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TRC



EXPOSED!

Why the Arc field doesn't appear to have been outstanding after all

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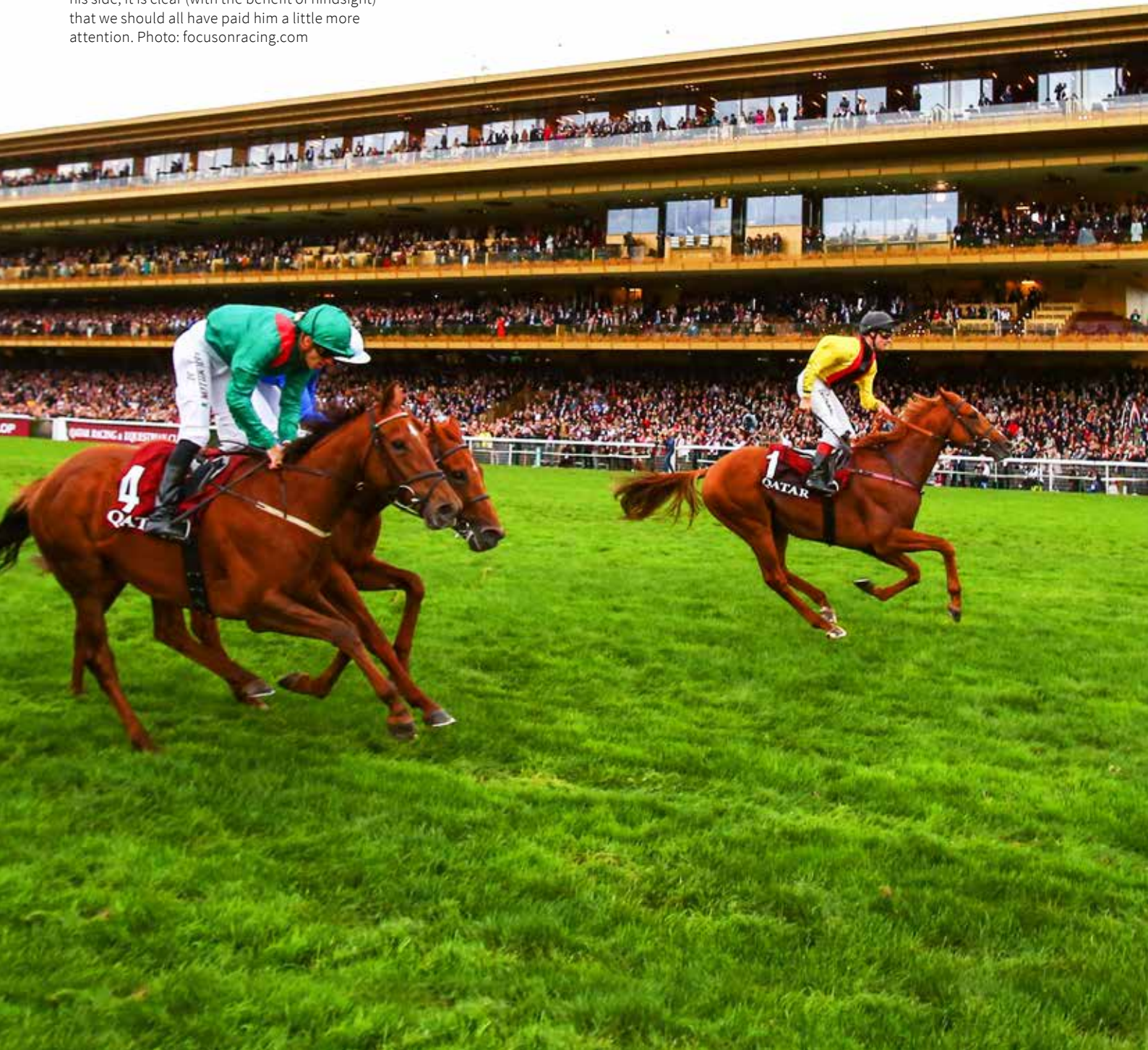
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Maybe the Arc field wasn't quite as strong as we thought

James Willoughby | October 06, 2021

Cover: A joyous greeting for Torquator Tasso and jockey Rene Piechulek after their Arc victory. As a German horse with toughness and stamina on his side, it is clear (with the benefit of hindsight) that we should all have paid him a little more attention. Photo: focusonracing.com

Torquator Tasso (right) gets the better of Tarnawa (green) and Hurricane Lane in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. Photo: focusonracing.com



The 2021 G1 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe told us not just that Torquator Tasso is better than widely presumed, but also that his rivals are perhaps not as good as we reckoned.



This is how the TRC Global Rankings algorithm has treated the result; this is the most logical inference because other explanations are either too fanciful or subjective for the unbiased estimations of a computer.

If a handicap system continues to promote every winner above the existing elite, it suffers the problem of upward drift and has to artificially manipulate the population down again at regular intervals. TRC Global Rankings never has this problem which continues to bedevil human-operated systems all round the world.

Our rankings try to establish a hierarchy of talent that best explains the results of Group and Graded races – bearing in mind their recency. Notice we don't depend on the race's reputation or previous standard unless there just isn't any form to go on, such as when rating contests between previously untested young horses.

