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ARROWFIELD

Life Is Good is new #1 on world rankings after Pegasus romp

James Willoughby | February 02, 2022



New world #1: Life Is Good (Irado Ortiz) after an authoritative display in the Pegasus at Gulfstream Park. Photos (front and this page): Lauren King / Gulfstream Park.

Life Is Good's brilliant all-the-way victory in the Pegasus World Cup has catapulted him to the top of the TRC Global Rankings. James Willoughby explains why.

Life Is Good, we already knew. Life is Great? Perhaps. Life Is Best in the World, right now.

The Pegasus World Cup for 2022 has resulted in a change at the top of TRC Global Rankings. Breeders' Cup Classic winner Knicks Go has been deposed and will head into retirement at #3.

In his stead, the brilliant winner Life Is Good takes over at the top. Now, according to our rankings algorithm, beating the best is no guarantee of becoming the best – unless a horse has supporting evidence. And last year's Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile provides that.

Our rankings are driven by TRC Computer Race Ratings, an entirely automated system seeking to find the set of race ratings that minimise inconsistencies in past results without so-called 'overfitting' – statistical language for getting too cute. We want a set of numbers that predicts the outcomes of head-to-head clashes between horses in future, and we let the machine go about doing that by using the past as a guide.

The TRC computer gave Life Is Good 127 for his effort on the World's Best Racehorse Ratings scale. It also made the following changes to its race ratings: the Breeders' Cup Classic (won by Knicks Go) came down 2pts to 129, the Dirt Mile (won by Life Is Good) went up 1pt to 130.

However, there was also a

more subtle, cascading effect of the Pegasus. Third-placed Stilleto Boy ran better than the computer had estimated at Gulfstream Park. So, in these instances, a horse's form is automatically reviewed. Did the upstart simply improve? Or should previous form be upgraded? In this case, the TRC computer saw the better option as the latter. And this happens to be important in this instance.

Stilleto Boy's previous run was third in the G1 Malibu Stakes at Santa Anita late last year. He was beaten more than 12 lengths by the potentially brilliant Flightline – but he and lightly raced Baby Yoda (who, incidentally, owns a 114 Beyer in a non-Graded effort) were well clear of the remainder.

Following the maths, the TRC Computer had chosen a conservative assessment of this race with the first three being so lightly raced overall. Now, however, that race goes up 2pts – which fits the data better now the result of the Pegasus is known.

As a result of the Malibu being Flightline's only Graded stakes run, he gets one of the most significant changes to a ranking in our history, for a horse just standing in his stall: the son of Tapit rises from #60 to #39. His next performance is pivotal, in a rankings context.

It seems like when a horse is as accomplished as Life Is Good, it can

hand out this kind of compliment. After six starts in Graded stakes, the Todd Pletcher-trained colt reaches the top with five wins plus a defeat at the hands of #19 Jackie's Warrior, no less, over an inadequate seven furlongs and off a layoff (jockey Mike Smith did not knock him about).

Where might pretenders to his top spot come from in 2022? Look no further than the aforementioned Flightline. What a boost for US racing it could be for the two to meet. Out east, the Japanese Horse of the Year Efforia sits at #5 and has such talent that he could render the argument of the top dog in America somewhat moot.

In Britain, dual G1 winner Baaeed is the great hope after victories in the QEII and Prix du Moulin. He stands unbeaten after four Group races at #8, and Flightline has some catching up to do on him.

There are all sorts of possibilities further down the rankings. They are speculative at this stage, but the great thing about the sport of racing is that champions can emerge from all corners of the world.

TRC Global Rankings reflects that international, cosmopolitan, multi-coloured reality. And it is true in our rankings of jockeys, trainers, owners and sires too.

The racing world is a smaller place. And Life Is Good.

Amelia Green and Life Is Good:
'We're just proud of the horse.'
Photo supplied



Meet the ex-Henry Cecil apprentice who is a key figure in Life Is Good's rise to fame

Jon Lees | February 04, 2022

Amelia Green tells Jon Lees how she crossed the Atlantic and became an integral figure in the Todd Pletcher operation behind the Pegasus World Cup hero.

USA: Once apprenticed to Frankel's legendary trainer Sir Henry Cecil, Amelia Green left Britain bound for the US looking for the opportunity to develop her career as a Flat jockey.

She last rode in a race six years ago. Yet as a key player in the rise of world #1 Life Is Good, life couldn't be better for the 28-year-old from Nottingham.

The Todd Pletcher-trained four-year-old blitzed his rivals last weekend in the Pegasus World Cup with a dominant display that took him ahead of Gulfstream victim at the top of the TRC Global Rankings.

