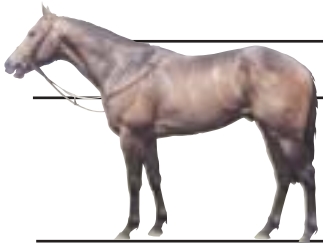


Physical Examination And Auction Strategy

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." St John 15:11

It is difficult to define a set of concrete objectives for a racing stable, as we must deal with many variables. However, it is vital that all inmates should be evaluated as quickly as is reasonably possible. With practice, it will be seen that a fairly accurate prediction of the potential of most horses should have been made by, at the latest, August of their two-year-old year. There may be some exceptions, mainly those who have been injured or sick, but overall culling at this stage will very probably prove cost-effective, even though it may initially be quite unpopular with owners. This policy can only be applied if all purchases are strictly selected as being likely two-year-old runners, although they should also possess the physical scope to give hope of an extended career. It definitely does not pay to purchase the type of horse that will obviously need a lot of time, as the percentage of these big backward horses that do eventually make the grade is not high enough to finance an extra year of training for the whole group whilst they are sorting themselves out. Some of these animals may make handicap campaigners as they get older, but will not have any great resale value in many cases. The same type of horse can easily be purchased after someone else has wasted their money getting him handicapped.

Most eventual top-class horses do not look particularly backward as yearlings, and could show speed as two-year-olds. They may never be called on to do so simply because they enter stables where they will be given time as there is no sense of financial pressure. The better examples of well-bred but obviously physically backward yearlings are very expensive at auction and yet an alarming percentage of them will still wind up in 1 3/4 mile maidens at Yarmouth as back-end three-year-olds. 'Backward' can be another way of saying 'slow'! It is much safer to concentrate on those horses that look as if they may come to hand quickly and may be suited by distances up to a mile, because if these horses don't show any early potential it is psychologically much easier for owners to abandon them without worrying unduly that they might come to life for someone else.

Having adopted this approach based on precocity, it might be reasonable, over a period of years, to anticipate 75% of the intake making it to the track, with about half of those winning a race within a reasonable period. Obviously, with prize money lamentably low in Britain, the key to the system's viability must be the resale of the horses, but it is also important to aim at a total of races won that approaches the number of horses we run in any given year. Obviously, wins at the lowest level, whether in selling races or from very low handicap ratings, are useless from the point of view of either earnings, stable prestige or of improving the capital value of the horses. The total income from sales of horses by the yard can be made to equal the cost of buying in yearlings only so long as a high percentage of the stable inmates enhance their resale value by becoming Allowance class runners, or, better still, are officially rated as amongst the leading 5% in the end of year two-year-old standings. All this will, of course, be far easier said than done. However, in the words of the late Newmarket trainer Jack Waugh, "It is vital to have a plan; it

may not actually work, but if there is no plan then it can't work!"

"The day you buy is the day you sell" is an excellent maxim for horse buyers to keep before them at all times. The simplest interpretation of this tried and tested precept is that the eventual realistic resale prospects of every animal should be borne in mind even at the time of purchase. Reasonably correct and athletic horses can usually be sold, albeit at reduced prices, after they have been tried, always assuming that their lack of ability has not been too much highlighted in public. A very incorrect horse is unlikely to be helped from an athletic point of view by his defects and, when he has eventually been weighed in the balance and found wanting, it can often be difficult to give him away - in fact, give him away is exactly what we should do. An outstanding French owner/breeder the late Marcel Boussac reputedly employed a rather arbitrary system in which the two-year-olds were formally tried and those appearing to lack ability were summarily shot. Another ancient formula for disposal of an unproductive team member is to "Swap him for a dog, and shoot the dog"!

Most yearlings will be bought at public auction and it is as well to give some thought to the advantages and pitfalls to be encountered at the sales. The greatest advantages of the auction system are that far greater choice is available than with any other method, and the fact that comparisons can readily be made with other animals of similar age. The biggest drawback is the possibility of political and financial intrigue.

One method very popular with many owners is the production of a list of potential purchases before the sale. This approach is used by the majority of those considered to be the most serious players. However, it has little to recommend it to anyone intending to put together a stable of runners at reasonable cost, for the simple reason that the numbers on a list compiled from the catalogue will appear on similar lists supplied to all the opposing buyers. There is no point in making lists unless we are financially in a position to apply the simplest of all formulas for success at auction, which is just to bid last!

One of the problems that can arise when too much soul-searching goes into the proposed purchase of one particular animal is that, as there is no guarantee that the most suitable lots will be evenly distributed throughout the sale, it is very easy to miss the next suitable purchase purely because we are still fretting about the loss of a previous lot. This is far less likely to happen if we are trawling the whole of the sale for suitable purchases without the constraints of any list.

Another drawback to the lists method is the clear and present danger of the vendor, heaven forbid, being able to divine enough of our intentions to formulate a sales ring strategy that may not be to our advantage. As a basic rule, no one should be aware of our plans, something that will be even more important when we have proved ourselves a discerning buyer. In the event of our achieving better than average results with our selections over a period of time, it is as well to be wary of doing the leg work for the opposition. Some people may be aware enough, and uncharitable enough, to observe for which horses we are bidding and, without bothering to do their own research, outbid us.

It is vital to bid quickly and decisively and to give rival bidders the distinct impression that resistance is useless. The only time less aggressive tactics are indicated is if we have any suspicion that the vendor could be, probably indirectly, taking a hand in the proceedings. Obviously, if that were the case it would be more constructive to give a strong impression that we might walk away at any second. However, as long as the price is around our estimate, it is usually better to get the job done in the ring, even if we may suspect a little vendor support. The situation often gets

confused when trying to buy an unsold yearling after the auction, especially if he is an attractive type; and if he isn't a nice horse we shouldn't have been trying to buy him in the first place. The ludicrous recent decision of the racing authorities in Britain to consider animals that have been bought-in at auction to be qualified for Auction races has obviously given at least tacit acceptance to the questionable practice of vendors bidding for their own horses.

The best method of buying yearlings, in fact probably of buying anything, is to see as many examples as possible and to be prepared to make quick decisions. We must have the judgement and the knowledge to bid confidently on a horse that we may have seen for only two or three minutes. This is obviously not a technique that can be acquired overnight, but it can be learnt in time. It is not practical when using this system to have the horses examined by a vet; however, once we have mastered this way of operating this will cause few problems. We could probably inspect several yearlings during the time spent discussing the veterinary report on one. This does not imply a dismissal of veterinary opinion, but a recognition of the fact that vets must always err on the side of caution, for professional reasons. If we were to involve them then we should logically give credence to their opinions which would make the system advocated here unworkable.

