

WINNERS FOR 1946

MEYRICK GOOD  
AND  
JOHN BETTS

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*By*

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## STARTING A STUD

*by*

FLORENCE NAGLE

I HAVE been a breeder of animals all my life, and have bred Royal champions in Berkshire pigs, seven Field Trial champion Irish setters, and many Irish wolfhound champions, as well as cattle, turkeys, and poultry. In 1934 I decided to embark on a much more hazardous proposition—the breeding of bloodstock.

I must confess that my first attempt came the nearest to achieving my secret ambition to breed a classic winner, as the first horse I bred scored what would now be called “a near miss”; he was second in the 1937 Derby—probably beginner’s luck—but this nearness to the desired objective has kept me struggling on under very adverse circumstances during the war.

Breeding is the most interesting part, but racing is the vital test of whether you are on the right lines or not. It is surprising what a snare and a delusion beauty and conformation can be. In my opinion, the most important things are courage—in plain language, guts—and the gift of going. You can alter the shape, size and colour to what you desire by breeding, but it is anything but simple to breed good-plucked ones. The dam is 75 per cent or more of the battle; some mares throw winners to anything to which you send them, and such mares are pearls of great price which should be hung on to at any cost. I, personally, like to obtain daughters of great race mares, as they often produce much better racehorses than their dams have done; and if the colts from them turn out good, there is a chance that they will make good stallions, while any fillies, even if they only win small races, have a big potential stud value.

It is getting very difficult to breed now as you would wish; the leading stallions are so booked up or else syndicated that it means you have to fit in mares with the stallions you

have been able to obtain, like a jigsaw puzzle, and that is not breeding in the true sense of the word.

I should like to say how very grateful we, as breeders, should be to the leading breeder-owners, who retained their stallions during the war, and who, in spite of penal taxation, have not syndicated their horses. A committee, in my opinion, cannot consider the horses' welfare in the same way as an owner, as it is responsible to shareholders.

People who have never owned or bred racehorses are very fond of criticizing breeders for producing horses which are likely to be two-year-old winners or sprinters. With the present terrible costs to owners, it is not surprising that they want horses to run as two-year-olds, and of course a sprinter can run in and win more races than a stayer. Even so, great studs like Lord Derby's, Lord Astor's, or Lord Rosebery's, do not over-race or spoil their promising two-year-olds, and probably those who do are driven to it by economic necessity. The remedy is, surely, more valuable races over one and a half miles for three-year-olds. There is a certain early maturing type from past blood which I am sure comes to no harm from being raced a reasonable amount as two-year-olds, and it is also essential to have speed on one side or another to breed a class horse. The Gold Cup at Ascot, which is, after all, the classic test of a stayer, has only been won a few times by a foreign horse, in spite of our so-called concentration on speed and racing two-year-olds.

The present boom in thoroughbreds and racing may not be all to the good of the Turf; many think it is a quick way of getting rich and spending war-time profits. The stable elements are, again, the great studs, built up during several generations, where ruthless discarding has been the rule, who hung on to their best in spite of tempting offers when things looked very black during the war, and where the improvement of the thoroughbred, not merely commercial success, has been the prime aim. They are now reaping their reward, when their discards are fetching up to £10,000, and their exports are bringing fame and some much-needed foreign currency to this hard-pressed country.

I can only add that I race purely to test the results of my breeding efforts, but how long it will be possible to do so I do not know. The owner has too heavy a burden to bear with present-day taxation. Very few of the racing public realize what a bill the owner has to foot; apart from training bills, travelling horses and jockey expenses, there is Weatherby's stake account, which, if you have well-bred horses, is apt to come to more than all the rest put together. Horses have to be entered for important races sometimes a year or even two years before the race. How can you know if they are any good? And, unfortunately for their pockets, owners are apt to be optimistic! I feel I have qualified for the right to be the spokesman of the great brigade of "also rans" in imploring the Jockey Club to consider if it would not be possible to have smaller entry fees, and for big races a larger forfeit the week before the race. Nobody minds paying a larger forfeit for a good horse, but the small owner cannot afford to enter several horses a year ahead in the big races, on the off-chance that they will be good; but if he did happen to own a good one, he could afford a stiff fee to enter it later. I have been told it would affect the value of classic races, but, after all, the object of the classic race is to find the best three-year-old, and there have been cases of good horses not being entered as yearlings because they were small and not promising at the time. They do not always develop quickly as two-year-olds, and the great mare Sun Chariot might easily have been taken out of her classic engagements when she was nearly discarded in her early two-year-old career. I should much like to know how much a moderate horse which is well-bred costs a year in forfeits; from my own experience it is from £400 to £500, and when the good horse does come along it is bearing a heavy tax.

Racing is the most thrilling sport I know, but it seems to me in danger of becoming too commercialized. Heavy betting affects men's judgment and puts too great a strain on those riding and having the care of hot favourites in big races, nor is it in the best interests of the horses themselves. I am told you must bet to be able to keep horses in training,

but the only people who remain steadily in racing are those who look to the appreciation in value of their stock from successful racing to recoup their expenditure. I started my racing in 1922, in a stable well content to wait one to two years for a coup. It was surprising how often the coup came unstuck, and the owners one by one came unstuck too and retired hurt. I was lucky enough to be able to return to racing fifteen years later, and hope to carry on in a small way as a breeder-owner. There is a great future and a world-wide demand for our stock, which has proved itself on the race-course and in the studs of every country to which it has been exported.

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I take leave to differ from some experts who have declared that the 1946 crop of fillies is much below the colts.

It is contended that the exposed fillies are of doubtful stamina. I have dealt with some lightly-raced unknowns who will probably be entitled to rank with the best of the colts. I predict a bumper year as far as class is concerned for both colts and fillies.

J.B.