The graphic below shows the order in which we ranked the runners entering the race, their finishing position and how we ranked them afterwards.

Does this sound like a race where randomness played a large part? The horses ranked 1-2-3-4-5 finished 3-2-4-7-6, while the horses ranked 10-11-12-13-14 finished 12-8-5-13-10. And only two horses – the winner and fifth-placed Sealiway – exceeded their projection in any meaningful way.

Furthermore, although Torquator Tasso was ranked behind seven runners entering the race, we still had him comfortably within the world's Top 50. This is because he had already won two G1s and a G2 in his native Germany.

In common with Japan, German racing is focussed on racing at middle distances and beyond. Their breeding industry has long made an admirable stance against horses to have raced on medication, and trainers tend to give horses time to mature and prove their worth. As a result, it is often the case that horses with form in German races tend to improve as they tackle better races elsewhere in Europe. Arc winners Marienbard (2002) and Danedream (2011) have followed this trend before Torquator Tasso.

How good was the winner's performance? We measure a horse's performances on the same scale of the World's Best Racehorse Ratings, which are the sport's de facto official figures. On our fully automated system, TRC Computer Race Ratings, Torquator Tasso earned a rating of 127, which is even a shade above average for all winners of the Arc during the 11-year (2011-2021) TRC era. See below.

Horse	Global Rank before	Race Rank before	Finish	Global Rank after	Race Rank after
Hurricane Lane	5	1	3	10	2
Tarnawa	6	2	2	7	1
Adayar	7	3	4	11	3
Chrono Genesis	11	4	7	17	5
Snowfall	21	5	6	24	6
Broome	29	6	11	37	7
Deep Bond	32	7	14	53	8
Torquator Tasso	44	8	1	15	4
Alenquer	110	9	9	123	9
Raabihah	158	10	12	199	11
Bubble Gift	172	11	8	172	10
Sealiway	368	12	5	364	12
Baby Rider	405	13	13	427	13
Mojo Star	601	14	10	620	14

Summary of TRC Global Ranking changes for runners in the 2021 G1 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe

Year	Winner	Age & Sex	Rating	Going	Sire	Trainer
2017	Enable GBR	3 F	131	Soft	Nathaniel IRE	John Gosden GBR
2013	Treve FRA	3 F	129	Soft	Motivator GBR	Mme C Head-Maarek FRA
2014	Treve FRA	4 F	129	Good	Motivator GBR	Mme C Head-Maarek FRA
2015	Golden Horn GBR	3 C	129	Good	Cape Cross IRE	John Gosden GBR
2021	Torquator Tasso GER	4 C	127	Heavy	Adlerflug GER	Marcel Weiss GER
2016	Found IRE	4 F	126	Good	Galileo IRE	Aidan O'Brien IRE
2018	Enable GBR	4 F	124	Good	Nathaniel IRE	John Gosden GBR
2019	Waldgeist GBR	5 H	124	Heavy	Galileo IRE	Andre Fabre FRA
2020	Sottsass FRA	4 C	123	Heavy	Siyouni FRA	Jean-Claude Rouget FRA
2011	Danedream GER	3 F	120	Good	Lomitas GER	P Schiergen GER
2012	Solemia IRE	4 F	118	Heavy	Poliglote GBR	Carlos Laffon-Parias FRA

Winners of the Arc during the TRC era (2011-2021) arranged by descending performance rating

The ground at ParisLongchamp was described officially as heavy. This is almost certainly an exaggeration of the state of conditions; times on the day strongly pointed towards the surface being no worse than soft. As we have highlighted, plenty of horses gave their running on the day, so to use the official description of the ground as justification for caution over the Arc result is a bogus.

A more detailed look at how the Arc field rated using performance ratings (below) gives a clue to how a computer rates a race like the Arc.

According to the figures, Torquator Tasso peaked while every other runner was not quite at their best. Soft going is a legitimate excuse for some, particularly the Japanese pair Chrono Genesis and Deep Bond, while others would have failed to reproduce their best simply because they were in too deep and ran the race inefficiently by trying to chase better horses while flat out.

The computer doesn't rate the race any differently because it is the Arc. Instead, it finds a rating for the race by choosing a set of performance figures

for all races in the database which fit the data best and cause the variation in performance figures for each horse to be minimised.

See how the best figures for each horse tend to cluster together but are rarely all the same (Snowfall is an exception)? This is because of an important principle of handicapping at the mathematical level: Races should be rated around several horses (by allowing them to vary around a notional mean) not through one (the egregious practice of 'stemming' or choosing a 'marker horse').

Handicapping is merely an optimisation exercise, if you know how that works in applied maths; the computer tries to learn how to pick winners using past ratings - knowing that it is impossible to always be correct - but working to minimise mistakes.

Finally, the TRC algorithm uses all the tools for handicapping at its disposal to arrange the world's best horses in a hierarchy that is the final ranking. We know the computer is going to have to assign a higher rank than #44 to Torquator Tasso, but how does it decide how high?