If we do buy a yearling with a serious wind problem then we can return him. If he has something that shows up on an x-ray but is invisible to our naked eye and is not apparently bothering him, we are probably better off not knowing. Many good horses have been rejected under these circumstances. In fact, there is some argument for saying the old system, which did not even guarantee the wind of yearlings, was better than the one we have now. Once the hammer fell they used to be sold, for better or worse, and there was no comeback or soul-searching.

Of course, the ideal situation would be getting an iron horse like recent American champion Skip Away and then having his price discounted by the vendor because of a minor defect!

For the purpose of argument, unless we are spending a lot of money, we should forget about routine vetting of yearlings and concentrate on refining our own ability to sum up horses quickly. This is definitely a technique that can be learned, but it does require discipline and concentration. Implementing it may be easier said than done when there are a succession of moderate individuals to be examined and, in this situation, it is always better to err on the side of ruthlessness than to attempt to make a case for poor individuals that may appear acceptable because they are the best of a bad lot.

It is essential to record basic conformation notes on all yearlings examined whilst honing these skills; the very fact of summing up any horse in writing concentrates the mind on the business in hand. The description of each horse will necessarily be brief, virtually in shorthand, but it will serve to enable us to describe each yearling to members of our team. This procedure for evaluating every sales yearling may have been originally applied in England by Richard Galpin, and was passed to me by my brother Dick who spent his early career with Galpin at the Newmarket Bloodstock Agency. Obviously, it is essential to use the same parameters when describing every animal. It is an excellent proof of the effectiveness of this system if we can confidently use our yearling description as a snapshot of horses we may be selling at a later date, subject to adding any blemishes sustained during their racing career.

As we will, by and large, be working within a small group of people, it can also be helpful in some cases to refer to past horses known to our group. This can be very useful if we have seen a yearling that should probably fail a strict inspection but which we feel has something to

recommend him. However, we must bear in mind that the benchmark horse mentioned was good in spite of his faults, not because of them!

Just as the method of working from a preselected list can cause problems, there is a drawback to this snap decision method in that if one of us is unable or unwilling to take the time to attend the sale he must either give carte blanche to those who do attend, or risk missing horses that fit our requirements. It is because prospective owners quite naturally wish to feel involved in how their money is spent, without necessarily investing the time to inspect the large numbers of animals, that the list system has evolved. It is greatly valued by both vendors and bloodstock agents as an aid to their forward planning.

Now that we have, more or less, determined our approach, it is time to discuss the actual basis for the selection of yearlings to race. The guiding principle is still that “the day we buy is the day we sell”, and if we adhere to this we cannot go far astray.

It is not intended for this to be a technical or complicated work on equine conformation, as there exist many excellent offerings elsewhere for detailed study. However, these notes may prove the equivalent of the popular no-nonsense guide books now in vogue in other fields. The excitement at which both media and public greet those who have revived an awareness of training and schooling practices which were well recognised a century ago is clear evidence of how widespread the loss of basic equine awareness has become in a mechanical age.

Whilst on the subject of magic, reference should be made to those farm horsemen of an earlier era, particularly those in East Anglia and Scotland, the ablest of whom were at great pains to protect their personal horse knowledge through the ritual of secret societies which mystified and even demonised it. Theirs was a purely oral tradition of passing on that knowledge, the Horseman’s Word, to selected followers who were sworn to secrecy. Written records were so encoded as to be uninformative to the layman. The tradition of these men having made a pact with the Devil added to the potency of their influence in their community. Secret ceremonies involved blood oaths, sometimes sealed by shaking hands with the Satanic cloven hoof, and a form of Black Mass. Visits to lonely streams at midnight and at full moon were made in order to select a toad’s bone talisman; the selected bone being that which would float upstream against the current, and which would invest its possessor with great power over all horses. These practices naturally set members apart from their contemporaries, maintained their mystique and also guaranteed their social and financial supremacy in the working hierarchy. Obviously, in order to maintain this state of affairs such men had to demonstrate in their daily lives a superior ‘power’ over horses; however, the shield of perceived magic very effectively protected their copyright of advanced equine behavioural knowledge from challenge by uninitiated rivals. They seem to have relied on the horse’s sense of smell to perform some of their more spectacular achievements. The ability to fix a horse on the spot by use of a scent as an arresting agent is well authenticated, and was a favourite method of demonstrating the Horseman’s uncanny power. Once so halted the animal could only be moved if the smell was neutralised by whoever had fixed it - or by someone else who shared the secret. A certain awareness of the horse’s sense of smell survives in the application of ‘Vick’s vapour rub’ to the nostrils of colts who share transport with fillies. On a more basic level, it is likely that many of them relied on various forms of war bridle as a training aid, although they may have tended to fashion such equipment from a cord sufficiently light to have been unobtrusive beneath a working

horse's harness. Like many talented specialists, those horsemen were at pains to develop their knowledge and observation of their subject continuously, but they also adopted a little showmanship, not to say shamanship, as a commercial safeguard of the time that they had invested.

Suffolk was heavily represented in the early emigrations to the New World, with some of the earliest Pilgrim Father arrivals hailing from Groton in deepest Suffolk. The Senate House in Washington was built with bricks from Woolpit, which is only a few miles from Newmarket. Great similarities in archaic speech patterns, and even in accent, between some less progressive or less outward-looking populations in America and East Anglia still exist today, and many instances reflect 17th century English rather than incorrect usage. A prime example is the universal American remark that a horse "win", rather than "won", when referring to his past exploits. This would be quite normal in the villages in Suffolk as a shortening of the old past tense "winned". "Good ol' boy" and "neighbour" are very common terms in the Newmarket area, and the very ancient form "yeah" was the normal term of agreement amongst the older rural population long before they had enjoyed any exposure to transatlantic speech. Reinforcement of an idea by the use of a double negative is another throwback to a more naive age, both in East Anglia and in America. Two words are perceived as reinforcing the point, rather than nullifying each other. As the doyen of American jockeys, Eddie Arcaro observed - "Don't get beat no noses!" Those American horsemen currently gaining global acclaim in the equine behavioural field may after all prove to be part of a tradition quite local to Newmarket.

George Ewart Evans touches frequently on such matters in an excellent series of works on East Anglian rural life in the 19th century, published by Faber from 1960 onwards. Most of the successful practitioners of public horsetaming did publish books, or at least pamphlets, advocating their methods. Unfortunately, many have not survived the Internal Combustion Revolution and they are no longer easy to find. The most comprehensive recent work may be a series of four books first published in the 1970s and 80s by Tom Roberts in Australia. There are also one or two recent anthologies giving brief details of the leaders in this field, although these works tend to dismiss or even ignore some previously acclaimed exponents of the art altogether, presumably due to the difficulties encountered in properly researching the subject.

