

talkingbusiness

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Kent-based racehorse trainer John Best could not be more aptly named. Now in his tenth year as a flat-racing trainer, he is based in Huckling, near Maidstone. Although John Best Racing is a relatively small yard, with about 50 horses, this isn't a handicap. In fact, last year he made headlines with Royal Ascot winners coming in at 33/1 and 100/1. His yard is attracting owners from across the county and throughout the wider racing world. John's become something of an expert at spotting racehorse potential. Rising Cross is a good example. Having been overlooked at the sales because of her small stature, John snapped up the horse for £14,000. She was later sold for £325,000. His career has never been a gamble. He understands that racing is a business that's a bit different from most others, which is why good communication with his owners is vital. He spoke to KOS Media:



Racing cert that being Best isn't a gamble

Q How did you get started?

A I started my career by riding and training point-to-point and hunter chasers. I took out a flat-racing licence in 1999 and my first victory came quickly, with Santiburi Girl turning over an odds-on favourite at Salisbury. By 2004 I'd notched up my first 100 winners. I was also recognised as the leading up-and-coming trainer of that year.

Q What have been your highlights?

A Plenty – it's not just about the winning, particularly when you're starting out – but in terms of statistics, I was the most successful UK trainer at Royal Ascot in 2008. I get a lot of satisfaction from seeing my horses do well at all levels, especially when I know they've been overlooked by other trainers.

Q What's a typical day?

A As you'd expect, the day always starts early. If we're not racing, we're out on the gallop. Race days tend to be hectic and I rely on my assistant, Martin Smith, and the grooms a great deal. I

meet the jockeys and talk through race tactics – much will depend on where the horse has been drawn and the race distance.

But when starter sets them off, the split-second decisions have to be taken by the jockeys – most of the time they can't hear my shouting. I always take time out to chat with the owners to give them an honest appraisal of their horse's prospects.

Q What ownership options do you offer?

A You might be surprised at the level of investment needed to get into racehorse ownership. It's no longer the sole preserve of Premiership footballers and oil sheiks.

In addition to sole and company ownership, we offer the Huckling Horses Partnership. With such a scheme, up to 14 partners jointly own three horses.

Complimentary race day badges are available whenever the horse runs.

Prize money is shared between the partners, and as with sole ownership, any profit

from the sale of the horse is tax free.

Q Is it really possible to 'get-rich-quick' with horseracing?

A It's possible, but not something I ever "sell" to prospective owners. Just like every other successful business, you need a slice of luck, but mostly it's down to hard work, having good people around you and a belief in your own ability.

I do know a good horse when I see one but it's rare to make a profit from prize money alone, it's all about selling at the right time.

Q What is Kent Bloodstock?

A It's a syndicate I set up with colleague Dave Nevison. We've been buying yearling racehorses together for the last five years. Through the syndicate, we race these horses and then sell them on at the top of their value. To date it's proved to be a highly successful venture for all the owners involved.

An initial investment of £50,000 buys a share in at least eight horses. It's important to emphasise that the syndicate operates on a



SIMPLY THE BEST: Kingsgate Native

commercial basis.

Q How do you explain a loss to an owner?

A I believe honesty is the best policy. I have a reputation for telling the truth and not pulling any punches.

Before each race I discuss the realistic prospects of the horse, but ultimately it's the owner's decision to race. It's tough for them, but I understand why a horse can be beaten.

But of course, when I'm wrong, and the horse does win, I'm more than happy to give the good news.

Q Any hot tips for 2009?

A My main aim for this year is to continue to improve and expand my racehorse training facilities and so offer even better prospects for the owners.

However, do keep an eye on my string of two-year-old racehorses – they promise plenty more success for the yard in 2009.

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