When a lower-ranked horse causes an upset, it pays the computer to find a compromise between moving it up the hierarchy and moving others it surprisingly defeated downwards. The more established is a horse's form, the more reluctant the computer is to shift it a long way from its current perch,

Horse	Position	Arc rating	Top 3 other runs
Torquator Tasso GER	1	127	119 119 117
Tarnawa IRE	2	125	128 126 125
Hurricane Lane IRE	3	124	125 124 123
Adayar IRE	4	116	130 127 112
Sealiway FRA	5	115	119 117 109
Snowfall JPN	6	114	120 120 120
Chrono Genesis JPN	7	113	125 125 123
Bubble Gift FRA	8	113	115 111 107
Alenquer FRA	9	110	116 114 113
Mojo Star IRE	10	110	116 115 103
Broome IRE	11	106	120 118 118
Raabihah USA	12	102	114 113 112
Baby Rider FRA	13	101	112 111 103
Deep Bond JPN	14	86	118 118 116

TRC Computer Race Ratings for the 2021 Arc field at ParisLongchamp

though there are a few clever tricks in detecting when a horse has declined due to age or has improved after a change of trainer, say.

Here, it turns out that the set of ratings for all horses that is most consistent with all the results is achieved by ranking Torquator Tasso in front of every horse he defeated in the Arc - with the exception of the former world #5, #6 and #7 Hurricane Lane, Tarnawa and Adayar.

The basic reason for this is given by the previous paragraph: They are peak-year runners with very strong, established form that would create inconsistencies in the rankings if they were relegated too far. As things stand, all three lose rankings points (whose ordering produced the classifications) as shown by a snapshot of that week's top horses below.

The computer expected Hurricane Lane to defeat Tarnawa, so the fact that the opposite happened (albeit narrowly) leads to Hurricane Lane losing more ranking points than the Irish filly. This is facilitated by the Godolphin colt's best efforts being wide-margin wins of uncertain value, so they can easily be downrated a little.

Adayar, who finished fourth after being sent for home early in the straight, must be a rather confusing horse to rank for the computer - his two best efforts (victories in the G1 Derby at Epsom and the G1 King George at Ascot) are absolutely top-notch, but he has fallen somewhat below that form in other tries. As a result, he could fit into the rankings in a wide variety of places, but placing him at #11 is the most optimal.

No change at the top of the rankings

The 2021 Arc was a strongly contested renewal - the result of a race should never affect the way we assess that - but maybe it was not quite as strong as it looked.

Indeed, it looked a strong possibility that the result would have a more significant impact on the standings at the very top of the TRC Global Horse Rankings, with St Mark's Basilica, the Aidan O'Brien-trained winner of the French 2000 Guineas, French Derby, Eclipse Stakes and Irish Champion Stakes this year, likely to lose his place as world #1. That didn't happen.

Assessing racehorses requires an aversion to the fault of overfitting - making the rankings fit the latest results a little too snugly - but a proportionate response to the Arc is that the bar was not quite as high as it looked for Torquator Tasso and, as a German horse with toughness and stamina on his side, it is clear (with the benefit of hindsight) that we should all have paid him a little more attention.

WORLD'S TOP 15 HORSES 3 October 2021

TRC GLOBAL RANKINGS

Rank	Name	Modal Country	Runners	Runs	SR	Rating	G1.Wins	G2.Wins	G3.Wins	Points	Change
1	St Mark's Basilica FRA	IRE	1	7	71	125.6	5	0	0	2119	-48
2	Palace Pier GBR	GBR	1	7	86	124.8	5	1	0	2085	-22
3	Essential Quality USA	USA	1	8	88	122.9	4	2	1	2018	5
4	Mishriff IRE	GBR	1	9	56	124.8	4	1	0	2017	-22
5	Zaaki GBR	GBR	1	16	44	120.7	2	3	2	1952	1
6	Knicks Go USA	USA	1	16	38	121.6	4	0	2	1950	56
7	Tarnawa IRE	IRE	1	12	67	123.5	3	1	4	1949	-28
8	Hot Rod Charlie USA	USA	1	7	43	123.2	2	1	0	1940	-4
9	Jackie's Warrior USA	USA	1	10	70	120.6	3	4	0	1940	-3
10	Hurricane Lane IRE	GBR	1	6	67	122.2	3	1	0	1922	-64
11	Adayar IRE	GBR	1	5	40	125.1	2	0	0	1896	-69
12	Nature Strip AUS	AUS	1	20	45	120.9	6	2	1	1889	-18
13	Baaeed GBR	GBR	1	3	100	121.9	1	0	2	1878	-20
14	Gran Alegria JPN	JPN	1	12	58	123.4	5	1	1	1877	-20
15	Torquator Tasso GER	GER	1	9	44	119.9	3	1	0	1876	230

For further information, visit www.thoroughbredracing.com/rankings



BBAG



TORQUATOR TASSO

QATAR PRIX DE L'ARC DE TRIOMPHE GR1

Owner: Gestüt Auenquelle
Breeder: PH Vandenberg
Trainer: Marcel Weiss
Jockey: Rene Piechulek

SALES & RACING FESTIVAL 2018

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Vendor: Gestüt Erftmühle
Price: €24,000

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Why there aren't enough veterinarians in America — *and how HISA may help racing cope*

Daniel Ross | October 03, 2021

Successful efforts over the past few years in California to shrink the number of catastrophic equine injuries have seen the numerical pendulum swing in the opposite direction when it comes a key ingredient.

