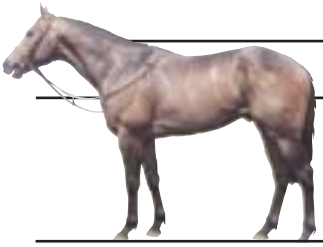

Training The Older Horse

"They shall go from strength to strength." Psalms 84:5

We have completed in some detail the specific training of a yearling up until the time of his first start and we will now turn to more general aspects of racehorse training, particularly with reference to the maximisation of assets and to damage limitation. These twin precepts are the only realistic foundation on which to establish a long-term involvement without having consistently to introduce further large sums of capital. To apply them successfully requires a professional and disciplined approach. For some reason, such a philosophy may prove difficult to explain to many owners and because of this difficulty trainers as a whole have tended to take the line of least resistance, simply preferring to keep their boxes filled.

Truly to implement the various procedures we may need to employ in order to succeed we must, almost certainly, abandon the comparatively recent fashion of delegation. There are various agricultural proverbs dating from the 17th century that might be applied, such as "The best manure is the foot of the farmer walking on the land every day" or "Nothing fattens beasts like the master's eye." The truth is that our financial objectives will only be accomplished with any consistency if the trainer has total hands-on control, as it is unrealistic to expect to find deputies who are genuinely qualified to take decisions for the remuneration commonly offered. This nondelegatory approach will necessitate the number of horses being restricted to 60 at most. Up until 30 years ago 60 was considered a big string, despite the more capable staff then available.

The enormous stables that have become the norm merely reflect the current defeatist attitude that this is purely a numbers game, and one cannot hope to do other than haemorrhage money. As long as it's someone else's money the prevailing system does have certain attractions for a trainer. In the words of philanthropist, owner, trainer and gambler Barney Curley, "Most trainers should carry a Government Health Warning!" As noted above, the modern trainer's attitude may in most cases be a reasoned response to the demands of their customer base, but due to the inevitable loss of attention to detail the numbers-game philosophy of racehorse training has become self-perpetuating. There can be no doubt that most very large strings do not produce results remotely in keeping with the size of the investment made in their raw material. They obviously do tend to include the best runners but require enormous investment and reinvestment to do so. It would be interesting to explore whether some of the biggest strings could produce just as many top performers if a much smaller intake led to less delegation and increased attention to detail. In the present climate no one is likely to have the confidence to attempt such a move.

The revolution in National Hunt racing since Martin Pipe appeared on the scene is almost unbelievable. To define that change in one line we need only note that a two mile novice hurdle might currently be run in up to 20 seconds less than was the case prior to his emergence. This is a phenomenal improvement in a relatively short time. An improvement in overall training

methods, leading to greatly improved fitness in very many of the horses in the country, driven by the need to compete with the Nicholshayne horses cannot fail to be a factor. If there was not some truth in that theory, Pipe would still be winning all the races easily without the times necessarily having to improve. Prior to his meteoric rise there may well have been a feeling among jumping trainers that as their horses broke down only too often they should obviously be circumspect in the amount of training they administered. An unfit horse must be more likely to sustain an injury than a fit one and the scene was set for another self-fulfilling prophecy. The style of jump racing that previously allowed a moderate seven furlong horse recruited from the Flat to reserve his stamina sufficiently to win two mile hurdle races is now a thing of the past.

Rather than registering that his success was due to superior training technique, and resolving to examine the shortcomings in their own regimes, Pipe's opponents seem to have wasted several seasons deluding themselves that his results flowed from some magic formula. As the old-time farm horsemen had recognised there was no point in him disabusing his rivals of those suspicions and thus making them try harder themselves! By coincidence, one of the most remarkable training performances of recent years in America was by ex-English jumps trainer Michael Dickinson whose Da Hoss won a second Breeders' Cup after virtually two years off. To train the first five finishers in the Cheltenham Gold Cup, or indeed 12 winners on a single day, as Michael had done previously, are further feats unlikely to be repeated.

The new wave of National Hunt trainers currently coming to the fore may well owe much of their success to the fact that they have been able to observe Martin Pipe whilst they were still young enough to learn from his success, and to some degree formulate their own training strategies accordingly. It is notoriously difficult to teach an old dog new tricks, and the previous generation of trainers had difficulty in adapting to the new style of jump racing in which most races are strongly run from end to end. As the horses of many other trainers tend to be far fitter nowadays it might pay Pipe to rethink the stable policy of almost invariably making strong running. Fitter current opponents are less easily galloped into the ground than those he previously faced, and indeed their connections may often appreciate someone to do the donkey work for them.

