

# RACING POST

## GOOD MORNING BLOODSTOCK



BY MARTIN STEVENS

Yorton Farm will offer 15 yearlings and two-year-olds at Auctav's National Hunt Sale at the stately stud-turned-sales facility Haras de Bois Roussel in Normandy on Friday.

I know what you're thinking: doesn't a British stud presenting young jumpers to French buyers on their home turf seem like a spectacular case of coals to Newcastle? But this is no pointless exercise, as the operation's principal David Futter explains.

*"We've had a lot of success holding the Goffs UK Yorton Sale at home on the stud for the past five years but last season we just found it too difficult to collect 50 horses to make a catalogue, with the cost of stock rising so high," he says.*

*"It's a family business at the end of the day, and we couldn't responsibly make the sort of investment needed at the moment, so we decided to take a year off. We've already announced that the sale will be on again at Yorton next year all being well, though.*

*"For all that, the business is still set up to sell at this time of year, and we have to move on our own homebreds and a few pinhooks in order to keep the wheel turning. There are no places to sell them at that age in Britain or Ireland at this time of year, though, and so when Auctav approached us and we found that we shared a similar ethos, and would be selling in a similar stud environment, we jumped at the chance."*

Results from the Goffs UK Yorton Sale suggest that visitors to Auctav would be unwise to dismiss horses raised at the Welshpool farm as inferior to the homegrown product. It has been responsible for 24 runners in France, who were knocked down for an average price of around £25,000. An impressive 67 per cent of those have won and 21 per cent have earned black type, for aggregate earnings in excess of €1 million.

*“If it wasn’t for the attempt to emulate the benefits of the French system, and getting these National Hunt horses to do more at an earlier age, the Yorton Sale wouldn’t have been so successful, or at least got off the ground so quickly,”* says Futter.

*“We’re not trying to be the height of fashion with the pedigrees we sell, although we’ve had Blue Bresils because we stood him, as well as the odd lot by top French sires like No Risk At All. In fact, some of the successful horses we’ve sold have been by virtually unknown or deeply unfashionable sires.*

*“What we’re selling instead is the model of taking a horse who doesn’t cost a fortune and putting them into pre-training, and ultimately training, at a younger age. I’ve been banging this drum for years now: it’s all about the process rather than pedigree.*

*“That’s not to say pedigree doesn’t count at all, but it’s the horses themselves and what you do with them that really matters.”*

Futter has indeed been at the forefront of the movement in Britain and Ireland to do more with incipient National Hunt athletes, as happens regularly in France, which produces so many Grade 1 winners on these shores nowadays. It has resulted in widespread debate in industry forums, the introduction of junior hurdles and the launch of two-year-old sessions at some store sales.

Futter can’t be accused of not having put his money where his mouth is, as he has stated his case on TBA committees and sold younger horses at his own Goffs UK Yorton Sale. So does he see light at the end of the tunnel on the topic?

*“If you conducted a straw poll in the National Hunt community I think there’d probably be a majority who now realise the benefits of the French model of getting horses started at an earlier age,” he says. “But still not everyone, by any means.*

*“Getting improvements in place feels like trying to turn around an ocean liner, though. It just isn’t happening quickly enough. Look, I’m not saying it’s the be-all and end-all, or that we shouldn’t still sell three-year-olds unbroken or put them in training at four when there’s a case for it. Not every horse has to go down this route.*

*“But if we don’t get to a place where it’s easier and more attractive to sell and race jumps horses at a younger age I really fear we’re going to get left behind, and that would be a shame for everyone who makes a living out of the industry.*

*“The French have done it for years, while the Irish have the slick point-to-point system and are coming around to the French model. It’s frustrating, as Britain was onto this first, but it’s one of those chicken-and-egg situations where people have to see the junior hurdles working, and yet those races aren’t being supported strongly enough for that to happen.”*

Futter would say that, wouldn’t he? After all, he has adapted the Yorton Farm production line to deliver jumps stock that can be put to work sooner than has traditionally been the case in Britain and Ireland. He has skin in the game.

But actually this might be a rare case in the bloodstock industry where cynicism can safely be suspended. He isn’t speaking entirely out of self-interest; his concerns over French horses dominating the racing scene in two countries that breed thousands of their own jumpers each year are sincere and should be shared by everyone involved in the domestic industry.

*“France has been doing more with those young jumpers and reaping the rewards for years now,” says Futter. “I promise you their sires are no better or different from our own; there’s no magic DNA over there that makes their horses superior.*

*“Many of those horses who were raised and prepared at Yorton and won significant races in France were British-bred, so it goes to show that it can be done. That’s not me trying to say aren’t we clever. It’s a system we’d encourage other people to do too.”*

As it happens, the law of supply and demand is dictating that those looking to source jumpers to race in Britain and Ireland might have to rely on the domestic product more in the short term.

Word has it that French breeders have hiked prices for youngsters in the field so high that traders in particular have been put off. Even some of the biggest names in pinhooking were grumbling at the store sales that you nearly have to do deals for foals in-utero to get any sort of value at present.