Revenons a ces moutons! No racehorse was ever helped by being incorrect. That is to say, by being made in a way that compromised his athletic efficiency, even though many horses have achieved great things in spite of seemingly serious defects. Bearing in mind that it is not unknown for people to get struck by lightning or to win the lottery, but that both are very unusual, we must confine our buying to those yearlings which appear, mechanically, to stand a reasonable chance of surviving rigorous training and of emerging sound enough to be sold on as a racehorse at the end of that training.

To define in a few words the ideal type of racehorse is not easy. In fact, one of the most repeated sayings is that they run in all shapes and sizes. However, careful analysis of successful runners, whilst it will definitely show a wide range of differing physiques and, indeed, of defects, will also reveal many essential qualities that have enabled those animals at least partially to overcome any structural handicaps. We must remember that however good an incorrect horse may appear he must, by definition, be compromised by his physical faults. He cannot run as fast as he would have done as a correct individual, he probably will not stand the preparation he needs to show his best possible form, and his career may well be cut short due to predictable

injury. Traditionally, those colts which were best received as stallions were animals which had completed fairly long and arduous careers on the turf. Sadly that is no longer the case. The fact that a short (and frequently medication-assisted) career has become acceptable in a stallion prospect is not, however, likely to be of much assistance to us when we are readjusting our portfolio, as we will normally be selling second-hand racehorses, which must still be sound to race at the point of resale.

The single most important asset in the racehorse is athleticism and, if it comes to a straight choice between an athletic and precocious, but slightly incorrect, individual and an absolutely correct, but inactive and stolid-looking one, the athlete should be selected. In making this choice, we would weigh the prospect of being in and out of our ownership of the athletic one, having hopefully won a race or two, against the alternative of eventually having to sell the less athletic one as a correct riding horse. With this in mind, we should make our first requirement that any yearling we buy carries himself at the walk as if he means business. The best indication of an athletic stride is obtained when the subject is viewed from the side. The hind foot should easily clear the print left by the forefoot and the whole body, from head to the tail, should demonstrate an easy and rhythmical swing. If, which is not the case, we were to make our selection based on only one requirement, this might well be it. This pattern of walking initially indicates that the horse may cover the ground in an efficient manner. Unfortunately, it would appear to have become a more common accomplishment and is presumably, in some cases, acquired rather than natural, since the use of walking machines in yearling sales preparation has become widespread. It is essential to view the horse from the front and, to a lesser extent, from the back, in order to discover whether the flight of his feet is straight enough to allow him to move efficiently at speed. There are no walking races. A horse that overstrides but forges, catching the ground surface of the toe of his front shoe with his hind foot as he walks, should be avoided.

A word of caution is needed here about the overstride theory as an indicator of speed. Although this is a most effective indicator of likely speed, there can be situations where the reverse is true. Horses that demonstrate an extreme overstride of around 18 inches should be viewed with some suspicion. These animals are often not absolutely positive and controlled in their hind action. We should have these ones turned round and round very sharply, in both directions, to observe their coordination. If they appear to get their legs tangled up then they may have coordination problems. The same applies to horses that tend to kick the dirt or gravel up with their hind feet when they walk. Experience shows that an appreciable percentage of the very exaggerated overstriders will not have complete control of their movements. We want a good loose walk, but not too loose. With practice, the potential disasters are easy enough to recognise.

If we like the way the yearling moves in the walking ring we next need to examine him at rest. At Keeneland the reverse procedure must be employed, because the horses are standing still when we first see them. In actual fact, it is much easier to look at a large number of horses at Keeneland because they are standing in line, approximately 20 at a time. It is relatively easy to determine those correct enough to be followed up to the presale walking ring in order to see them walk for a few strides. Remember, this method of purchasing calls for very quick decisions and considerable self-belief, but once we have mastered it the system does work very well.

At rest, the horse is first viewed from the side and, with practice, an overall impression can quickly be formed. The very same opinion could probably be formed, after lengthy measuring procedures and at considerable

The ideal sprinting physique - Paranoide (Arg), brilliantly speedy and a durable weight-carrier.
(Photo courtesy of Caroline Fyffe and Yearsley Bloodstock)

expense, by various specialist commercial organisations. The basic requirements of good conformation are not disputed by the majority of successful buyers, but unless our eye has been trained to observe the important facts swiftly and accurately it is impossible to review any large number of horses in the time available. This is the rationale behind a refined version of the list theory based on pre-examination by a third party. We can only use this method if we have absolute faith in the third party's judgement, as horses once left off a list are unlikely to be seen in time to examine them. Those on the list may tend to include some animals with which the list provider already has some financial or political connection. A successful racing enterprise cannot afford to become a clearing ground for other people's mistakes, and all horses added to the stable strength should be selected on their own merit.

Opinions vary as to the right size for a yearling. Any auction provides an impression of what is the average size at any particular stage of the sales season. There is a great difference between July yearlings and December yearlings. We should prefer an individual of medium size but for the overall purposes of our programme it is safer to err on the side of too small rather than too big. We should not buy a small horse unless he is strong and well-muscled and looks as though he will come to

hand quickly. We need to think in terms of being in and out of our involvement with him, having won a race or two, before the better class opposition appears and, hopefully, before there are any other two-year-olds for sale. It is often possible to obtain an excellent price for an early season two-year-old with form, purely because it is a seller's market. Big yearlings carry the additional risk of tending to be more backward, which makes it much more difficult to form a confident early opinion of their eventual worth. Meanwhile they can eat us out of house and home. A possible exception to this rule is the taller sprint type of yearling who already looks quite mature. This stamp of horse, although at first glance too big, may be seen on closer examination to have a level top line, with his withers well developed and clear of his shoulder; he may have done most of his growing already. Should this horse pass the other aspects of our inspection, then we should buy him; early next year he will probably have a distinct physical advantage, which his contemporaries will be unable to challenge.

These horses are just more mature than the rest and all else being equal, may be too strong for their rivals early in the season. Sometimes this type can look very good as early two-year-olds, and can realise excellent resale prices, without actually being tremendously talented. The ideal situation here is if they have something close up in a sprinting pedigree that makes staying a mile look feasible to the next purchaser, enabling us to charge a premium price. It is not recommended to buy this physical type unless they are speedily bred; they will tend to be more expensive if they have a stouter pedigree and in that case will probably still need plenty of time.

After checking the basic size, we are looking for symmetry. Whether we seek it from a mechanical or an aesthetic point of view scarcely matters, but without it no horse can deliver optimum performance. As noted elsewhere, racehorses might run with defects, but not because of them. Good-looking horses are always easier to dispose of than ugly ones. Basically what we want to see first are a well-sloped shoulder and a good length from the point of the hip to the tail and to the hock. Study of the equine skeleton will probably demonstrate the reasons for this, but we need only keep it before us as a benchmark. The impression that the shoulder, as indicated by the withers, goes well into the middle of the back is very desirable. Actually what we are looking for is a horse that appears to have a relatively short back although his overall length is good. As a very general rule, horses with a longer back and a short hip will tend to be stayers, although many of them do seem to lack speed without even being true stayers! These horses will not tend to do well when viewed for overstride at the walk.

