole at Salisbury, which we thought would be an easy one to pick up black-type.

"She won her next race at odds on and

then we put her in the Fillies' Mile but she hit her head coming out of the stalls and came alive too early, so she had run her race before halfway, although she ran well to finish fourth to Together Forever. She never quite got going as a three- and four-year-old."

Any disappointment over Marsh Hawk's second and third seasons on the racecourse has been erased by her opening efforts at the stud. Her first foal, by Siyouni, made 220,000gns as a yearling and named Mohawk King after his breeze-up purchase, he has won twice for Sky and Snow Lanterns' trainer Richard Hannon.

Marsh Hawk's second foal, by Starspangledbanner, is American Kestrel, who was sold into David Menuisier's stable for 26,000gns in February this year, after winning one of her five races in the Keswick colours. She was beaten a nose in a Saint-Cloud Listed race on her September debut for new connections.

Then came Trillium, the April-foaled filly of 2020 by No Nay Never who ran a promising second at Goodwood before rattling up a hat-trick that started at Newbury, included the Group 3 Molecomb Stakes at Goodwood and culminated in the award-winning Group 2 Flying Childers Stakes at Doncaster.

What will Trillium's optimum distance be as a three-year-old, given her family includes a number of useful stayers, not least the Grand National winner One For Arthur? Keswick is not sure. "It's a shame we didn't see the best of her in her last race, the Cheveley Park Stakes [when eighth]," he says, "but we know she gets six furlongs and her jockey Pat Dobbs said she wasn't stopping there.

"Let's see how she goes on over the winter. We've time to dream, and there's nothing like a good dream in racing."

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