Green was namechecked in the post-race NBC interview with Pletcher, who lauded her role in the development of Life Is Good as the colt's regular exercise rider. "I wasn't expecting Todd to say what he did," she says.

"I just feel very lucky to ride the horse. I am under no illusion that if somebody else rode him he would still be the very talented horse that he is."

The Pegasus was a sixth win in only seven career starts for Life Is Good, who would be unbeaten but for the neck by which he went down to top-class Jackie's Warrior on his return from a layoff at Saratoga last August following his coast-to-coast switch from Bob Baffert's barn to the Pletcher operation.

“I have to rent a place everywhere I go but be ready with a suitcase packed whenever needed. I might have to invest in a mobile home!”

He went on to record a commanding victory in the Breeders’ Cup Dirt Mile, thereby setting up a much anticipated showdown with Knicks Go. In the event, however, the duel never materialised as Life Is Good slammed his rival, making all the running to win by 3¼ lengths.

'We all knew the talent he had'

“I’d like to think we were very confident going in,” she says. “But he was up against the best horse in the world so you never know how it is going to pan out and we weren’t sure if it was going to be a speed duel at the front end, which it didn’t turn out to be.

“We were very excited and anxious to get to the race and finally let him show the world how good he is. We’re just so proud of the horse. We all knew the talent he had and how easily he does everything at home.”

Out on his own at Gulfstream, Life Is Good also prefers to be out on his own in the mornings. Aside from Irad Ortiz, Green is his only other partner, in the saddle for nearly all his preparation, often under cover of darkness.

“I like to think we get along with each other in the mornings,” she says. “He can be a handful. For the most part, day in, day out. I canter him, galloping him every day and on his breeze mornings, normally once a week, unless Irad comes in.

“We have figured out he likes to train first thing in the morning. He likes to be the first horse on the track and if you let him go out on a quiet track, preferably in the dark, he is a lot more relaxed than if you took him later on in the morning with a busy track with breezers. He appreciates a quiet track, nobody being around him and just him out there.”

'I was small and light and loved horses'

Growing up in Nottingham, Green represented England as a teenage show jumper before switching attention

to horse racing, on the advice of her grandfather Peter, himself a former jumps trainer. “I was small and light and loved horses,” she recalls.

“I did the nine-week course at the British Racing School and that was where I met Frank Conlon, who has been a big part of why I got to where I am.

“He used to be head lad for Henry Cecil so he hooked me up with him and I got a job straight off the back of the racing school. I was lucky to get in a big yard straight away.”

Cecil gave her her first ride at Ascot in July 2012 where she finished third on a filly called Feeltthedifference in an apprentice race. “I wished I could have got a winner for Henry,” she reflects. “That would have been something to treasure. Unfortunately that never happened before he passed away.

After three and a half years in Newmarket, Green made the move to the US where she rode her first winner for Californian trainer George Papaprodromou at Hollywood Park.

'It wasn't enjoyable for me anymore'

“George offered to sponsor my visa,” she explains. “So I got a five-year visa and went to work for him.

“I tried for a year and then took a break. I moved to Maryland to concentrate purely on being a jockey and ultimately I couldn’t do the weight. I struggled every day to drop from 120lb to 112lb and decided that wasn’t the life I wanted to live.

“I couldn’t hang out with friends, couldn’t go out to dinner and have a social life. It wasn’t enjoyable for me anymore.”

Having ridden nine winners from 148 mounts, Green returned to California where she became assistant to Papaprodromou before being introduced to Pletcher by his former assistant Michael McCarthy, who won the Pegasus in his own right as a trainer with the brilliant City Of Light in 2019.

“I told Michael I was looking for a change so he called Todd to ask if he had a job,” she says. “I was told to call Todd tomorrow at 11am. I called him the next day and he offered me a job over the phone. A month later I was on the other side of America in Florida.”

Continuously on the move, Green says her car is her home, explaining: “When we send the string to Keeneland in the spring and the fall, and when we go to the Breeders’ Cup, and when we go places where we don’t have a string all-year round, that’s where I go, filling in the spots that need filling.

“I have to rent a place everywhere I go but be ready with a suitcase packed whenever needed. I might have to invest in a mobile home!”

'You'd have to say Life Is Good is the best and most talented'

Currently based with the string in Palm Beach Downs, Florida, Green’s next move will be to Pletcher’s New York base at Belmont Park, by which time a programme may have been mapped out for Life Is Good.

“Hopefully he has a big year,” she says. “As long as he is healthy and well, hopefully he can keep showing everyone how good he is.”