Hence Futter’s opening remarks about struggling to source enough horses for a sale at Yorton Farm this year, to which he adds: *“I’ve been doing it long enough now that I’ve seen prices rise too high a few times before, and to be honest the market needed another reset; things were getting out of hand.”*

*“It’s interesting, as that demand from Britain and Ireland was changing the way the French breeder did things, and not for the better. They were starting to chase sires because pinhookers were going onto their farms and saying they liked a foal but wouldn’t buy them because they weren’t by a saleable stallion at an Irish store sale.”*

*“I doubt the damage is irreparable, though. There are many fewer pinhookers going around France at the moment, and I’m told French trainers have rekindled their relationships with local breeders, so more horses will go into the French system.”*



*“That should help rejuvenate the French breed again, as it encourages people to breed horses who win races and valuable premiums, rather than horses who have fashionable sires, which isn't always the same thing. It might remind a few people that the mare's contribution to class, physique and temperament in the offspring is always underestimated.”*

The horses who make up the Yorton Farm draft at Auctav, bred in accordance with such laudably sensible principles, have been settling into their temporary home of Haras de Bois Roussel over the past few days.

*“George Mullins, through Paul Murphy, came with the wagon and drag to collect the horses at 3pm on Saturday, and we came over on the same boat,” says Futter. “We unloaded them at 9am the next morning. It was all very seamless.*

*“The horses travelled well and Auctav have been fantastic. The stud has horse walkers, lunge pens, paddocks to turn the horses out into, everything you need. It's a very calm place, and feels as though it's in the middle of the countryside, so the horses relaxed straight away and have been lying around as if they're at home.”*

The laid-back lots include two by Blue Bresil, who fathered numerous celebrities during his four seasons at Yorton Farm before he was transferred to Glenview Stud at the end of 2019, none more starry than the great hurdler Constitution Hill.

The yearling colt out of the Presenting mare Present Your Case and two-year-old filly out of the Kahyasi mare Makadamia are worth paying close attention to, as the stud jointly bred and reared two of the sire's other Grade 1-winning sons, Inthepocket and Redemption Day, and traded and raised another in Good Land.

*"We have a close relationship with the Cashman family at Glenview Stud and kept five breeding rights in Blue Bresil, which we obviously try to use every year,"* says Futter.

*"The filly is out of a beautifully bred mare who we bought from Robert Waley-Cohen. He's been very kind over the years, and whenever a meeting was held at his house when he was chairman of the TBA National Hunt committee I nearly always ended up buying a broodmare from him. We had some good fun."*

*"The yearling has been left entire. I'm not saying he's definitely stallion material but he's well bred, from the family of One Man, and in France they don't mind racing colts over jumps. If he does turn out to be useful, they'd rather he had his equipment intact."*

Futter also highlights three yearlings in the draft by the late Yorton Farm resident Masterstroke, a son of Monsun and Galileo and Sea The Stars' Oaks-placed half-sister Melikah who won the Grand Prix de Deauville and finished third in the Arc.

*"Masterstroke is having a great time in France, he's sired a lot of black-type scorers recently and another winner at Auteuil last week [Keyreine Du Seuil],"* he says. *"We have a very nice colt out of Kalikova, who has already bred the Prix Wild Monarch winner Kalouka and is from that fantastic 'K' family of Kotkijet and Kotkikova, and a gelding out of Galla Blue, a Blue Bresil half-sister to Cyrname."*

*"We also have a nice big two-year-old gelding by Isfahan, and another by Protectionist with a smart Flat pedigree. Protectionist is*

*popular in France. We sold one by him to Hector de Lageneste and Guillaume Macaire at Arqana in July. We've tried to pick what French trainers will go for, although we also have three fillies who are all registered 100 per cent for the Great British Bonus."*

The Gentlewave filly out of the Kahyasi mare Loralas is a subtly important member of the consignment, as her half-sister Anneloralas put beyond doubt that Futter's plan to replicate the French system can work.

The Yorton Farm-bred daughter of home sire Pether's Moon was sold as a two-year-old to Chauvigny Global Equine and Gabriel Leenders for €19,000 at the inaugural Yorton Sale in 2019, and was sent out by Leenders to finish an honourable seventh in the Prix Wild Monarch in the following spring, before collecting black type over hurdles in the autumn – when the vast majority of her National Hunt-bred peers in Britain were still a long way off making their racecourse debuts.

Futter has full confidence in the quality of those offerings but he is going into the auction at Auctav on Friday with his eyes open. He will be competing against lots by some of the leading French sires – Choeur Du Nord, Goliath Du Berlais, Kapgarde, Masked Marvel, No Risk At All, Saint Des Saints etc – from the country's most prestigious producers.

He reasons: *"Auctav have put an excellent catalogue together and they'll put on a good show, and I know there are a lot of buyers who will be there, but most sales have the same script these days: strong at the top and a struggle for the rest. It might be the same here but we'll just have to adjust; we've set realistic reserves."*

*"We're certainly not coming into the French market thinking we're Billy Big Bollocks, we know it might be difficult. Equally, though, we're very proud of our own record even if we don't shout about it. We've sold 44 per cent winners to runners across all auctions in Britain, Ireland and France, and the farm has produced a lot of high-class horses like High Class Hero and Maximilian as well as the Grade 1 winners Good Land, Inthepocket and Redemption Day."*

*“That’s not bad for a business that’s still relatively new and started off with cheap little mares. Richard Venn takes great delight in telling me he needed sunglasses when he looked at our pages in the early days, they were so blank.”*

A British nursery taking a large draft of National Hunt yearlings and two-year-olds to France, where they are already abundant, might feel like an exercise in carrying coals to Newcastle but that reasoning never stopped the French invasion of British and Irish racing, which wasn’t exactly short of domestically bred jumpers either.

You don’t have to be a raving protectionist to cheer on the Yorton Farm team doing their bit to redress the trade deficit a little in Normandy this week. Bon courage à toute l’équipe.