In viewing mature horses, a level top line is desirable, but in yearlings, because they tend to grow in fits and starts, this is not always the case. Often a yearling will be an inch or two higher behind than in front and most of them will have levelled up by the time they are ready to run. Occasionally, particularly with sprinters, including some pretty smart ones, they never do level up. Sayyaf and to a lesser degree Group One winner Sayf El Arab were high-class sprinters with this conformation.

As we are really selecting for likely two-year-old ability it is as well to favour those that already show better than average strength and development across their loins. This is particularly important in a small yearling.

The neck should look in proportion to the size of the animal. Opinions seem to differ on the optimum length, but as a general rule it seems reasonable to suppose that if it looks right it is right. A very stallion-like neck is not desirable, and may be an indication that the presale diet has included other than grain and hay. It is not uncommon for very impressive-looking sales yearlings to fall away badly once the steroids and growth

Sayyaf, a high class performer until the age of five despite having sizeable splints as a yearling

a) Defeating champion sprinter Sharpo, Tony Ives up

b) Getting a well deserved pat from Elaine O'Gorman afterwards, with brother Dick in background.
(Photo courtesy of Wallis)

promoters get out of their systems. The opposite extreme, a ewe neck that looks as if it is put on upside down, is not recommended either. These horses can tend to be awkward to restrain, particularly when they have had a little speed introduced into their training; they also give the impression that should they wish not to go through with their effort in a race then they will be difficult to ride.

The head can be a very emotive subject, and whilst horses do, without doubt, run with all sorts of heads there are certain points we can bear in mind. Obviously we would prefer a horse with a handsome head, in proportion to the rest of him, with big, bold eyes, medium-sized ears and a proud expression, and the nearer we can get to that ideal the better horse we are likely to have. Lop-eared horses are uncommon nowadays, but were traditionally supposed to be very honest; on the other hand even in Shakespearean times a "prick-eared rogue" was considered less than ideal. It is possible that prick ears might indicate over-reliance on hearing due to defective eyesight, which might well explain behavioural problems with these animals. Experience seems to show that deviation from the ideal, although often unavoidable, does bring various more or less

Superlative returns after the July Stakes - The Look Of Eagles. Tony Ives up, David Lowry at his horse's head. Milk of the Barley's lad Eddie Cuthbert, in dark glasses, and a youthful Newmarket Heath gallops manager John Taylor follow him in.

serious problems with astonishing regularity. Horses with a prominent bump between their eyes are virtually certain to be difficult to deal with once they start to feel the pressure of training. Horses showing distinct white around their eyes tend to be flighty, probably because the eye is not set in the head correctly and vision may be distorted.

A more positive observation is that those few horses that do turn out to be talented runners may very often exhibit a confident, rather distant, expression, even as yearlings. This has been referred to by horsemen as the 'Look of Eagles' and, all else being equal between two horses, we should definitely favour the one who shows this trait. A haughty demeanour will not, of course, protect him from the many risks he will encounter in training.

We have now completed the basic examination of the body and must move on to the forelegs, which are the most common source of problems in the racehorse. This is basically a mechanical examination and there are certain basic precepts that should be adhered to as closely as possible, although the ideal situation of complete balance and strength is depressingly rare. This is where experience in making serious and immediate decisions about the likely viability, or otherwise, of yearlings as racing prospects is essential. We do need a reasonably sound, if basic, appreciation of the structures of the leg. This must be coupled with a working knowledge, based on experience and observation, of what constitutes an acceptable deviation from the ideal.

Moving away from the body we first examine the forearm. This is not an area that causes many problems, as although it will occasionally be subject to stress fractures these will probably heal unaided, sometimes even undiagnosed. It is desirable to have a strong and well-muscled forearm and this seems usually to be the case in fast horses; it is a very noticeable feature of Quarter Horse conformation.

Most leg trouble in Thoroughbreds occurs in the front legs from the knee down, because at some point in each stride the total weight of the body plus that of the rider will be passing over each foreleg in turn. Obviously, a simple calculation combining this weight with the speed involved will give an idea of the enormous stress to which this relatively delicate structure is subject, and confirm the need to keep as close as possible to an architecturally, for want of a better word, sound construction of the limbs.

Viewed from the side, the forelegs should ideally be quite perpendicular through the knee, that is to say the horse should neither be 'over at the knee' with the knee appearing to sag forward, nor 'back at the knee', also called 'calf-kneed', with the knee appearing to be bent backwards. The former is very uncommon now, and although it always looks as if it would make stumbling more likely, the older generation in Newmarket used to say that horses never got a tendon strain when they had this conformation. A degree of back at the knee conformation seems to be virtually unavoidable nowadays, and our inspection will, in most cases, be determining levels of acceptability on this score. Most slightly afflicted horses seem to show few ill effects, particularly if their pastern set-up is normal. There may be additional stress to the tendon area in more serious cases and there is greater risk of all injuries caused by backward deviation of the knee. This is demonstrated in the alarming photos sometimes seen, usually taken near the end of a race, where the knee of the supporting foreleg seems to be displaced backwards into a grossly exaggerated version of the original conformation defect, whilst the fetlock has dropped right onto the track surface. These injuries tend to involve both soft tissue strains at the rear of the limb and crushing injuries to the front surfaces in both knee and fetlock areas.

There is some difference of opinion on the importance or otherwise of a horse having

plenty of bone below the knee. The point at which the theoretical measurement is taken includes soft tissues, and the value of checking this area is to be sure that the horse is not 'tied in' below the knee, that the line of the rear of the tendon is perpendicular to the ground. The side-on view of the leg below the knee must not give the impression of being narrower just below the knee than just above the fetlock as this tied-in conformation does seem to predispose to tendon injury. As far as the bone itself is concerned there seems to be every possibility that the rather coarser types of seemingly heavy-boned horses remain less sound than the light-boned ones. We should feel the tendons and joints, but it is most unlikely that at this young age any damage will be felt. However, we will occasionally see a yearling with a tendon that is not quite straight. Some of these are not very noticeable from the side-on inspection and we must always look down the leg whilst positioned at the horse's shoulder to check for any deviation. Even though these may not be true tendon injuries (possibly being what is known as a 'bandage bow' or resulting from carelessly fitted lunging boots) we should reject these horses.