The Thoroughbred is actually a far tougher animal than it is generally given credit for, and with proper preparation will outperform many other breeds in their specialist fields. There was a well-known saying amongst foxhunting men, who required considerable strength and stamina from their mounts in the golden days of the that sport in the late 19th century, that in horses an ounce of blood was worth an inch of bone. That inherent strength and soundness is still genetically present, and probably improved by further selection and refinement, but it still requires training to be seen to best advantage. The common perception that the modern Thoroughbred is less resilient than his forebears is in fact a comfort zone for everyone involved in his racing career, as once it is universally accepted that the modern racehorse is congenitally weak there is obviously less pressure to achieve anything very meaningful with him. Whether the modern reluctance to cull inferior individuals will have serious repercussions on the breed remains to be seen, but the current policy of positively encouraging them by the proliferation of low-grade handicaps does appear very short-sighted. In fact, those in authority seem to have been almost entirely won over to the point of view of the off-course betting lobby that the number of runners is of more importance than the merit of those runners as far as day-to-day racing is concerned.

The current programme of handicaps must

also have a detrimental effect on training standards and practices as it actively discourages revealing the true potential of many horses in Britain. Once a course has been plotted to make any horse appear moderate in order to earn a favourable rating from the handicapper, it seems a small step for his connections to accept that he truly is moderate, and that being defeated is no bad thing in that it effectively confirms, and may even lower, his handicap rating. The true object of training racehorses ought to be to discover any horse's potential, or lack of it, as quickly as is reasonably practical, to win as much prize money as possible, to waste as little money as possible and to sell him for the highest attainable price. The discussion here continues purely on that rather old-fashioned basis.

As long ago as 1804, Samuel Chifney noted in his modestly named work Genius Genuine that, "Horse's legs are very soon destroyed at first coming into work; but when they have had time to be well trained, scarce any running or riding will hurt them." There is no doubt that the same is true today, and it must follow that the best protection we can afford our investment is a fairly rigorous training regime. This need not necessarily be the extreme and precise interval training advocated in some quarters. These systems seem far too complex to implement properly in a working racing stable, and in any event, as evidenced by Martin Pipe, they may not be necessary for optimum results. What we will attempt to practise may involve an overall workload similar to that practiced in Newmarket between the wars, although the detail may differ markedly.

As the racehorse has evolved it certainly requires less extreme training to deliver acceptable results, presumably because the cold elements in the pedigree have become more and more remote. The training that both Thoroughbreds and trotters were subjected to in the early years of both sports is unbelievable. In those days successful trainers were obliged to develop their racing speed, whereas nowadays they have at least some degree of speed genetically present without any training. Old-time Thoroughbreds, which were actually rather less Thoroughbred than the present animal, were subjected to five hours exercise daily and to regular long works in heavy sweaters. Orrin Hickok reportedly drove the trotter St Julien 50 miles at a three-minute rate in a single day, whilst attempting to resolve the problems of his attitude and gait, and in fact kept him away from competition for three years whilst trying to straighten him out. The pair broke the world record for a mile with 2.11$^{1}/_{4}$ in 1880, a speed that would be ridiculously slow to the highly bred trotter of today.

There were several connections between the romantic figures of American history and the Turf. Orrin Hickok was the brother of Wild Bill Hickok. Frank James, whilst on the run, had horses in training in Nashville with George Rice. After his acquittal by a rather partisan jury he acted as a starter at trotting meetings and as betting commissioner for leading Thoroughbred trainer S.C. Hildreth. Jesse James, living openly but under an assumed name and with a large reward on his head, was also a racing enthusiast and friend of trotting trainer Col. W.W. Abbott. Railroadman E.R. Harriman who, at least in the film of the same name, organised the hunting down of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, was, typically of many 19th century captains of commerce, a harness racing enthusiast. Indeed, he founded the Trotting Horse Club of America.

Since those days the training pendulum has swung completely the other way and in most cases training regimes for horses have never been lighter than today. Conversely in the human athlete, the recent increases in speed are accepted as the product of ever more brutal schedules. Some degree of any human athletic improvement must be due to psychological strength, but we cannot explain to a racehorse that once he passes the pain barrier he will be

famous, and so the severity of his exercise routine will always be limited by the animal's ability to cope mentally as well as physically with his workload. There seems however, no logical reason to suppose that a progressive and moderately strenuous schedule for our horses will not prove more effective than relying on their inherent ability.

Before embarking on any description of the recommended exercise regime it is vital to note that there will always be horses which, for various reasons, will not achieve optimum results unless adjustments are made to their routine treatment. Much of the art of training lies in recognising these individuals at an early stage so as to avoid compromising whatever chances of success they might have, and also to avoid their disrupting the remainder of the string. In many cases such a discovery may be made by accident by an attentive trainer in close daily contact with his horses. Such unlooked for revelations are not unusual, but we must be aware enough to recognise them. They may present themselves both in regard to daily training and in regard to a horse's style of racing. For example, although it is commonly misinterpreted as bad luck in running when a beaten horse finishes fast after being shut in until the last moment, this may actually be a valuable clue as to his preferred running style.