“Before, there was a state vet and that was enough for a single track, single meeting,” says Tim Grande, the California Horse Racing Board’s (CHRB) newly minted chief official veterinarian, about an increased presence of official veterinarians in California due to the state’s expanded suite of safety programs.

“Now we want — I may be exaggerating a bit — but maybe we want half a dozen people active during a race meet.”

Filling the ranks, however, is no breeze thanks to a dearth of qualified and readily available veterinarians. This shortage isn’t confined to California, or even the nation. “It’s actually, to some extent, international,” says Grande. “I certainly know that the international jurisdictions take a lot of overseas candidates.”

The reason? Blame is fragmented, from shifting societal tastes and economic pragmatism.

But, with the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA), pencilled in for implementation on July 1 next year, expected to expand the need for official veterinarians, experts are predicting the shortage to heighten in the years ahead.

Dionne Benson:
“In general, equine practice is in trouble,” says the Stronach Group’s chief veterinary officer



“There is a perception that, in order to be an equine vet [in the racing field], you cannot be ethical... There’s a perception that the only reason you’d go into it is for the financial [incentive].”

“It’s something I’ve pointed out to USADA [the United States Anti-Doping Agency] because there’s no quick fix,” warns Mary Scollay, executive director and chief operating officer of the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTTC) and member of HISA’s Anti-Doping and Medication Control standing committee.

‘Things can get contentious’

Official veterinarians are essentially split between two camps: Those employed by their corresponding state commissions, and those employed by the tracks. An exam is required (in the case of California one the CHRB issues).

And, also in the case of California, the hoops and jumps of its newer safety programs have seen the official veterinarian’s remit broadened beyond just that of a pre-race examiner.

You’ll now find them trackside of a morning, monitoring training, helping with the state’s necropsy review program, and perched on entry review panels.

“There are also rules that increase the workload in terms of official workouts to make horses eligible for race-day after performing an official workout,” says Grande.

Thankless can sometimes prove an apropos descriptor of the role, one that has traditionally fallen to older veterinarians considering retirement.

Their assessments should be singularly focused on horse welfare. But a decision that pulls a horse from a race or places it on the vet’s list can ignite all sorts of residual blow-back from connections with no small amount of time and money invested.

“Things can get contentious when somebody is displeased with your assessment of a horse,” says Scollay, with diplomatic understatement. And so her ideal candidate “would be someone

who’s had experience not only in equine medicine and surgery and practice, but also experience dealing with people.”

But the nation’s shortage of official veterinarians, however, isn’t necessarily a consequence only of these peculiar demands.

‘Equine practice is in trouble’

Several of those interviewed for this story suggested that veterinary college enrolment in equine studies has shrunk in recent years. But that’s a tough one to quantify.

At the University of California, Davis — one of America’s more prestigious veterinary institutions — the number of equine-focused students has vacillated between approximately ten and 20 “for as long as I can remember”, wrote Joie Watson, associate dean and professor of veterinary medicine and epidemiology at the university.

“And I have been here 33 years,” she added.

Greater certainty revolves around the matter of fewer young veterinarians heading into large animal work, lured instead into small animal practice by the twin promises of generally higher pay (at least initially) and a better quality of life, says Dionne Benson, chief veterinary officer for The Stronach Group (TSG).

“In general, equine practice is in trouble,” Benson says, including in that grim prognostication all equine fields, and not just horseracing.

“You very rarely have to work weekends in small animal practice,” Benson adds. “There are exceptions, like emergency medicine. But with small animals, you have a quality of life which is very important to graduates nowadays.”

Veterinary students can graduate college with as much as \$300,000 in debt, says Benson. And the equine world as a whole hasn’t necessarily

kept pace with the salaries offered in the small animal world. “When I did my internship, I think I made less than \$30,000 for my first year out of vet’s school,” says Benson of a position at the famed Kentucky practice of Rood & Riddle. “That was 2011, so it wasn’t that long ago.”

On top of that, when future practitioners — equine or otherwise — are considering their options out of college, racing isn’t always discussed in the most flattering of lights, she warns.

“There is a perception that, in order to be an equine vet [in the racing field], you cannot be ethical,” said Benson. “There’s a perception that the only reason you’d go into it is for the financial [incentive].”

Mental health problems

Warning signs of shortages and other related problems have bubbled away within the broader veterinary field for a while, one of which concerns a workforce greying around the temples.

In 2018, the American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA) conducted an analysis of its membership and found that, of the nearly 113,400 veterinarians living in the U.S., one third were baby boomers, 60 percent of whom were practice owners.

Another significant concern — one exacerbated by the Covid crisis — is burnout, and a workforce pushed to the brink. In 2015, the AVMA found that one in six veterinarians had considered suicide. Then last year in a follow-up study, the organization found that veterinarians are 2.7 times more likely to attempt suicide than members of the general public.

So trenchant is this problem, a non-profit (Not One More Vet) was founded in 2014 to provide a forum for animal doctors struggling with mental health problems.

“There are states where we’ve got veterinarians in the test barn drawing blood samples because the regulations require that only a veterinarian draw a blood sample,”

Implications for HISA

So, what can be done to stem the tide?