The fetlock joints should look and feel tight and firm, not fleshy or gummy, as after all they are supposed to be virtually new. We occasionally notice a slight gristly appearance on the front of the joint, which does not appear to cause problems. It is very important to check the rear inside area of the joint for damage due to interference in the sesamoid area, and this can be confirmed visually from another angle when we observe the horse obliquely from behind.

Ideal | Back at knee | Over at knee | Tied in

Ideal | Axis broken back - long toe (or v. straight pastern) | Axis broken forward - club foot (or v. slack pastern)

The angle of the front pastern should probably be in the region of 50º to the ground. This is obviously not an exact specification, and if it looks all right it usually is. In areas like this, the auction situation does provide ample scope for comparison with the apparent norm. The angle of the centre line of the pastern should agree with the angle of the front face of the foot. If the foot is markedly steeper than the pastern the axis is said to be 'broken forward', while if the reverse is true, as is typical of 'long toe, low heel' shoeing, then the axis is 'broken back'. The pastern must not be too long, and this can easily be checked as the yearling walks. A long pastern shows too much slackness, and in this case the axis tends to be broken forward. Even at a walk it is obvious that the fetlock joint is descending too far towards the ground and it can be imagined what might happen at speed. If in doubt, comparisons are readily available. Too short or

too upright a pastern is not acceptable either, as this causes a different (though in fact less disastrous) set of problems due to the failure to absorb the shock of hitting the racing surface; once again, if in doubt, compare. There seems to have been a distinct change over the last 30 years, in that very straight in front or upright yearlings are now uncommon, whereas the number with very long, slack pasterns seems to be increasing. It would be interesting to determine whether this is due to genetic or dietary factors. There may be some confusion amongst beginners as to whether a horse should or should not be straight-legged! The front legs should appear as straight as possible when viewed from the front but not when viewed from the side.

Ideally, the knees should appear flat when viewed from the side. However, they will sometimes appear concave in profile, in which case they are called 'open' knees and may indicate that the horse will require a little more time for the knees to mature. This conformation should probably not deter us from buying an otherwise suitable animal and, in fact, they may well lower his price. The reverse, which is a convex profile or any protruding irregularity of the knees, or more likely, of one knee, should be regarded with grave suspicion. If there is evidence of a superficial injury to account for the swelling, and if there are also x-rays to demonstrate that the joint itself is not involved, then this too may indicate an opportunity to buy at a discounted price.

We are now ready to give some thought to the feet of our subject. Everyone has heard of the saying "No fut, no 'oss". Fortunately this is not quite true, in view of some of the offerings we are about to witness. However, there is no doubt that a good-footed horse is easier to train than a bad-footed one. The front face of the forefoot, viewed from the side should again, ideally, rise at an angle of around 50º or so to the ground. This does not need to be precise, and yet again there is every opportunity to make a judgement based on what seems to be the norm amongst the sale entries. It is, however, important that an imaginary line drawn through the middle of the pastern shows an angle virtually identical with the angle of the front face of the hoof. Fortunately, at this age there is every chance of this still being the case, but we need to be sure that long toe, low heel shoeing, even in the short time he will have been shod, has not altered this hoof-pastern axis from normal to broken back.

The feet of yearlings, particularly in Britain, have been much altered for the worse in the last relatively few years. The causes of this are an ever-increasing paranoia on the part of vendors about apparent correctness in their consignments. This in many cases involves quite severe dressing of the feet on one side or the other from an early age to give the impression of the animal standing straight on his legs. If we add to this many vendors' predeliction for a big foot and further add the fact that it is impossible to keep a properly full-fitted shoe on a yearling that is doing considerable work on the lunge, it will not surprise us to observe many lots with their heels already destroyed, and with feet very flat. Fortunately we can usually improve this flat-footedness and the foot pastern axis in moderate cases. It is difficult to predict the likely outcome of subjecting many of the more severely corrected horses to a strenuous athletic regime. This should theoretically be one area where a homebred programme could be an advantage, but even studs breeding to race seem to delight in trying to improve on nature. Correction is now the general order of the day. We may not always spot moderately collapsed heels, even by picking up the foot, as the final shoeing before the sale will be a little more full at the heels, thus hiding the true position of the heel itself. If the underside of the foot seems to have little arch to the sole, and if the impression is that it seems a big foot for the

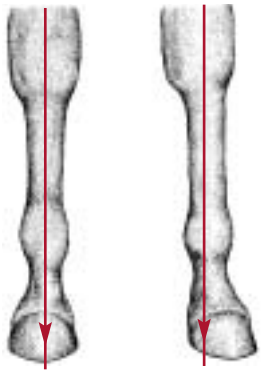
size of horse we can anticipate some problems. However, this situation is now prevalent, and we have to live with it; how to address it will be dealt with elsewhere.

Although it is not yet clear exactly what the problem may be, there should be definite scepticism about the overall training prospects of any yearlings that demonstrate patches of white horn on a black foot which has no white hair at the coronet. The same thing applies to those white-footed horses showing a great deal of red bruising in the walls of their feet. Unfortunately, these animals are often virtually impossible to spot due to the thick hoof dressing in general use. Severe fever rings on the feet of a yearling are often a sign of some episode of illness, but may also be associated with dietary changes in the sale preparation; in general they may give less cause for suspicion than do the red or white marks on the feet. The latter often seem to predict reduced racing success from these animals, whose systems may be so undermined as to prevent their standing the rigours of training. Were any of our purchases to exhibit such marks once the dressing had worn off his feet we would be well-advised to immediately initiate an extended course of treatment with a broad spectrum antibiotic. It is as well to start the treatment without waiting to discover whatever bizarre symptoms might emerge should, as is likely, the marks result from a laminitic episode connected with a systemic disease which might have invaded the central nervous system. This subject will be discussed more fully at a later point.

We must now examine our prospect from head on, and once more we will look at him from an engineering point of view. What we would hope to see first is a fairly wide chest indicating sufficient space for what is, basically, the engine room, and to allow reasonable clearance between the forelegs.

Our next wish is for a leg in which a vertical line, viewed from the front, passes through the middle of the forearm and continues through the middle of the knee, the cannon bone, the fetlock, the pastern and the hoof in turn. Unfortunately, in most cases we will be disappointed. The purpose of our examination is to decide which horses are likely to live with any minor shortcomings and emerge relatively unscathed, and saleable, after strenuous training and racing. If a horse has good form, and his x-rays are clean, minor incorrectness will probably be accepted by whomever we happen to sell him to next year. This applies only to minor deviations from the ideal; a very incorrect individual will always be regarded as an accident waiting to happen, and we may well find ourselves unable to sell him. Once again, degrees of deformity can easily be compared in the sales paddock, but with practice the decision-making process becomes largely intuitive.