The standard and numbers of staff employed in a training establishment are governed by both availability and cost. The best plan is to pay a premium above the regular wage in the hope of attracting enough recruits to allow us to be more rigorous in our standards. If we do this and maintain a ratio of about two staff to five horses we should always have volunteers waiting to fill any vacancies. This ratio allows the yard to operate reasonably smoothly even when there are lads away racing. It also attracts those lads that do still take an interest in their horses as they cannot do that in most yards where they may be doing four or five even before they have any spares. When the weather is warm this system allows the better horses and those currently in a busy racing schedule to be taken out for a pick of grass at evening stable time. If this seems a rather cavalier attitude to cost we should reflect on whether we wish to be merely a livery yard or take training to its logical conclusion, as the latter will be impossible to achieve without adequate manpower. By the same token, no thought should be given to anything but the best quality oats, hay and bedding.

Even if the lads were doing one each, the horses would not be done as they were years ago. However, as long as their charges appear to be clean and tidy no-one, as was formerly the case, is going turn up the animal's coat to inspect for grease or expect a row of knockings from the curry comb on the doorstep. On the other hand, a good horse like St Simon will no longer be driven mad by one lad strapping him whilst another restrains him with a muzzle on. Most stables in the old days contained horses that had become savage largely due to the aggravation of grooming on the basis that, apart from the higher standards of spit-and-polish formerly required, the vigorous pumelling and massaging was felt to be extremely beneficial physically. This was a glaring instance of lack of common sense by our forbears, as any ticklish or body-sore animal was effectively being tortured for up to an hour per day, which can hardly have been conducive to his best performance as a runner. One of the dodges used to be keeping the dust and scurf in a matchbox, and pouring it back onto the body brush to provide instant knockings for inspection on the doorstep the following evening! The hygiene of the stable itself, a safe depth of bedding, and absolute cleanliness of both feed and water mangers must be rigorously enforced. The head collars should be kept clean; to avoid frequent oversights this task can be completed and all brasses can be brightly polished each Friday at midday whilst our lads are waiting for their wages!

It will be hard for girls to break into a chauvinist sport, although the male jockeys are not, by and large, the problem. (Photo courtesy of Jon Nicholson)

Poor timekeeping should not be tolerated, nor should the irritating habit of disappearing before the last horse is fed at evening stables. If we do have the staff structure suggested above it should be easy to insist on our standards being met.

The term 'lad' does not imply a male, but is understood to include girls as well. Actually, as a general rule, girls may look after their charges better than boys, and they are certainly more likely to be able to plait and to turn themselves and their horse out to a high standard. As far as riding is concerned, the girls may tend to have less experience and may require more tuition, but they may also make more effort to follow instructions. Our tolerance level for

anyone disregarding instructions should be set at low and everyone must realise that this is not a rehearsal; we are doing it for real.

Unfortunately it does seem that any attempt to make a jockey out of a girl will be doomed to frustration, in Britain at any rate, as the industry as a whole is extremely chauvinistic. Obviously this state of affairs does not tend to encourage those girls who might have a chance to make good horsemen to stay in the game, which further reduces the number of lightweight exercise riders available. However, we might remember that it took a High Court injunction to install the first female trainer in Britain only 30 years ago! A girl will need to perform twice as well as her male counterpart to be regarded as half as good in the racing world, although in very many cases that will not prove to be a particularly difficult assignment. We might also remind ourselves that in 1895 Willie Simms came from America, having ridden 228 winners the previous year, and was able to secure less than 20 mounts. Of course, Simms was black, and adopted the shorter stirrup always credited as Tod Sloan's trademark, which would also have called for a certain amount of lateral thinking on the part of English Turfmen. Within a very few years, however, the riding ranks in England were dominated by Americans boasting less distinguished records. As the physical size of the population increases, female riders may well become more and more accepted through pure necessity.

The most sensible way to organise the morning is for everyone to muck out all their horses straight away, to give them their hay and, lastly, to clean and refill the water mangers. Many horses will not have eaten their breakfast and it should be left for them to eat when they come in from exercise. When the soiled litter has been removed the stable should be set fair with what remains, with the fresh bedding added to the sides. If the daily addition is placed in the middle of the box it will be impossible to rotate the litter correctly so that there is nothing in the stable more than a few days old. Other methods that deal with each lot or set of horses separately result in the horses that go out late in the morning getting no attention from 6.30 pm until 10 or 11 am the next day, apart from their breakfast at 6 am. There is normally no reason to withhold a horse's hay until after exercise, but if we do particularly want to ascertain any horse's wind fitness we can leave him without his hay until he comes in after work.