Many of those interviewed pointed to evolving attitudes towards animals, and a society increasingly disconnected from an agrarian lifestyle. This decade-old paper taps into this notion. The authors suggest that a veterinary student’s professional track — with small or mixed animals, for example — is highly determined by their exposure prior to admission to that same animal world.

Benson explained that she’s developing a fellowship program to usher new blood into the regulatory world.

“It would be for somebody graduated from vet school, has finished an internship, and who wants to do something more,” she says.

Though still in the developmental stage, Benson suggested it could be a 2-year course, split between practical experience and academic studies, culminating with a master’s degree in regulatory or sports medicine. “Ultimately that’s what we do — sports medicine,” she says.

If, as some expect, HISA increases the number of official veterinary positions around the country — or at least expands the tasks they perform — the situation needn’t become dire.

Written into the language of the law is implementation of a “nationwide database” geared around “racehorse safety, performance, health, and injury information” for the purpose of an “epidemiological study”.

Work-life balance

Utilized correctly, this database could perform some of the everyday heavy-lifting that official veterinarians perform, Scollay says. Efficiencies can also be made elsewhere.

“There are states where we’ve got veterinarians in the test barn drawing blood samples because the regulations require that only a veterinarian draw a

blood sample,” Scollay says, pointing out that such a role could go instead to a vet technician.

At the end of the day, at a time when many are looking for greater equilibrium in their work-life balance, perhaps the biggest draw to the regulatory world for private equine practitioners run-ragged by long irregular hours is the job itself.

While remuneration in private practice can sometimes far exceed an official veterinarian’s salary, the latter’s work week can hue more closely to the typical 9-to-5.

“I will tell you my best recruiting is through my own vets. They meet people, they talk about their job. They’re very excited about their job,” says Benson. “They feel it’s very fulfilling.”



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Nick Bradley: "The aim is [for the syndicate] to be the leading 2-year-old owner in the next two years." Photo: John Gilmore

Big ambitions for the syndicate with a buying formula that keeps on paying dividends

John Gilmore | October 17, 2021

Take these four fillies:

Nick Bradley has some record when it comes to finding value at the sales.

- **Fev Rover** (by Gutafain) won a G2 in France last season and was third to Mother Earth in the Newmarket 1000 Guineas in May. UK owner Bradley has turned down seven-figure offers for her.
- **Oscula** (by Galileo Gold) won a G3 at Deauville in August, then ran third in three of the best juvenile fillies races in Europe. She's also been the subject of some hefty offers from envious owners.
- **Mystery Angel** (by Kodi Bear), twice a winner at Newmarket, finished second to Snowfall in the Oaks at Epsom in June.
- **Corazon** (by Markaz) won a G3 at ParisLongchamp in September.



As well as winning some nice prize money, they're all now valuable broodmare prospects, the kind of fillies even giant operations like Godolphin and Coolmore wouldn't sneeze at.

You'd imagine Bradley would have had to fork out considerable sums for each of this quartet, yet look at the money he actually paid:

- £20,000 for Fev Rover
- 4,000 guineas for Oscula
- 11,000 guineas for Corazon
- 22,000 guineas for Mystery Angel

That's less than £60,000 for four fillies who have each achieved a TRC Computer Rating of at least 107. It's the stuff of fiction novels!

Bradley, one-time primary school teacher, one-time professional gambler, has cashed in on the skills he developed in those very different professions to make a success of his Nick Bradley Racing ownership syndicate (members pay £800 up front and £89 a month for two to three years for a 2.5 percent share in a horse).

The organisation has gone from strength to strength since it was formed six years ago and this season has claimed £743,549 in prize money, with particular success with 2-year-olds.

I caught up with Bradley on the second day of Arqana's August yearling sales, where he had been busy examining potential yearling purchases.

"I have a list of 25, 30 or so yearlings that I am interested in bidding for tomorrow, but they have to match my valuation otherwise I don't buy," he said. "I go to as many European sales as I can, looking for athletic fillies with good conformation from sires who are not well-known. This means checking around 150 yearlings each day at Deauville. [I'm] always buying fillies as if they perform well on the track they then have added breeding value."

In the end, Bradley didn't buy any on that third day, but he purchased three at the V2 sale there the day after - by Air Force Blue, Shalaa and Whitecliffsofdovery for €23,000, €40,000 and €22,000

Bargain buy: Subsequent Guineas third Fev Rover (Christophe Soumillon, left) takes the G2 Prix Calvados from Plainchant at Deauville last August for trainer Richard Fahey. Photo: John Gilmore

respectively. That's on the expensive side for Bradley, whose average spending has been around €20,000 per horse.

"My objective is to buy 40 yearlings this year and to maximise the joy for syndicate members while at the same time giving a return through being able to compete for the top races without breaking the bank."

Bradley's initial interest in racing came through gambling in his 20s.

"I was a primary school teacher who had lots of time off and used to spend my time gambling on cricket, golf, horseracing, both European and American," he said. "I eventually gave up teaching to become a professional gambler and, in 2008, bought into Tim Palin's newly formed Middleham Park Racing venture as a partner."