But just how good is that? “I’ve ridden some very nice horses for Todd in four and a half years,” says Green.

“I went to the Kentucky Oaks with Malathaath when she won last year. I rode Audible when he went to Dubai and rode Coal Front when he won there. I rode Gidu when he went to Royal Ascot. I feel blessed to be able to ride them – [but] you’d have to say Life Is Good is the best and most talented.”

Life, it seems, is also pretty good right now for Amelia Green. “I guess this is the next best thing to being a jockey,” she agrees. “I wanted to be assistant trainer to Todd; I am assistant trainer to Todd and I travel for Todd.

“I love what I do – you can’t really complain when you get to travel with Group 1 horses around the world. I don’t know anyone that wouldn’t love to do that.”




Breeding the future

A Derby hero and Royal Ascot juvenile. **Like Mill Reef.**

Descends from Urban Sea. **Like Galileo and Sea The Stars.**

Masar: he's got greatness in him.

Darley



Ferrin Peterson: the 'vet jockey' keen to follow twin vocations in Kentucky. Photo supplied

Scrubs or silks?

Ferrin Peterson is enjoying the best of both worlds in the bluegrass state

Jon Lees | February 13, 2022

Jon Lees catches up with Julie Krone's protege, who is now licensed as both professional jockey and practising veterinarian in Kentucky

USA: Ferrin Peterson believes she has finally found the best of both worlds in trying to fulfil her twin passions.

Such a promising jockey that her talents persuaded Hall of Fame rider Julie Krone to move to the east coast to act as her agent for a spell, the 29-year-old has been searching for a base where she can not only meet her riding goals, but treat

horses as well in her second vocation as a practising vet.

That place is Kentucky. Having newly gained her licence to work with equines in the state, by day she is Dr Ferrin Peterson, DVM, CVA, and by night 'the vet jockey' or 'the doc jock'.

In Lexington, at the very heart of the US bloodstock industry, there is plenty of

work for a vet, but Peterson still ranks developing her jockey career as her number one priority.

'There's nothing like Lexington, Kentucky'

"When I decided I wanted to continue pursuing being a full-time jockey after I graduated, I had to find a way to incorporate both," she explains. "It's taken a while to figure out how and where to do that, but I thought there was nothing like Lexington, Kentucky.

"Every morning from 6am to 10am I am at the racetrack breezing horses and Thursday through Saturday there is night racing at Turfway Park. Now that I have my licence approved, I am picking up veterinary work the rest of the time.



Ferrin Peterson: here's mud in your eye.
Photo supplied

"I am planning to base myself on this circuit and develop my Kentucky business. There are so many breeding farms in one small area and every couple of months you have a sale. So having both of those in the areas I want to focus on, it really is perfect."

There is, though, no argument that life as a jockey takes precedence. "The vets understand that riding is my top priority," says Peterson.

"They even said they won't call me about cases during that time. I need to be in full competition mode and leave enough time in the day to concentrate on my exercise, which I am very strict about, my diet and having the right balance."

Peterson, who grew up in Sacramento, northern California, was a champion pole

vaulter at school who always had higher ambitions. After getting an animal science degree she earned her DVM and CVA [Certified Veterinary Acupuncturist] at the prestigious UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, securing internships in Japan, Hong Kong and Dubai, as well as across the US.

At the same time she started riding as an apprentice in California, gaining notice because of her unusual background, if not initially for riding any slew of winners. But that all changed when she caught the attention of Julie Krone, the most successful female rider in the history of US racing.

'You're the vet jockey, right?'

"I was only riding longshots and my stats weren't improving but Julie was watching me and could see I did have ability," she recalls. "I just wasn't getting the right mounts and that's when we met. I said to her, 'You're Julie Krone, right?' and she goes 'Well, you're the vet jockey, right?' I was quite in shock that she took any notice of me."

Krone became Peterson's agent for the summer, even travelling with her in 2020 to the east coast to try to establish her client at Monmouth Park, the New Jersey venue that had provided the springboard for Krone's own highly decorated career.

"Moving to Monmouth was when I finally got my chance and started getting on more live horses," says Peterson. "The moment it picked up I had to catch that wave and it got going from there."

"Julie moved to the east coast for me. She brought her daughter for the summer and we all lived in a big house together and it was a great time."

'Julie has remained a mentor'

"Monmouth was her stepping stone to get to New York and I am hoping Monmouth will be my stepping stone to Kentucky. She has still remained a mentor; she is a really gifted teacher."

Peterson duly rode 50 winners in 2020 and finished second in the jockey rankings at that year's Monmouth meet.