The condition in which the knee does not sit directly above the fetlock and squarely between the forearm and the cannon bone we will call ‘offset knee’. It is quite often present in only one leg. Simple observation shows that this condition vastly increases the forces at work both in the knee itself, leading to fractures, and below it, leading to splints. There will also be an effect on the flight of the foot. The animal must at every stride, in order to proceed forward, swing the offending foot into the direction of the body’s progress and away from the direction in which it faces at rest. The variation can be either in or out, relative to the horse’s mid-line. Offset knee is due to different rates of growth in the small bones of the knee as a foal and may be related to diet. This is not intended to be a technical discussion, and we will not attempt to distinguish between carpus valgus, where the leg goes out from the knee, or the reverse conformation, carpus varus. Nor will we bother to remark on ‘base wide’ and ‘base narrow’ stance since both in most cases merely reflect an irregularity higher up the



leg. For the purposes of our shorthand, every variation of this common affliction will be referred to as 'offset'; if we do wish to record the direction of the deviation we can add the self-explanatory 'knock-kneed' or 'bow-legged' to our description. When viewing large numbers of horses at a sale it will be obvious that a high proportion of them are slightly afflicted. We should not bid unless our comment is 'slightly offset' at worst, and the horse otherwise appears attractive. Anything more than minor affliction with this condition will still count against a horse when he is being resold, particularly to America, however good his form might be. If we wished to avoid confusing purists by blanket use of this terminology we might consider substituting some other general adjective, such as 'crooked knees'. Although it is not unheard of to see useful racehorses with even a considerable degree of offset knee conformation, it is very common to see it in bad horses.

Obviously, all yearlings will wear boots for breaking. It may be advisable for those that turn their front feet out slightly, and which will therefore swing them inwards as they move, to continue to wear boots at exercise as even very minor regular contact, though not serious enough to cause lameness, may easily result in a blemish. Apart from being unsightly, any fullness caused by hitting on the inside of the joint will of course further increase the danger of interference and injury. If the horse is normally protected in this way, and does not seem to mark the boots, we will probably dispense with the weight of the boots on race day. If he does regularly touch the boots, greater caution is called for.

The various descriptions applied to limb and gait deviations can prove confusing. An easy aide-memoire is that when used to describe either the direction of the leg below the joint or the direction of foot in flight then the shorter words 'varus' and 'dish' refer to the shorter preposition in, and the longer words 'valgus' and 'paddle' refer to the longer preposition out. For embryonic sailors the same formula should be used to remember the directions for port and starboard!

Any splints that are already present at this stage are obviously cause for comment. Often they may be a matching pair. As long as they do not seem to result from stress apparently attributable to a deviation at the knee, splints can provide an opportunity to purchase an otherwise attractive horse at a discounted price. In many cases they will cause no further problems and they will not be held too much against a horse with good form when he is resold. There may also be a possibility of reducing, if not removing, them in some cases. Both Sayyaf and Reesh had two big splints as yearlings. They had originally been purchased to go to other trainers, but eventually came into my stable largely because their purchasers became concerned on closer examination of these blemishes that the horses' prospects were likely to be compromised. Both proved to be very sound horses and won many races at the highest level.

Deviation of the pastern and the hoof relative to the fetlock is simply referred to as 'toe-out' or 'toe-in', and, as in other points of conformation, degrees of affliction can be easily compared. We may also notice situations where the leg goes out from the knee and again from the fetlock but the foot

Offset - corrected; still out from knee, but now in from pastern. Foot flight can be unpredictable

Toe in - foot flight paddles out

Toe in - foot flight wings in

Toe out Axis broken in

Ideal

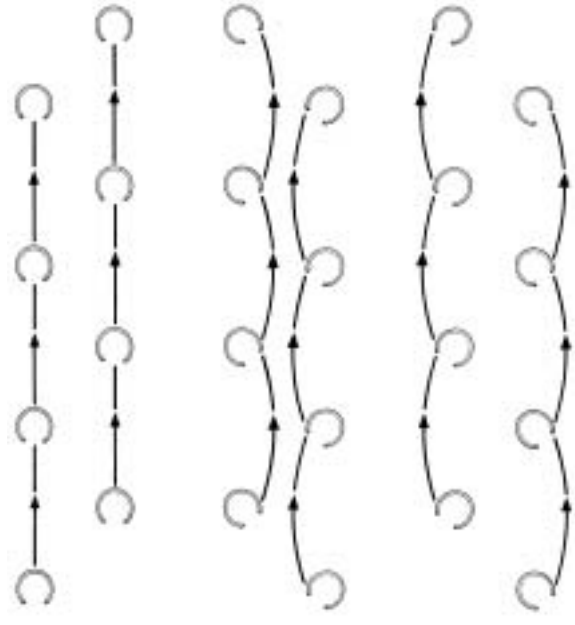
All near fore

Toe in Axis broken out

itself tends to turn in. These horses may have been inclined to exaggerate their splay-footed stance when reaching for the grass as foals. As the foal's neck grows longer this problem tends to resolve itself and so the trimming designed to correct the condition may often be unnecessary. The natural decrease in the straddled stance allows the horse's legs to straighten up naturally as he gets older and so greatly exaggerates the effect of any trimming designed to achieve the same result. The fact that the reverse condition occurs rarely tends to reinforce this explanation. This is far from an ideal situation from the point of view of future soundness, but can sometimes look fairly acceptable on quick examination from the front, as the foot may appear to be in line with the body and roughly below the knee joint, although the plumbline will not pass through the centre of the cannon bone and pastern. The foot-pastern axis is now broken out and the bulk of the foot appears to be towards the inside of the pastern when viewed from the front. On viewing the ground surface of the foot, the frog will tend to point inwards.

It is a good idea to look at every horse obliquely from the rear, in order to spot better the rather bulldog-like stance of this condition. The oblique angle of examination can also serve to highlight any irregularity in the sesamoid area, which should be investigated.

Ideally the forefeet should resemble each other as closely as possible in size, shape and angles. Feet that do not appear to be a pair may indicate considerable correction having taken place, although difference in size may be somewhat disguised by a clever shoer. When the foot is picked up, the bulbs of the heels should be level, as if they are not the horse may suffer a 'sheared heel' and this can prove difficult to deal with. It can be taken as evidence of quite severe correction in a horse of this age. Although big, flat feet are



Ideal
Foot travels straight

Splayfooted
Toe out
Wings in

Pigeon toed
Toe in
Paddles out

The oblique view is an essential part of the examination, demonstrated here by Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse sire Apollo (USA). (Photo courtesy of Vessels Stallion Farm)

undesirable, very small and contracted feet may indicate disease of some description, or may result from lengthy box-rest following a serious skeletal injury.