Whether any breakfast is taken by the lads before or after first lot doesn't really matter, as long as everyone is ready to go back to work promptly afterwards.

As a matter of course, all racehorses should be rigged as simply as possible in plain jointed snaffle bridles and running martingales with a bib. If the yearlings were broken using the sweet mouth bridle then some thought should be given to making it universal for use on all the horses that have no specific requirements. There is probably sense in each horse having his own bridle in order to reduce the risk of infections. Lads are very inclined to make any adjustments on the near side of the bridle only, which tends to further encourage one-sided mouths, and they are in fact quite likely to make no adjustment at all between horses when they are using the same bridle! The American type of martingale with detachable bib is not as good because it does not run through the neckstrap.

The amount of clothing the horses wear is governed by the weather. However, there is no sense in free-sweating animals wearing heavy clothes; these horses are better off being cool whilst they are out if it means they remain dry and that they come in fit to have their stable rug, or at least a sheet, put on. Any horse that will still sweat on a cold or windy day must never walk home without something covering his loins, nor be left stripped for any length of time when he comes in. It is not good policy to

wash horses in cold weather, but if unavoidable this should be done quickly, with tepid water, and out of the draught. The horse should then be scraped and covered with one of the big American coolers as soon as possible and led round until he dries.

It should be stable policy that no horse, ever, comes out of his box without being wiped over and having a quarter mark. The tack should always look as if it has been carefully fitted, with the exercise sheet on straight and not hanging over the tail. There should be a notice in the tack room warning all staff that they are responsible for monitoring the safety of their tack, as they are often very careless in reporting worn or broken equipment. Those lads riding light-framed horses should take care to fit breast girths if necessary and not to set out with their girths already in the top hole at both sides! Frequent reminders will always be necessary on every aspect of tack and equipment, and the fact that a horse has always worn a particular item of tack is no guarantee that that fact will be remembered by his rider.

The string should stay on the premises until the last horse has pulled out so as to all set off together. Any instructions regarding the gallop to be used or the work to be done are better given when all the riders can clearly hear them in order to avoid mistakes. Most lads are very inclined to assume that someone else will be paying attention, and so not to listen themselves. Once the destination is set, the string should walk to the gallops in an orderly fashion, not wandering all over the road and antagonising car drivers, as this only intensifies the traffic problem for all horses. We should place someone on a steady older horse at the front to slow drivers down and to convey our thanks to them when they do so.

Once the string is on the grass they trot briefly to check for any lameness, although horses that are habitually stiff when they first appear may be sent to trot on for 10 or 15 minutes before rejoining the main group. Older horses, in particular, will often move poorly in their slower paces even if there is nothing wrong with them; whether they have enough sense to realise that this action might tend to precede an easy day is debatable, but we should always be alert to the possibility of horses that are actually in relatively good racing condition not bothering to move well until they go faster.

As long as everyone is alert to the possibility of being kicked, it is a good thing for the horses to walk upsides once they are away from the traffic, as this is more interesting and relaxing for them. If care is taken, there is no need to segregate colts and fillies absolutely. This coeducation lessens the chances of a two-year-old colt becoming upset by a filly either in the transport or in the next stall when he runs.

Depending on the distance of the gallops from the stable, the time before the first canter may vary between 10 and 30 minutes. If the first canter is to be a steady one, primarily intended to take the string to the serious work ground, there is no need to delay. The total exercise time might be an hour, or slightly over, as long as the weather is not very bad. If the horses are to be reasonably well done up when they come in, it will take at least 30 or 40 minutes to get the next lot out. Early in the year the two-year-olds do not usually require quite so long, and will tend to make up the second lot, but as time passes both strings will tend to include all ages, so as to best utilise the lighter riders. Any third lot horses are normally ‘waifs and strays’, or ‘lame, sick and sorry’, and do not require a long exercise. The walk home should be relaxed and should be long enough that all horses have completely stopped blowing before they go in. There would obviously be great difficulty in adapting these theories to racetrack training in America, but it might prove possible to organise a modified version at a training centre.

The first canter is normally reasonably sedate, probably up to seven furlongs at around 17 or 18 seconds per furlong for the older

horses, although occasionally arthritic older animals may require a very steady canter as well as some trotting before doing even this canter. Early in the season the two-year-olds may pull up after five furlongs but as the year progresses the young ones will also go further. Any more excitable horses that may be only doing one strong canter should be sent on ahead to avoid chasing after the others or being chased up themselves. These irritable horses are better suited to getting their work over with as little waiting around as possible, particularly once they are fit.