Last year she rode at Aqueduct in New York in the winter and Monmouth in the spring and summer, while also treating cats and dogs at a Staten Island veterinary practice to keep up her skills in that arena.

By that stage, New Jersey had



controversially banned the use of the riding crop for encouragement. Peterson says she treated that development as a challenge, explaining: “I was up for it and I think I have come out a better rider because of it.

“There are so many aids we can use with horses,” she adds. “We think we are limited because we are just balancing on our ankles and hovering above a horse, but really there is so much to be done with your weight, your voice.

“As equestrians we should always be thinking outside the box with every horse,” she goes on. “It makes you a really strong finisher because you are just hand riding. Jockeys will tell you hand riding makes you more tired than whipping.”

A century of career winners is now within sight and Peterson hopes to get on better-quality horses in Kentucky – and not just in the mornings when she has breezed for Graham Motion, Jack Sistrone and Rusty Arnold.

“The Kentucky circuit is highly respected,” she says. “A lot of top horses and riders are out here. I think riding with the best makes you the best.

“I knew it was going to be hard getting going, but I actually thought right off the

bat, trainers have been giving me a shot. Even if it’s not riding their top horses in races, I’ve been getting to breeze them for important prep races. My first race I rode here was a winner, so even though I don’t have a ton of mounts, I feel like my percentage is going really well.”

‘People kept telling me I was going to burn myself out’

As such, she is well pleased with her twin roles since moving to the bluegrass state. “This is how I want it to continue,” she says. “I think the two roles complement each other. Working with horses on the ground always helps me on their back and being on their back helps me as a vet as well.

“There is so much we can learn from horses so it’s nice to approach it in different ways. I became an apprentice jockey while I was going through vet school and people kept telling me I was going to burn myself out but it was helping me to thrive during vet school. It doesn’t feel like work. I’ve never felt burned out.”

She does, though, draw a line between both jobs and takes no veterinary work that would involve treating horses in training.



Top: Ferrin Peterson in action at Monmouth Park, where she was second in the jockey standings in 2020. Photo: Equi-Photo

Above: At the day job: it’s not only horses that Ferrin Peterson sees as a vet. Photo supplied

“I am not doing any racetrack work because I don’t want any conflict of interest,” she says, “but it’s a longtime dream of mine that I could one day treat a racehorse that is significant to my career as jockey when it’s in retirement as a broodmare or stallion. This would be the place where that could come together.”

Introducing the untold stories of the backstretch

Jay Hovdey | February 18, 2022

Jay Hovdey catches up with Rasi Harper and Maurice Davis, the team behind 'The Real Players Inside The Backstretch' racing channel, a hit on Youtube and Facebook.

USA: Outside their immediate circle of family, friends and racetrack co-workers, chances are the names of people like Edmund Pringle, Phillip Scott, Paul Barone, Penny Gardiner, Kortez Walker, Artemio Rodriguez and Robert Leavell would never see the light of day.

But now, that has changed.

The videography team of Rasi Harper and Maurice Davis has spun from whole cloth the internet destination called The Real Players Inside the Backstretch, inspired by a desire to tell the stories of the people who put in the long hours and the hard work to keep the horses happy and the game chugging along.

Like any creative producers of a successful reality show, Davis and Harper offer up a tossed salad of guest stars, from bonafide racing celebrities like Bobby Flay and Eclipse Award-winning photographer Barbara Livingston to entertaining regulars with a bounty of stories to share, among them the retired jockey-turned-trainer Robbie Davis and the formidable horseman Roy Seales, who seemingly has been everywhere worth going and done everything worth doing.

Output from The Real Players Inside the Backstretch can be found at their Youtube channel as well as on their Facebook page. The sites are currently populated by more than 100 video interviews, with more always on the horizon.

Maurice Davis: encyclopaedic knowledge of horse racing imbues authority to 'Inside The Backstretch' content. Photo supplied





A kind of benevolent ambush

Their video technique style is often a kind of benevolent ambush, as Davis and Harper appear seemingly from out of nowhere to waylay the unsuspecting with a handful of questions designed to pry open memories never before committed to anything but wistful conversation.

Now, as the sport shrinks and mutates from the glories of days gone by, those memories are being recorded for a posterity that someday will be appreciated beyond words.

Davis and Harper don't see themselves as trained historians, but more like evangelicals gathering the faithful to testify before a grateful congregation. At least, that's how their interviews sometimes feel.

There are origin stories like that of Saudia Burton, who tells the camera: "One time I was at Aqueduct when I should have been in school. And I met Allen Jerkens coming back from the paddock. And I asked him for a job. The rest is history."