The uneven stresses that occur in incorrect legs are not the only problem to be faced. Every deviation from the perpendicular will result in a foot flight that cannot be straight. If the foot turns in the flight must tend to be out, known as 'paddling', and vice versa, which is called 'dishing'. The most severe form of dishing is referred to as 'plaiting', which is self-explanatory, and to be avoided. The use of the term 'winging' is acceptable but should be qualified as either 'winging in' or 'winging out'. Minor degrees of one or other defect may have to be accepted, purely because they are so widespread. Traditionally, toe-in conformation has been generally less abhorred by horsemen than toe-out, simply because pigeon-toed horses do not tend to interfere in front. However, toe-in racehorses can be prone to hitting themselves behind with their front feet due to the path the front foot is obliged to follow coinciding with that of the hind leg. This seems to occur most often in speedy horses, which tend to overstride at the walk, because their hind legs do reach further under the body at each stride. This hazard can often be overcome by careful shoeing. On balance the

old horsemen are probably right to prefer toe-in as the lesser of the two evils. There is a possibility of an even more bizarre foot flight with the more severely corrected horses, which often leads to both structural damage and insurmountable interference problems.

We can now turn to the hind leg inspection. Fortunately this is not usually such a danger area as the forelimb in flat racers. Ideally, a vertical line from the point of the buttock should follow the line of the hind leg from the point of the hock down to the rear of the fetlock. Viewed from the side the point of the hock should be level with the chestnut on the foreleg, according to Ben K. Green in his excellent, but hard-to-find, 1969 work Horse Conformation as to Soundness and Performance. This will provide the most efficient set-up for the driving mechanism for the whole machine. Obviously, once again, comparisons may be helpful in initially establishing what degree of deviation from this ideal seems to be commonplace. We will in fact be seeing a high proportion of horses in which the hock is placed further behind the body than our favoured position. We can refer to this as 'hocks behind', and should confine ourselves to, at worst, those animals we record as only slightly affected.

The area above the hock is not one that needs particular scrutiny; it should be well muscled and there should be no evidence of swelling or soreness in the stifle area. We should be alert to any slight stiffness or awkwardness behind as a possible indication of stifle lameness, usually caused by bone cysts or OCD lesions. This is unlikely to be causing soreness at this stage, unless we do see the animal when he first leaves his box, but a percentage of horses will have a problem with this in the early stages of training. This is an area where x-ray definitely aids diagnosis and would enable us to avoid the problem. However, given that OCD afflictions seem increasingly common, and that most horses are either minimally affected or do recover quite well, it does not at the present seem worth disrupting our present system. It is not clear what the true relevance of these lesions, either in the stifle or elsewhere, is to the long-term prospects of the horse, but it is quite clear that they can greatly confuse things at point of purchase. A fairly large-scale survey has recently shown the afflicted animals in a group to have raced more productively than those which did not show the lesions as yearlings!

The repository system of x-rays for presale inspection that is being adopted by American auction companies does make much more information available to purchasers. However, there is no reason to suppose that the introduction of these presale x-rays has altered the percentage of any given foal crop carrying career-threatening injuries invisible to the naked eye, or succeeding at the track. The primary decision on purchase has to be made on the basis of personal examination if we are to have time to go through the majority of the horses in the sale. It will be sufficient to check any certificates lodged in the repository and put a line through the catalogue page of any lot number with a certified fracture or similarly compromising defect that we cannot see on personal inspection in the flesh and evaluate. There just is not time to look at the x-rays of a large enough number of horses. If we are, occasionally, spending a large sum on a particular animal it might be sensible to make an exception and review all available information.

The other problem above the hock that seems to have become more commonplace is a fracture of the tibia. This may merely be because of improved x-ray techniques! These injuries normally heal well on their own.

The hock itself should now be closely examined for blemishes or any deviations from a normal appearance. A curb, if not too unsightly, is not normally reason to reject an

otherwise suitable horse, as these rarely give trouble once they are established. Any soft swelling on the hock must be regarded as serious unless it is associated with an active wound. As with the knees, a blemish that does not appear to compromise full flexion can sometimes be overlooked as long as it is the subject of a vet's report and of x-rays showing that the mechanics of the joint are unaffected.

The cannon bone and the fetlock in the hind leg tend to be fairly trouble-free and should appear strong and clean. There are often various minor blemishes due to paddock and transit accidents but these are clearly of no significance in most cases.

The hind feet and pasterns, again, give relatively little trouble in the Thoroughbred. They should be examined in the same way as those of the forelimbs, although the natural angle of the hind foot should be higher, around 55º, than that of the forefoot. It is also important that the angle of the pastern is similarly higher. Weak or slack pasterns are undesirable due to the danger of the animal running down and making the underside of his fetlock joints sore. This happens more frequently behind, and is much more common on artificial surfaces.

Until quite recently all yearlings went barefoot behind, and they still tend not to have been subjected to much correction or alteration to their stance even if they are shod. We should still inspect for deviation of the feet from the direction of the body at rest as the hind feet will be equally subject to erratic flight; however, this is often easier to control in the hind limb by careful shoeing, and at any rate does not normally present problems as severe as when it occurs in front.

If we stand directly behind our subject we can confirm our impression of where both fore and hind feet are positioned and also take note of whether he is very close, which we refer to as 'cow-hocked', or wide and appearing to be bow-legged at the level of his hocks. The former, because the feet are naturally turned out at rest and so will tend to travel inwards in flight, may cause interference to the other hind leg at a later stage. The latter can give an impression of lack of control, with the hock sometimes appearing to rotate at every stride, although Reesh was a pretty good horse despite being markedly affected in this way.

Having made our inspection of the yearling at rest we will now have him walked about 50 feet straight away from us, and straight back towards us. We should have him continue a few steps past us on the return trip, so as to see him from another angle. This procedure is followed wherever possible, even with the horses we have previously seen in the walking ring, although unfortunately at Keeneland there is no real opportunity to see horses walk far in a straight line without previous visits to the barn area so we must pay extra close attention.

Many horsemen will want to check the airway of each lot, in fact they may well commence their examination on that basis, by determining the width of each horse between his jaw. Obviously, due to varying hand size in different people, each must adopt his own set of values, and as yearlings will tend to be smaller than old horses, presumably further allowances must be made. If we felt the need to adopt this test it would be relatively simple to identify the norm by comparison. However, although it is obvious that a large airway should be an advantage, it is doubtful if anything other than a disastrously small one should be considered undesirable, particularly in horses racing relatively short distances.

Another test, not seen so often in recent years, is the testing of the yearling's tail strength as an indicator of his overall strength. On page 591 of that excellent publication The New Care and Training of the Trotter and Pacer, Dr Kenneth P. Seeber says, "When all else checks out normally, a decrease in tail tone seems to be a finding fairly consistent with

Brondesbury posing on Newmarket Heath in June as a 2-year-old. A brilliantly speedy colt.
(Photo courtesy of Rouch & Co.)