As mentioned elsewhere it is relatively simple for anyone with a stopwatch to make a reasonable connection between stride patterns and time, even if only for the horses that tend to lead the work. On communal open heath training grounds, the lacksadaisical replacing of the half-furlong marker discs that may have been kicked out by horses when working can complicate matters by making the distances between those markers irregular. It would be simple enough to mow a strip right across the whole width of the ground to be used for the year in order to ensure that at least the furlong markers were always reset in the correct place. One of the drawbacks of Newmarket Heath, although overall it may be the premier facility worldwide, is that there tends to be more interest in grandiose schemes than with such simple matters.

After walking for a few minutes, the second canter is completed at about 15 seconds per furlong by all those in full work. Very backward horses, which we have endeavoured to avoid, or those returning from injury, obviously attain this level gradually, progressing through long trots with short steady canters through longer steady canters to three moderate canters and so on. Throughout this training process each stage must build upon the previous one and this fact needs to be constantly reinforced to all members of staff. Occasionally, a backward horse and his rider may both become so content with a steady cantering routine that no further progress is made and this should not be allowed to continue. As long as any horse is sound, he must be made to do enough work to derive some fitness benefit from it if we hope to evaluate him.

Any horses that have been rested are returned to full work in this gradual way but if coming from complete rest they will require careful exercise in the arena, initially ridden and led, for some days before going outside the premises. All horses should wear front boots when they are fresh so as to lessen the risk of injury. Although we should beware of the tendency to rely on it regularly, the mild sedative acepromazine can be helpful in returning very fresh horses to exercise without risk of their injuring themselves.

This basic cantering pattern has been designed so as to render too much severe galloping unnecessary, particularly once the horses have started running and if they are in regular competition. It is doubtful whether any exercise at a rate slower than 14 or 15 seconds per furlong can be of much effect in the majority of horses. There may be some confusion over the term ‘gallop’; it is used throughout in the English sense to indicate fast work. Canter is used in a more liberal way to describe all routine exercise according to the adjective used with it. The various times referred to throughout are included to give a true idea of what is being described and do not imply total reliance on the watch. As previously noted, traditional descriptions, such as ‘swinging canter’ and ‘three-parts’ speed, have largely been lost in the mists of time and can no longer be regarded as trustworthy benchmarks.

The words ‘gallop’ and ‘canter’ can also used to indicate the actual strip of ground, but this should be apparent from the context.

Any work done on an uphill gallop will, of course, be of more use in building and maintaining fitness. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that the use of uphill

stretches is constructive rather than destructive to young horses. They may quickly become disillusioned and fail to improve with their training if they are initially expected to cope with the degree of uphill work that the older ones take in their stride. For instance, if sending old horses Across The Flat at Newmarket (this is the gallop parallel to the Rowley Mile track), an excellent work is to send them "four and two, increasing up the hill". This indicates that they begin opposite the four furlong pole on the racecourse and continue two furlongs past the winning post towards the top of the town. By commencing at about 15 seconds per furlong and gradually picking it up when they reach the rising ground around halfway, they can derive considerable benefit without ever exceeding a 13 second furlong purely because of the gradient. However, this is far too severe for a two-year-old early in the year, and early two-year-olds should only use a stiff uphill training ground with caution.

It is advisable in many locations that do have grass gallops to press on with the training in the spring before the ground becomes too hard, as although there are many artificial surfaces they all have various drawbacks, and a variety of grass gallops is preferable. If a horse has already achieved a strong level of basic fitness before the ground dries up he can more easily simply maintain it on the artificial surface without overly risking him, particularly if he can compete regularly. Whenever artificial gallops are used the cushion must be regularly monitored for both depth and consistency, unfortunately on communal gallops this tends not always to be the case.

Fast work for older horses should follow the same precepts as for two-year-olds in that there must be a steady process of increasing the workload. Sudden fits and starts are not to be recommended and all riders must be constantly reminded that their mounts are not to be allowed either to stick at a level that they have easily achieved, or to make quantum leaps, whether they appear keen to do so or not. Many problems arise from horses progressing too quickly for one reason or another. We do not want any surprises, as pleasant revelations in this area have a definite habit of turning sour.

The farmers' race can also be a useful tool in preparing older horses, although some of them will be too free-going to be able to take part without doing too much unless they set off behind the others. As long as it does not become a real race, both lads and horses will greatly enjoy it and it can be a means to get work into those more cunning old horses that are normally careful not to overdo their efforts. For some old horses it is probably as encouraging as giving a track greyhound a live kill. These works will probably be six or seven furlongs in around 1.16 and 1.30, respectively, and as this proves easy for horses working in a bunch most animals can do it two or three times a week quite happily. A gross horse will thrive on this work almost daily.

Early in the season two-year-olds should not normally be sent with old horses on these occasions but as they get stronger they will be up to it, as long as they are getting weight from the older ones. The morale-boosting effect of these performances may be very useful to a juvenile fulfilling a very long and busy season. This type of horse must be kept in a permanent state of readiness for Allowance races without having definite objectives, and he must obviously remain dead fit without becoming sour.