There is wisdom from someone like Leroy Ross – 'Big Ross' – who chose a

racetrack job with Woody Stephens over life on the streets of South Carolina. When asked how people in his line of work can handle the grind, Big Ross replies, "All you got to do is keep thinking, 'you got to eat.' And if you don't get up and do it, somebody else will."

Honest-to-goodness tears

And there are honest-to-goodness tears from a man like Cleveland Johnson, who got his first racetrack license at age 15 in 1965 and now trains a small string. Asked to recall great black grooms of his lifetime, Johnson can only lament: "Those guys who came up with me, they never had the opportunity I got now. What is it, maybe one per cent trainers are black? That ain't right."

Harper and Davis are master barbers who own a shop in Schenectady, a town just to the south of Saratoga Springs in New York state. The shop is called Boss Builders & Outreach Barbershop, located on State Street, and rapidly becoming a neighborhood mecca for both video talent and world-class tonsure.

Saratoga racetrack has been the scene for most of their videos, although

Famed racing photographer Barbara Livingston is ambushed by the video team behind *The Real Players Inside The Backstretch*, Rasi Harper (with microphone) and Maurice Davis, accompanied by Rasi Harper Jr (left). Photo: Janet Garaguso

they have ranged to Belmont Park, Gulfstream Park and Churchill Downs; they are making plans for a trip to Santa Anita Park in March.

Davis is the 'horse guy' whose encyclopedic knowledge of the sport's history helps give the team a credibility beyond their good intentions.

"My stepdad, who raised me, worked for the Kellys, Roger Laurin, Steve DiMauro, Jimmy Conway – a lot of the old outfits," explains Davis. "I was out there in the barns with horses from probably age four.

"When we worked in a shop in Saratoga and cut hair for a lot of trainers and racetrack people, he would see the passion, how much fire there was for working with the horses," he goes on. "He [Harper] said: 'Hey, we can talk about this'. Then God gave



Rasi Harper: 'My approach is really cold, man, real time, no setup.'

us a vision to go out and talk to the people on the backstretch, show how much they matter, how they're the pulse and the heartbeat of the whole thing."

If it appears as if the subjects of their interviews lean toward African-Americans, Latinos and women – newsflash – that is the face of the modern North American backstretch. Inside The Backstretch seems to be tapping into a demand for a one-stop resource displaying such a celebration of diversity.

"I see it every day," says Harper. "I've got people reaching out from all over the world about this content. The analytics on the page have been going up and up and up. Facebook just opened up so we can get subscribers now."

Harper handles the camera and asks the questions with backing from Davis, questions that always get around to what the people in the stalls and the shed rows mean to the game. For Inside the Backstretch that is at the heart of the matter.

'There's nobody too big or small'

"My approach is really cold, man, real time, no setup," Harper says. "For the most part everybody wants to tell their story. There's nobody too big or too small, once they know what we're about, who isn't game for it. And as people see our work, we're building more and more trust."

Davis and Harper have included a handful of familiar names among their interviews, among them trainers Bill Mott, Ken McPeck, Chad Brown, Brad Cox, Rick Schosberg and Shug McGaughey, who had so much fun that the guys went back for more. They even made Christophe Clement smile.

No one is safe from their benign approach. Harper and Davis roam the backstretch looking for likely subjects, asking around. While they were at Gulfstream Park last month, someone pointed to a fellow at the other end of the barn who, they were told, trained the winner of the 1985 Kentucky Derby. They couldn't get the camera down there fast enough.

"This is the guy who won the Derby in 1985?" demands Harper, camera

"I see it every day," says Harper. "I've got people reaching out from all over the world about this content. The analytics on the page have been going up and up and up. Facebook just opened up so we can get subscribers now."

running, as he swoops in. The trainer, unfazed, confirms the fact, but that's all.

"How good is your memory?" he asks Davis the Historian.

"I'm gonna tell you who won the '85 Derby," Davis shoots back. "Let's see, 1984 was Swale ..."

But even the pros hit a snag. Davis draws a blank just long enough for the trainer to let him off the hook.

"Spend A Buck," says Spend A Buck's trainer.

"Oh, my god," Davis says. "How could I forget that? Cam Gambolati, right?"

A bemused Gambolati smiles and invites them into his tack room office, where he reaches to a high shelf for some vintage Spend A Buck photos, including one of the 1985 Jersey Derby that was worth \$2.6 million in purses and bonuses.

"You beat Crème Fraîche!" says Davis, loving the moment as Harper lets the camera roll. Gambolati is impressed with Harper's recovery.

"You got it," the trainer says. "You've got a great memory."