EPM." The old horsemen were probably aware of an unacceptable degree of failure in weak-tailed animals in recommending this test and we should certainly give it some thought, particularly if any yearling during our short inspection should show other suspicious signs such as sloppy gait, erratic or very dull or stupid behaviour, or discoloured feet.

EPM, or certainly awareness of it, has increased rapidly in the past several years. The disease is far from completely understood. Possibly it is one of many infections that were inadvertently subdued by the general use of antibiotics throughout society in the last few decades, even to the extent that everyone largely forgot how devastating some of them were. Some of them are presently recurring in more virulent form. Tuberculosis in humans is an example supporting this theory.

The total time we need to spend looking at each yearling to evaluate him on this basis should be less than two minutes. This can only be achieved with practice, and a speedy examination is recommended even when more time is available, in order to remain comfortable with this method. Although it is difficult to explain, it seems that some experienced yearling buyers may develop, over many years, the ability actually to see speed, in the same way that a cattle buyer might predict the better of two beasts. This is probably the ability to perceive a difference in muscle tone, which may in fact be indicative of the ratio of fast-twitch fibres, or something similar. Whatever it is, it takes practice, but results in some successful buyers being able to glance at

two yearlings which might measure the same and accurately predict the superior runner.

It is extremely inadvisable to allow a situation to develop at an auction where anyone feels able to ask us to stand back from any particular lot so that they can buy it, and we should not expect to do it to anyone else. This sort of tit-for-tat arrangement invariably causes trouble somewhere along the line. It is also true that no vendor should influence in any way the selection of our purchases, unless he does so indirectly in that he has previously provided us with an above-average number of animals that far exceeded the call of duty in their racing careers. We should actively avoid yearlings from those drafts that have previously shown us below-average results. Stallions whose offspring have on previous ventures repeatedly flattered only to deceive should also be spurned, as such sires may well have some unsuspected but transmissible failing that might account for their regularly getting offspring that fail to fulfil initial promise.

As far as price is concerned, the method detailed here has proved effective in securing runners at very reasonable prices, but to ensure success we should be prepared for an outlay per horse of more than the median for the sale. For instance, if the median (which is normally fairly predictable) is 50% up from the bottom we should be prepared for our own purchases to average around whatever figure is likely to be 66% up from the bottom. This will, based on all past experience, enable us to buy horses both reasonably correct and with a little pedigree to aid the resale prices. If we can pay somewhat above the median we should buy plenty of the type of animals we want, assuming that the sale does contain reasonable specimens. We do not have to spend all the money allotted just for the sake of it, but it is as well to have our budget properly prepared beforehand, so as not to be trying to work it out whilst a prospective purchase is in the ring.

Pedigree

"Fables, and endless geneologies." Timothy 1:4

On the pedigree front we should be very flexible. There is an enormous amount of pedigree expertise available, but it is noticeable that much of it seems to be provided by those who have not themselves been outstandingly successful as owners or breeders. We need to remember that basically our purchase will be unable to call on his relatives in his hour of need, and we should select those whose own physique gives hope of success. In fact we really abandoned the pedigree experts when we abandoned the presale list. Even if we go to a sale where none of the pedigrees convey anything to us, we should be confident of buying able runners using our approach, despite any doubts shed by the established pedigree buffs.

There seems some logic in the theory that it is better to select our purchases on the basis that they are both by and out of successful runners. It is obvious that the actual racing merit of the mares will tend to be much lower than that of the sires; however, that will usually remain true of everyone's selections. The surest recipe for racing ability must logically be racing ability in both parents, preferably demonstrated over an extended career. This is an ideal situation, but if this can be found in a yearling whose own physical attributes are above average, then the expectation of his racing success may be well above average. It may previously have been the case that some major breeders, particularly of harness racers, did retain well-bred unraced fillies for stud (in what is now seen to be illogical expectation that their 'nervous energies' would not have been wasted in competition and so would be passed to their offspring), but we can nowadays assume that any unraced mare failed in some way in her training. Statistically, stakes-winning mares do breed more stakes winners than nonstakes-winning mares, and their offspring, if

attractive, will tend to be more expensive.

The most important time for some fashionable aspect in a pedigree is not on the racecourse but when we are fortunate enough to have a stallion prospect to sell, as at that stage pedigree will definitely command a premium. Animals that have close relatives running well in America might attract a higher price for us on resale, but this attraction, which is not always common knowledge, should not be allowed to influence our purchase of an otherwise unsuitable horse.

Mares that have failed to produce successful runners after several attempts should be avoided. The only exceptions might be if the yearling before us is physically outstanding, and either the very low recorded sale prices of his elder brothers and sisters indicate that they were probably moderate individuals, or they were all by stallions which are acknowledged disasters. Brondesbury's pedigree was the proverbial white page, but his own appearance gave every indication of speed. In similar cases we can, to a degree, back our judgement and perhaps benefit from a price that will be depressed by the probably predictable failures of his siblings.

There is no reason to discriminate against old, successful sires. In fact, they can represent excellent value, as even though they may be out of fashion their genetic make up remains, of course, unchanged. First-season sires, on the other hand, can be poor value, since there is a strong tendency for their lots to be protected by their connections, and there is as yet no evidence of their ability to sire winners. A hard-knocking but very unfashionable handicap horse will occasionally present a very good looking yearling, having passed on some of his own attributes. We need to accept that the mares this type of horse attracts are often of very moderate quality and that the stallion's contribution to the total make-up of even a good-looking offspring may not be sufficient to provide a useful runner.

The produce of old mares should be viewed with distinct caution unless the yearling looks exceptionally well forward and unless there is currently a useful two-year-old out of them to indicate that there is still reasonable prospect of success. Mares obviously have much more than a purely genetic input into their offspring, and elderly matrons tend not to have provided for their foal so well, either before or after birth as a younger mare would have done; in these circumstances many yearlings will never catch up.

As soon as we have signed the ticket, we must arrange for the new purchase to be scoped to check that he has no impairment of his airway which will make him returnable. In fact, to be eligible to go back he must both fail the scope and convince a panel of vets that he makes a noise on the lunge. Most people seem to lunge their purchases first, but given that the process involves some risk and stress to the horse, and that he may well be unreturnable anyway on the scope, it makes far more sense to do the scope examination first.

To have realistic hopes of making some sort of impact on the racing scene we must constantly be aware of the laws of probability, and we must equally constantly attempt to weight them in our favour. It is unrealistic to expect to discover high-class runners immediately or regularly. By focusing on the purchase of horses that will have reasonable prospects of resale on a physical basis, we will at least give ourselves a better prospect of generating cash flow. If this ensures a longer turn at bat, it should also increase our chances of hitting a home run.