Serious galloping of older horses may be kept to a minimum under this system although two or three fairly serious works, of five furlongs in around even time (a minute), as well as any uphill work and farmers' races, are necessary before the first start. It is rarely necessary for any very serious work to be over the full trip when racing beyond seven furlongs. Although sharp canters over the full trip with an increase towards the end are to be recommended, serious long work is extremely difficult to organise satisfactorily. It is essential

Wind fitness can be gauged by monitoring the line in the flank caused by the movement of the diaphragm.

that all riders (other than those who have specific tasks to fulfil) are instructed to maintain their position in the string when cantering, and not to fall far behind, in order that we may be able to proceed on the basis that all members of any particular bunch have in fact done the prescribed amount of work.

In order to have an idea of how fit any horse might be, we need to observe him closely after his serious work. We do not take much notice of the degree to which he seems to be blowing through his nose as this is very misleading in most cases, although many lads (so presumably their ex-employers) will seem to regard it as their yardstick. A more reliable method is to observe that when the horse is viewed from the side the line caused by the movement of his diaphragm will be clearly visible from the girth back to his flank. If he is blowing fairly hard, having derived some benefit from his effort, then this line may initially appear to be two inches deep as he breathes (see above). We should judge that the subject has finished blowing when the line disappears, which, if the programme is working properly, should normally be in around 15 minutes after he pulls up. This presupposes that the work increases in accordance with the level of fitness so that by the time of the first start he will blow this much after a fairly strenuous effort, such as five furlongs in a little over a minute, although earlier in the programme he will have blown similarly hard after either a shorter distance in the same time or the same distance in a longer time. To have a horse blowing for a much longer period at an early point in the training is obviously easy to achieve, but is to be avoided. Recovering from such distress is likely to result in an overall slowing of his steady progress. A fit horse running over a trip of less than a mile will probably blow for between 20 and 25 minutes if he has a hard race. If he should unexpectedly blow for considerably longer then something may be wrong with him. Once we are comfortable using this means of evaluating

fitness, any horse that does blow much more than we anticipated, should be regarded as being possibly off-colour and should be carefully observed for a day or two. As with the stride pattern method of speed estimation, this method may seem a little rustic; if so, it will be relatively easy to calculate some relationship between it and a more sophisticated one involving respiratory rates and heartbeats.

The practice of weighing horses daily has become fashionable over the past few years, but it is unlikely this could reveal anything we should not at first glance see for ourselves as regards any horse's condition and wellbeing. Quite apart from the obvious drawback that it is impossible to assess accurately whether or not any animal has emptied himself (or taken on water at a weight of ten pounds per gallon) to the same degree as on previous days, the fact that there is absolutely no way of proving whether just because a horse won at a certain number of kg that is his optimum weight, must cast further doubt on the procedure.

Some animals are prone to becoming setfast after their exercise. This is an acute attack of muscular cramp which can be so severe as to make getting the horse home difficult. It was originally assumed always to be associated with unaccustomed strenuous exercise or with exercise following an easy period, being referred to as 'Monday morning disease'. There is also thought to be a connection with diet. Those horses that are susceptible should have some exercise on Sunday, should possibly have their protein intake reduced and should be jogged part of the way home after exercise in order to allow their muscles to warm down gradually. This syndrome seemed to occur quite frequently in those of our animals that subsequently tested positive for Lyme disease, and to abate following antibiotic treatment.

Any horse that carries his head down after his work and has a rather glazed look in his eye should be scoped, particularly if he coughs, as he may well have bled without doing so visibly. Those animals that do bleed in their work, or in their races, can be treated with minute doses of a homoeopathic preparation of rattlesnake venom (Crotalus Horridus 200) which the vet will obtain. This seems at least as effective as any other suggested cures, and horses can run whilst being treated with no risk of failing the routine test. The extent to which racehorses are or are not affected by bleeding is far from clear, but those that do bleed visibly are almost sure to be compromised by doing so. A very high proportion of all runners have been demonstrated on scoping to bleed to some degree, so presumably many horses do cope with the minor episodes. It is, however, fair to say that if any horse bleeds visibly more than once in a short period there may be a potentially serious problem, and he should be given a break.

Gross animals are often very thick in their wind when first put into strong work without having anything wrong with their respiratory system. If endoscopic examination reveals no abnormality their work should be increased in order to resolve the problem. Their hay should be reduced and they should be bedded on something inedible. Susarma was cheaply purchased as a five-year-old, being announced as making a noise, and having run very poorly all of that year. He certainly did make a noise and was a gross Quarter Horse type, but as the result of his scope was normal he went into vigorous training, to say the least. Susarma was a good-natured horse and a good ride and he went out two or three lots every day for some time, both doing his normal exercise and then leading the two-year-olds. Eventually, after some weeks of this and two races - in which he blew up - he did get fit and became one of the best sprinters, although he always made a noise. As they get older, males in particular may need more work as they tend to become more gross; unfortunately, many of them also tend to become lazier and more resentful of being obliged to do their exercise, so these horses

should be handled with extra tact.