So do a whole lot of people no one ever hears from. Until now.

Saudi Cup: ‘Every year we tweak things and move it a step further’ – exclusive interview with Prince Bandar

George Dudley | February 22, 2022

Ahead of the third running of the Saudi Cup on Saturday, HRH Prince Bandar bin Khalid Al Faisal, chairman of the Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia (JCSA) and driving force behind the world’s richest race, speaks exclusively to TRC’s George Dudley.

Prince Bandar: ‘The goal is to open up the kingdom – we are open for business.’ Photo: Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia / Doug De Felice





George Dudley: This is the third time that we have sat down to look forward to a Saudi Cup. Year one was about creating a new global event, while the second was affected by the global pandemic. What, therefore, are the unknown variables going into the third edition of the Saudi Cup and what are you most looking forward to?

Prince Bandar: This is the third time that we will run the Saudi Cup, and hopefully there will be many, many more. The original challenge was to convince people that we could put on an international race and gain their trust on infrastructure, transportation, quarantine, race management and the overall experience for the horses and their connections.

We were hit by COVID the second time round, which was a challenge for everyone in the world, but the Saudi Cup was one of the few international races that went ahead. All of that has, I think, given a level of comfort to international and domestic owners and trainers.

There are fewer variables out there this year. The biggest challenge is to execute an international race to a scale that is slightly larger than the first one. While COVID is still here, we are confident that people have a greater understanding of PCR tests now. When it comes to the equine side, we are quite comfortable; but it is managing the people that want to attend the race and the connections of the horses that is more complicated.

I am looking forward to a wonderful international gathering. The potential race line-ups are no less strong than the previous two iterations of the Saudi Cup. In fact, the undercards are stronger this year.

You mentioned that you needed to “convince people” about the Saudi Cup and also gain their trust in year one. Have you achieved this?

It was a question mark in the beginning. I believe that the first Saudi Cup was a pleasant surprise to many people around the world. We had the benefit of people’s experiences in Dubai, which gave us a level of

Flying the flag: the Saudi Cup has welcomed the racing world to Riyadh. Photo: Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia / Neville Hopwood

trust in the region. The GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries were not, therefore, alien to them or perceived as a distant part of the world.

That familiarity with the region really helped in the beginning. It was just a matter of people coming and going through the experience – how it was to travel here, looking at the track, seeing the quarantine facilities and understanding how the equine transportation would work.

I feel that, yes, we have gained their trust. The prize-money is quite interesting and just over five weeks separate the Saudi Cup and the Dubai World Cup.

Every year we tweak things and move it a step further but I think that we have a winning proposal and it just works the way it is.



The Saudi Cup will be run as a G1 for the first time and Saudi Arabia has been promoted to a Part II country in the IFHA's International Cataloguing Standards (ICS) Book. How important are these upgrades and can you tell me about what went into achieving this?

It is extremely important. We announced two years ago that we are working towards becoming a Group 1 race and working with the IFHA [International Federation of Horseracing Authorities] on this.

I was tasked with moving Saudi Arabia to G1, but also to create a second-to-none equine and horse racing environment. I am looking at the season as a whole and horse welfare. I am looking at the bigger picture – the Saudi Cup is a major part of that, and I think that some of the undercard races will move up in status, as well as some of the other local races becoming Listed or G3 in the next couple of years.

It is very exciting for me to see horse racing move in that direction in this part of the world. We have a long season here – we start in June and end in March – and we are one of the few countries

in the GCC that can run a 10-month season. That package becomes extremely attractive to regional players, and we are going to start to see that this summer.

Now, the Saudi Cup becoming a G1 definitely makes it more interesting for a lot of global connections and what I am really excited about is the undercard races and the other ones throughout the season.

We have been working closely with people in the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman to have a coordinated season. This will, of course, be interesting for local competitors and those who are local to come here and spend the winter in this part of the world and we can help with the ease of transportation between the GCC countries. In the coming years, you will find that the way we schedule the race will have created almost a season in the region, which trainers can really start to plan for.

How closely do you work with those other Jockey Clubs in the GCC?

Very closely. We are talking on a monthly basis and there will be some

David Egan celebrates winning the Saudi Cup in 2021 aboard Mishriff. Photo: Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia / Mathea Kelley

announcements in the near future, probably in connection with the Saudi Cup. None of us are looking at this as competing jurisdictions as we feel that we can all benefit here [from the success of the Saudi Cup] and it will just add to the attraction of this part of the world.