He added, “The first horse I bought was the 3-year-old Exceptional Art [by Exceed And Excel] at the 2009 July Tattersalls horses-in-training sale for 45,000gns. I had expected the horse to go for around 100,000gns and hence my interest. The horse went on to win the Beverley Bullet sprint two months later in his first race, coming from last to first, trained by Dandy Nicholls.”

Bradley took over the role of buying horses for Middleham Park for four or five years. Successful Group horses purchased included DonjuanTriumphant, bought at Tattersalls breeze up sale for 30,000gns and G Force, bought for 25,000gns

“I bought G Force on the final day of the Tattersalls October 2014 sale, when hardly anybody was about. Nobody else was bidding for the 2-year-old filly, who had only had the one race and had not run badly,” said Bradley. “G Force went on to win the Group 1 Betfred Sprint Cup at Haydock and was then sold for a life-changing sum.”

Bradley left Middleham Park in 2015, when the company had 600 members in various syndicates and over 100 winners a year, to set up his own Nick Bradley Racing syndicate.

The syndicate operates with three main people in key responsible positions. “I buy all the racehorses at the sales and organise the race entries and contact with the trainers,” he said.

Bradley enjoyed a big gambling win in 2010 after which he bought a house in Lincoln. He has also bought two stud farms during the past ten years, which are managed by Jason Park, to prepare yearlings bought at the sales before they go to a trainer. His partner, Sarah Jane, is in charge of the administrative side of the operation.

Bradley has 50 broodmares and sells around 20 to 30 foals and yearlings each year.

His results speak for themselves. Unlike most other owners, who leave race entry decisions to the trainer, Bradley considers he has more available time than a trainer - and has gained plenty enough experience. Currently the syndicate has 40 2-year-olds and 12 3-year-olds syndicated.

“May to November is an intensive period for me and, apart from the sales, I work with trainers, like George Boughey, Karl Burke and Richard Fahey, who give exceptional feedback through videos, including gallop work, which can be passed onto owners. I manage all the future race entries, particularly looking to place horses in black-type races, where the opposition seems weak for the grade.”

Recent success in France with Oscula and Corazon in G3s proves this point, as does Oscula’s third in two recent G2s, the Prix Calvados at Deauville and the Rockfel Stakes at Newmarket, and her third to Zellie in the G1 Prix Marcel Boussac at Paris Longchamp on Arc day.

Bargain buy: Group 3 success at Deauville in August for the 2-year-old filly Oscula under Ryan Moore for trainer George Boughey. Photo: John Gilmore

The filly has won £137, 295, most of it in France. Not bad going for a horse who cost just 4,000 gns. “France offers bigger prize money and I am keen to send fillies over for the stakes races, where conditions are favourable,” said Bradley.

He has been busy at the recent annual September Osarus yearling sale at La Teste, South West France, snapping up three more relatively inexpensive filly yearlings, by Kheleyf, Born To Sea and Pedro The Great, for €16,000, €5,000 and €7,500 respectively.

Plenty of syndicate members go racing when their horse runs. “On a normal raceday, 20 percent of the syndicate turn up to watch their horse race, but 60 - around 50 percent - were there at Epsom on Oaks day, with Oscula winning and Mystery Angel second in the Oaks.”

For the future, Bradley has a clear objective. “The aim is for Nick Bradley Racing to be the leading 2-year-old owner in the next two years.

Judging by the track record so far in buying relatively cheap racehorses that are able to compete in Group races, who would want to bet against that?

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Bahrain's new ten-race turf series provides hard-pressed UK trainers with valuable options

Laura King | September 27, 2021

There are few certainties in racing, but here's one: UK prize money is not at a level most in the sport are happy with. It's a constant gripe of trainers, jockeys and owners. Happily, though, this great sport is not just confined to one small island in Europe – it's global, and over the past 20 years, this has progressively included the Middle East.

The racing stage may be growing fast, but there are some things you can always rely on - like the Frankie Dettori flying dismount. Here he celebrates winning the Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa Cup at Sakhir racecourse in Bahrain on Allan Smith-trained Thorkhill Star in 2019



The Dubai World Cup Carnival will turn 19 in January, while the new kid on the block, the Saudi Cup, will host its third edition in February.

Sitting between them is Bahrain, which hosted its first international race in November 2019.

Compared with sprawling Saudi and Dubai's home in the UAE, Bahrain is tiny, a Gulf island with a population of less than two million. It has only one racetrack, but is punching above its weight, having hosted two successful editions of the Bahrain International Trophy so far.

The 2020 renewal, won by the Fawzi Nass-trained Simsir, attracted five G1 winners, including Irish Derby hero Sovereign, Japanese star Deirdre and popular grey globetrotter Lord Glitters.

Now, those behind the island's Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club, are out to capitalize on European support, having recently announced the Bahrain Turf Series.

Starting on December 10 and culminating in a finals day on March 4, there will be ten races, with a minimum value of £50,000, including £30,000 to each winner.

Entries and declarations are free, and priority is given to overseas runners, while two places per race are reserved for locals.

The idea is to encourage overseas trainers to set up satellite yards in the Kingdom, although six of the ten races are also open to those flying in, referred to as 'guests'. In addition, flights are included for horses, while connections are entitled to

a £12,500 expenses voucher, on a reimbursement basis.