If, at the end of his work or as he pulls up, a horse is heard to gurgle - a noise sounding rather like water running down the waste pipe of a bath - we can usually expect the problem to resolve itself gradually in many cases as fitness develops. However if this is not the case, and if the gurgling persists even after experimentation with a tongue-tie, some problem involving the soft palate is probable and veterinary advice must be sought.

Many yearlings may make a noise when cantering at first, but the majority of these will be proved on scoping to be suffering from a throat infection. If cantering is suspended for the duration of the antibiotic treatment they normally recover completely.

Very often the older a horse gets the less inclined he may be to put much effort into his training. We have to use our imagination when faced with this type of horse and try to get the work into him without him realising that he is doing it. Bullying these horses rarely produces good results, but the rider should be alert to the possibility of allowing such a horse to do a bit more than was scheduled should he ever seem keen to do so. This is one of the very few occasions when improvisation by exercise riders should be encouraged. Group One winner Superpower was an appalling worker and he

Susarma (USA) was an extremely coarse winded horse requiring a lot of work. Tony Ives up. Here Tommy Kelly holds him after winning at York. (Photo courtesy of Kenneth Bright)

Superpower with Walter Swinburn up. Compare his action to that of Mac's Imp (USA) - hindlegs reaching far under the body. (Photo courtesy of Liam Healy)

regularly galloped with a two mile maiden claiming horse in an attempt to enthuse him. He was an extremely surly individual and wore blinkers every day at exercise, although he normally ran without them.

An older horse that has become disillusioned may often respond to being used, if he is suitable, as the trainer's hack. This means he can canter about less formally, and can be given short sprints here and there on the unused and unmarked ground, to the delight of himself and his rider and the fury of the ground staff! If horses like this are sent with the youngsters that are just beginning to work they will be heartened by the fact that they are being restrained at the end so as not to overdo the juveniles. It can sometimes prove extremely difficult to get an old horse back to being competitive after a complete break such as being turned out, and rather than risk this happening it is safer to give him a change of routine if he seems a little stale. Generally speaking we should not be too strict with the older campaigners as long as they are not getting too much above themselves. All horses will tend to race more productively if they are kept as happy as possible.

It is quite common for racehorses to become more excitable as their workload increases, and we should always be alert to this. On the other hand if any animal readily accepts a fairly severe training regime and thrives on it,

mentally as well as physically, the omens are very favourable. This does not imply that we should try to determine just how much a horse will stand, but an individual that has remained calm throughout a successful preparation can normally be relied upon to run his race.

Horses that jib or otherwise behave disruptively at exercise should not be allowed to become a bad influence on the whole string. Before banishing them to a solitary routine with the pony, however, it is worth trying them in blinkers. The traditional Newmarket use of blinkers as part of an extreme punishment session is not called for. It is remarkable how many horses will settle down to their work simply by having blinkers fitted, although this fact seems little understood in the British racing tradition. Alternatively, very badly behaved horses sometimes respond well to an absolute routine and will go to the same place each and every day without too much fuss. In this case they should be allowed to do so rather than have daily confrontation. We should be careful not to diminish the attraction of this one exercise ground by going too fast, as we would prefer to get this type to the races half-fit than not to get there at all.

Generally speaking we will tend to do the last serious work about five days before a race, which leaves time for a blow-out two days before or on the eve of the race if necessary. This might be two furlongs at three-parts speed, or in about 25 seconds, and will sharpen horses up whilst being too short to take anything out of them. A very gross or stuffy horse will benefit from doing some work on the morning of his race, but with the problem of travelling that is often impractical. If a raceday work is used it is essential that the rider does not do too much, or go too far.

As a general rule no serious work should ever take place in the trainer's absence, and any work that must be done should be set so as to preclude the danger of the riders racing or trying the horses involved. Any discovered breach of this rule is a hanging offence. Richard Darvill in his Treatise On Training The English Racehorse, published in 1828, repeatedly remarks that "[stable] boys are very inclined to be tricky", citing his own youthful transgressions whenever the trainer's back was turned as reinforcement of his warning not to leave young staff in particular unsupervised with horses in training.