We just went through a change in the rules and regulations here. We have opened participation in Saudi Arabia to all nationalities and all jurisdictions, and there are no restrictions on the ownership side anymore. Previously, if you were not a Saudi citizen you had problems participating in Saudi racing – I could never understand why we had that rule. On the training side, everyone who is a member of the IFHA gets automatic recognition and a licence to train independent in the kingdom.

The goal is to open up the kingdom – we are open for business, and it only adds to us to have people from other countries and regions participating.

What has the feedback been from international horsemen for the Saudi Cup?

I am delighted that people have had a positive reaction to the Saudi Cup. Not everybody has the right horse to come for a specific year and there are some trainers that are not comfortable travelling. It's just not in their program. That's definitely understandable. They are comfortable where they are and this is an added dimension that doesn't attract them.

There are, on the other hand, many trainers who are the opposite. So from those that are interested in the international scene the reception has been really good. It does a lot for horse racing across the world to have one big race in each of the 12 months of the year for people to plan for and I think that February is Saudi Cup time, March is for the Dubai World Cup, and then you get into the European and American seasons before looking towards Hong Kong, Japan and Australia.

There is certainly room for one or two more big races – who knows? It is good for the industry.

What have been the main highlights or achievements for the team at the Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia?

Putting together an international race that is able to attract people from across the world. Yes, the prize-money always helps and the Saudi Cup being the highest one is going to attract people. We know that. Money alone is not going to do it, however, and you need to have the complete package.

The team that we have put together [at the Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia] – Tom [Ryan, director of strategy and international racing], Sarah [Tregoning, media and communications director], Emer [Fallon, director of racing services] and Paul [Roberts, Turnberry Consulting] – bring a lot of experience. Some of locals that love the international exposure are learning every day from them.

What makes me very happy is that I have started to see this reflected on the rest of the season, which is now being influenced a lot by what is happening in the Saudi Cup. Upgrading the whole

race experience and, for me, that is what is very exciting.

For you personally, what has been the standout moment of the process?

The first Saudi Cup was very emotional – we pulled it off in something like seven months! That was extremely satisfying and everyone told us to “think of us for next year”, but that was before COVID. That was a big moment for me.

Frankly, in an odd way, to see the rest of my season being influenced by the Saudi Cup is very satisfying. As is all of these new owners from the kingdom coming into the sport. Each year we see new faces, many young people that are excited about horse racing, which is good for the industry, and trainers are changing to more professional set-ups.

We are having to cater to horse racing from being a hobby – and somewhat of a sport – to becoming an industry in Saudi Arabia. That for me is probably the most satisfying experience that I have had.

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Marcus Tregoning: Derby-winning trainer spent 14 years learning his trade with the legendary Dick Hern. Photo: Mark Cranham/focusonracing.com

What They're Thinking

Marcus Tregoning: It's a miracle we manage to get international runners to Royal Ascot

Jon Lees | February 15, 2022

During his 25-year training career Marcus Tregoning has produced numerous big-race winners, the obvious highlights coming in 2006 when he won the Derby with Sir Percy and more recently the Sussex Stakes with leading miler Mohaather in 2020.

Tregoning, 62, learned his trade under three-time Derby-winning trainer Dick (WR) Hern, becoming his assistant after Hern was confined to a wheelchair following a hunting accident in 1984. Hern trained the legendary Brigadier Gerard in the 1970s and, with the patronage of Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum, the successes continued with Classic winners Harayir and Nashwan plus outstanding sprinter Dayjur among those to emerge during Tregoning's time.

After Hern died, Nayef was an early trailblazer for Tregoning from Hern's former stable in Lambourn, winning four times at G1 level in the Champion Stakes (2001), Dubai Sheema Classic (2002), Juddmonte International (2002) and Prince of Wales's Stakes (2003). Tregoning has been based at Whitsbury in Hampshire since 2013.

Which racing figure past or present do you most admire?

It has to be WR Hern because I spent so much time with him over the 14 years, both while he was on his feet and when he trained brilliantly from his time in a wheelchair. It was quite outstanding what he did. He was not only a good trainer and communicator but also a teacher. I wouldn't have got where I am without his help during that time. He has to be top of the list along with Sir Gordon Richards, who I was lucky enough to meet. He was an incredible achiever. It's extraordinary that he was champion jockey 26 times, riding all those hundreds of winners.

Which is your favourite venue and race anywhere in the world?

My favourite venue is definitely Goodwood – I think it is the most magnificent racecourse. It's well run and I was lucky enough to win the Sussex Stakes, which is their best race. I love racing there; it's very traditional. We love to run two-year-olds there, in fact any horse. It's a great atmosphere with a wonderful view across the Sussex Downs. It's a great place to take someone racing who has never been

before. If they don't catch the bug there, they won't catch it anywhere. The Derby is the greatest race in the world and again I've been fortunate enough to win it with Sir Percy. It's a very important race in our calendar and justifiably so.