It's an attractive proposition. So much so that British Classic-winning trainers Andrew Balding and Hugo Palmer are considering sending runners, while George Baker, who has saddled winners in France, Switzerland and Dubai, has already committed to Bahrain and has a 5-year plan.

"As a team, and in company with our owners, we will most certainly be supporting the upcoming Bahrain Turf Series," says the trainer, who is currently based at Robins Farm on the Surrey-Sussex border. "It's an exciting initiative in a burgeoning racing jurisdiction and we are looking forward to being involved.

"We also plan to build a long-term commitment to the Kingdom through the setting up of a satellite yard at the racecourse."

While innovations with an international programme generally make things tougher for locally-based trainers, they do appear to be supporting the new venture. British expat handler Allan Smith has been Bahrain champion more times than he can remember - "it might be 14" - and he likes the idea, although suspects it won't change his operation too much.

"I think it's great that Bahrain are trying to get international competition, and I like the format of the series," he says. "[In terms of the horses we buy] it wouldn't make too much difference to us; we are generally looking for that type of horse at the sales anyway."

New challenge

Smith's main title rival in 2021-22 is likely to once again be Hesham Al Haddad, who topped the table in 2020 and 2021. He sees the series as a launchpad to improve racing in Bahrain as a whole.

"It will encourage the local owners to invest in purchasing better-quality horses that would raise the bar for local racing," he says. "Putting Bahrain on the flat-racing map is another plus."

Al Afoo Stable have had plenty of success, both in Bahrain and Dubai, with Nine Below Zero one of their more useful acquisitions, having won a G3 at Meydan after being purchased for just 49,000 guineas at the Tattersalls Horses In Training Sale. Their Bahrain trainer, Mohammed Saeed, is enthusiastic in his support of the series.

"It's a new challenge," he says. "We are very keen to participate as prize money and the bonuses are very attractive, plus they are handicaps, and a lot can happen in these handicaps races."

"We have couple of horses who are qualified to run in the series and at the top of our shopping list for the October sales are horses rated between 90 and 100, over various trips, who will be targeted at the series."

Shopping for runners

With interest at the HIT sales from Qatar, plus increasingly Saudi, the U.S. and Australia, competition for suitable horses is likely to be strong, as Saeed concludes. "Hopefully we can find the right horses, as they are difficult to get these days."

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Fawzi Nass, long a flagbearer for Bahrain racing thanks to his G1 successes in Dubai with Krypton Factor and Salute The Soldier, has already been shopping. He went to 180,000 guineas to secure the ex-Sir Michael Stoute-trained Tawaareq, a 3-year-old son of Shamardal, at the Tattersalls August sale, saying: "I think he'll handle the fast turf out there and there are plenty of races for him. He's got an official rating of 90, so there are a lot of options for him within the new international series."

Bahrain is unusual in the Middle East in that it provides only turf racing, which now takes place on two tracks, allowing for meetings on Friday and Saturday.

The art of perfecting the surface is the job of former Lingfield Clerk of the Course Neil Mackenzie Ross, who has supervised all the international racing to take place in Bahrain so far.

"From a track point of view, we now have the two grass courses in operation, which will help us tremendously," he says, having used the inner track for the first time in 2020. "We will rotate them, which will allow them time to recover and the grass to regenerate, therefore hopefully enabling us to keep the racing surface in great condition throughout the whole season."

So is there a downside?

It's hard to find one. A 40-day residence in Bahrain is currently necessary for shippers from elsewhere in the Gulf Cooperation Council region, which may put off travelers from Dubai and Saudi, although work is being done to remedy this. A good thing for the visitors, but less so for local connections, is that horses dropping below a rating of 85 can then take part in domestic races.

"That will affect small owners, as not many owners in Bahrain can buy 85-rated horses," says Mohammed

Saeed. "These small owners are the fruit of the races; you don't want to lose them."

While the Sakhir track is quaint, welcoming and has been improved in recent years, it does perhaps lack the glitz of other international venues. There is currently no betting or alcohol allowed on course, while it is some 30 minutes' drive from the hub of Bahraini social life in Manama. That might put off all but those involved, although true racing devotees are unlikely to mind.

The advent of the All-Weather Championships in the UK, plus Dundalk in Ireland, have made it less necessary for trainers from those two countries to travel during the winter, but an excuse to see some winter sun is usually welcomed by owners.

For the series to succeed, it will need support from prominent European trainers, but with prize money in Britain rarely matching that available overseas, it seems Bahrain's riches are ripe for raiding.

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What They're Thinking Henry Beeby: The way racing operates around the world is madness

Sally Ann Grassick | September 07, 2021

Henry Beeby: "Something has to change [on prize money] as British racing cannot rely on prestige alone ad infinitum." Photo: Dan Abraham/
focusonracing.com



Henry Beeby has long been one of the most recognisable figures in European racing - with one of the most recognisable voices. A racehorse auctioneer for nearly 40 years, he has handled some of the most high-profile sales in Britain and Ireland in recent years, including knocking Irish Oaks winner Chicquita down for €6 in Ireland in 2013.