Who is your favourite racehorse and why?

It's one of mine. I was very lucky to train Mubtaker in my very early days of training. I had him for six years when I think he was the oldest entire to win a Group race at the age of nine. He achieved an official rating of 130 at one stage after his second to Dalakhani in the Arc. Although he wasn't a Group 1 winner, he was winning Group races every year. I know his owner Sheikh Hamdan particularly enjoyed that day at Longchamp where he was a very worthy second. Along with all the nice ones like Sir Percy, I feel very lucky to have trained any of them.

What is your fondest memory in racing?

Derby Day 2006. Every young trainer aspires to win the greatest race in the world and we were lucky enough to do it. There was huge expectation. He was coming off a good second in the

2,000 Guineas but that year the ground at Newmarket had been very firm and he actually came back injured. It was a really difficult time getting him ready to run again in three weeks. He managed it because he was a courageous horse with plenty of heart. He gave his all. It was a terrific day.

What is the biggest challenge racing faces today?

It's an old chestnut but the prize-money situation is very worrying. We have one of the greatest stages and traditional places for horse racing. It's a great privilege to win a Group 1 on these tracks but you can't live and survive off that. We have to compete. You can see how much people respect British racing by the fact we manage to get international runners at Royal Ascot, which is a miracle when they have so much better prize-money in their own countries and make the journey for the prestige and history. It's alarming and has to be addressed. Goodness knows how we do it. Lots of things have been tried but we have to do something about it because people won't go on and on paying £30,000 a year to keep a horse in training for a pittance in return. It can't continue like this forever.

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TRC GLOBAL RANKINGS



27 February 2021

Horses

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Life Is Good USA	USA	2072
2	Efforia JPN	JPN	2053
3	Gran Alegria JPN	JPN	2034
4	Nature Strip AUS	AUS	2029
5	Knicks Go USA	USA	2026
6	Palace Pier GBR	GBR	2021
7	Baaeed GBR	GBR	2018
8	Contrail JPN	JPN	2007
9	Verry Elleegant NZL	AUS	1986
10	Hot Rod Charlie USA	USA	1953
11	Golden Sixty AUS	HKO	1932
12	Essential Quality USA	USA	1924
13	Zaaki GBR	AUS	1921
14	Space Blues IRE	FRA	1901
15	Trueshan FRA	GBR	1870

Jockeys

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	James McDonald	AUS	2076
2	Flavien Prat	USA	1968
3	William Buick	GBR	1959
4	Joel Rosario	USA	1903
5	Frankie Dettori	GBR	1901
6	Irad Ortiz Jr	USA	1842
7	Christophe Lemaire	JPN	1827
8	Luis Saez	USA	1691
9	Ryan Moore	GBR	1667
10	Jose L Ortiz	USA	1562
11	Yuga Kawada	JPN	1546
12	Jim Crowley	GBR	1524
13	Florent Geroux	USA	1516
14	Mickael Barzalona	FRA	1485
15	John R Velazquez	USA	1482

Trainers

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Charlie Appleby	GBR	2819
2	Chad C Brown	USA	2686
3	Bob Baffert	USA	2565
4	John & Thady Gosden	GBR	2483
5	Brad H Cox	USA	2416
6	Chris Waller	AUS	2270
7	Aidan O'Brien	IRE	2263
8	Todd Pletcher	USA	1811
9	Jamie Richards	NZL	1806
10	William Haggas	GBR	1753

Owners

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Godolphin	AUS	3423
2	Coolmore Partners	IRE	2606
3	Shadwell Estate Company	GBR	2122
4	Sunday Racing Co Ltd	JPN	1790
5	Peters Investments Et Al	AUS	1774
6	Silk Racing Co Ltd	JPN	1755
7	Juddmonte Farms	USA	1613
8	Klaravich Stables Et Al	USA	1578
9	Michael Dubb Et Al	USA	1539
10	WinStar Farm Et Al	USA	1521

Sires

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Deep Impact JPN	JPN	2274
2	Dubawi IRE	GBR	2194
3	Galileo IRE	IRE	2180
4	Frankel GBR	GBR	1852
5	Into Mischief USA	USA	1846
6	Kingman GBR	GBR	1843
7	Sea The Stars IRE	GBR	1790
8	Shamardal USA	FRA	1611
9	Lord Kanaloa JPN	JPN	1516
10	Uncle Mo USA	USA	1503