Beeby is chief executive of the Irish-based sales giant Goffs, whose flagship Orby Sale is on September 28-29. He is also chairman of Goffs UK, formerly Doncaster Bloodstock Sales, which merged with Goffs in 2007. His many roles in the industry have included compering the annual awards for Britain's Racehorse Owners Association and Thoroughbred Breeders Association.

Who do you think is the most important figure in the history of racing around the world?

There have been lots of great people in this wonderfully diverse sport/industry, but I think that John Magnier's name will be remembered for ever as the way Coolmore has evolved and developed over the last 50 years is extraordinary. The vision and ambition that has made it such an international behemoth of the bloodstock and racing industry is really down to him, and the fact that he always surrounded himself with the best, whether it be Vincent O'Brien and Robert Sangster at the start or Aidan O'Brien and others today, demonstrates a farsightedness and skill that very few possess.

What is your favourite race and venue (anywhere in the world)?

I couldn't pick just one as I am very lucky to attend so many superb tracks and meetings. The Curragh and Leopardstown, especially on Irish Champions Weekend, are both wonderful; I love York's Ebor meeting;

Royal Ascot is unique with top-class race after top-class race; the Cheltenham, Punchestown and Aintree Festivals are all very special.

As for a race, again, I couldn't separate about half a dozen that excite me every time from the Guineas to the Derbys (any of the English or Irish versions), the Coventry and St James's Palace at Ascot, the Gold Cups at Cheltenham and Punchestown, the Grand National, the Arc, the National Stakes (which we sponsor at the Curragh and is invariably won by the champion 2-year-old). The list could go on and on as I just love good racing as that is what dominates my life.

What is your fondest memory in racing?

The only Arc I have attended was the amazing win by Sea The Starsto cap his unsurpassed career. He is without doubt the best, most complete racehorse and beautiful Thoroughbred I have ever seen, and the way he won the Arc took my breath away.

What is the biggest challenge racing faces today?

Prize money, prize money and prize money in the UK. Boring I know, and I don't have the answer, but something has to change as British racing cannot rely on prestige alone ad infinitum. And it doesn't matter whether you are based in Ireland or the UK, or further afield, it makes a difference to the health of racing upon which so many of us rely and about which we care so deeply.

If you could change one thing in racing, what would it be?

One set of international rules on all aspects of racing from interference to drugs, to whip use and more. It is madness that racing operates different rules all over the world when all other major sports, such as football, rugby, tennis, golf etc work to one.

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TRC GLOBAL RANKINGS



24 October 2021

Horses

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	St Mark's Basilica FRA	IRE	2120
2	Baaeed GBR	GBR	2072
3	Palace Pier GBR	GBR	2072
4	Essential Quality USA	USA	1993
5	Mishriff IRE	GBR	1959
6	Nature Strip AUS	AUS	1951
7	Tarnawa IRE	IRE	1942
8	Knicks Go USA	USA	1929
9	Jackie's Warrior USA	USA	1918
10	Hurricane Lane IRE	GBR	1914
11	Hot Rod Charlie USA	USA	1913
12	Trueshan FRA	GBR	1908
13	Incentivise AUS	AUS	1890
14	Torquator Tasso GER	GER	1872
15	Zaaki GBR	GBR	1866

Jockeys

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Frankie Dettori	GBR	2004
2	Joel Rosario	USA	1960
3	James McDonald	AUS	1957
4	Flavien Prat	USA	1951
5	William Buick	GBR	1888
6	Christophe Lemaire	JPN	1777
7	Irad Ortiz Jr	USA	1774
8	Ryan Moore	GBR	1706
9	Luis Saez	USA	1595
10	Jim Crowley	GBR	1560
11	Florent Geroux	USA	1546
12	Yuga Kawada	JPN	1535
13	John R Velazquez	USA	1494
14	Mickael Barzalona	FRA	1468
15	Jose L Ortiz	USA	1438

Trainers

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Charlie Appleby	GBR	2799
2	Chad C Brown	USA	2788
3	John & Thady Gosden	GBR	2635
4	Bob Baffert	USA	2403
5	Brad H Cox	USA	2397
6	Aidan O'Brien	IRE	2347
7	Chris Waller	AUS	2172
8	Jamie Richards	NZL	1889
9	William Haggas	GBR	1771
10	Steven Asmussen	USA	1757

Owners

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Godolphin	AUS	3337
2	Coolmore Partners	IRE	2558
3	Shadwell Estate Company	GBR	2342
4	Sunday Racing Co Ltd	JPN	1820
5	Klaravich Stables Et Al	USA	1666
6	Silk Racing Co Ltd	JPN	1637
7	Peters Investments Et Al	AUS	1582
8	Michael Dubb Et Al	USA	1576
9	Juddmonte Farms / Prince Khalid Abdulla	USA	1552
10	H H Aga Khan	FRA	1486

Sires

Rank	Name	Country	Points
1	Deep Impact JPN	JPN	2248
2	Galileo IRE	IRE	2216
3	Dubawi IRE	GBR	2172
4	Kingman GBR	GBR	1853
5	Frankel GBR	GBR	1841
6	Sea The Stars IRE	GBR	1821
7	Into Mischief USA	USA	1766
8	Shamardal USA	FRA	1647
9	Lord Kanaloa JPN	JPN	1523
10	Tapit USA	USA	1490