Any horse that showed top-class form in the previous year should be fit before he is allowed to run, because his reputation and his capital value are subject to review. This type of horse should be tried with horses that have recently proved to be in good form and at weights that reflect to some degree his ability. If the trial is not reasonably satisfactory the horse should not run. Although we may be tempted to seek excuses for him, it is virtually certain that a poor work predicts a poor race. At this point a sound relationship between owner and trainer can avoid the considerable capital loss that might be incurred should the horse disgrace himself. This is a potentially disastrous situation and cannot be regarded as lightly as running an ordinary horse before he shows that he has retained his form. In the latter case a moderate display or two might serve to get him rehandicapped, which might ultimately result in a successful campaign. Unfortunately many owners of a classy horse will insist on running in these circumstances, often having been influenced by the opinions of people who have nothing to lose if the wheel does come off, and who can advocate a bold strategy. We should remember that it is easy enough to roll a barrel down a hill; the hard part is pushing it back to the top. If any horse running poorly when that event should have been anticipated cannot be successfully rehabilitated then his owner may have learnt a costly lesson.

Francis P. Dunne summed up the difficulty of this particular situation when he observed, "Nothing brings out the prick in a man sooner than his first good horse."

A twilight horse. Mac's Fighter won The Wokingham Handicap under a record 9 stone 12 pounds, but was never given a chance by the handicapper subsequently. Here, he and Emma appear through the winter twilight at Lingfield. (Photo courtesy of Jon Nicholson)

One of the most frustrating aspects of the British system is the proliferation of handicaps, in which those who are unwilling or unable to produce the true potential of their animals receive weight from those who do try to run their horses to the best of their ability. Actually it may sometimes appear that the Official Handicapper may be unduly influenced by the trainer's name, while at best he certainly fails to penalise some who shamelessly work the system, including some whose position in racings hierarchy ought to ensure different tactics! Although we may find this situation annoying when our horse is defeated by what will likely prove an impossible weight concession, we will largely avoid it if, as anticipated, the majority of our horses are sold before they need to enter the handicap ranks.

In his excellent little book of 1892, How To Train The Racehorse, Lt. Col. Warburton, R. E., says, "We can easily understand and appreciate the pride or vanity which impels a rich man to give a large sum of money for a good horse in the hope of seeing him successful in weight for age races, and many of us will approve of it but few will think it a feather in any man's cap if he wins a race with an indifferent animal through the mistake of the Handicapper or his own cleverness." Cleverness is of course not in this sense to be regarded as a virtue, rather the reverse! The Colonel's philosophy should be very much the basis for our own organisation, and we should ignore any perceived success achieved by the handicap brigade as irrelevant to racehorse training in the true sense.

Fortunately, the two-year-old programme is based on allowance races, but these are few and far between for older horses, to the extent that fairly useful allowance horses, falling somewhere between handicap and Group class, are referred to as 'twilight' horses. Reasonably talented performers hover between two worlds in Britain because the system is primarily geared to providing a large pool of inferior runners for the off-course betting market. This type of horse does, however, find a ready market, both in America and in Hong Kong, as long as we can keep him fairly clean and sound. Because of the premium export value of higher-rated animals, as well as for sporting reasons, it is advisable that all our horses do their best. The only exceptions to this might be, as above, running an ordinary horse which we suspect may be out of form, as long as we are certain that it cannot much harm either his prospects or his value. If by any chance he does run surprisingly well after showing us little in his work then we might debate whether to allow him to continue to train himself, rather than think how much we can improve him at home by altering his own preferred programme which has been proved successful.

There might be a little confusion regarding the different interpretations of the term 'handicap horse' here and in America, as their interpretation implies a horse of four or older that competes at the highest level, whereas in Britain, unless prefixed by some qualification such as 'very useful', it is an almost derogatory term.

There is excellent prize money available in an increasing number of British handicaps but these races are difficult to win with exposed horses, which are handicapped to the hilt, and we should beware of running a twilight horse into the ground on too many wild goose chases. The size of the pot makes very little difference if you are too high in the weights to get any of it, and we must be careful to sell these animals whilst they are still sound and competitive. Quite apart from the physical dangers and the expense of running regularly and without realistic hope in these cavalry charges, many horses do eventually just get sick of hopeless tasks and lose all interest. Once again the owner must be prepared to remember the overall objective, which is to maximise sales and move on, before we reach this point of no return. The British handicap ratings are usually well understood by regular American buyers

and they are quite prepared to take these overburdened horses as long as we do not wait too long after the last positive effort.

As we do not wish to see advertising stickers making our horses or jockey look like a contestant in a stock-car race it is doubly important to follow a sound trading strategy in order to demonstrate to the Customs and Excise Department that our owning racehorses should be allowed, as a business, to reclaim the VAT of 17.5% on all the expenses involved. The reason that most owners in Britain opt for the ludicrous pretence that their horses are generating advertising revenue is because they are incapable of running the horses as any semblence of a bona fide business. The Inland Revenue does not necessarily demand that a business actually shows a profit, only that it is run in a way that clearly indicates the intention and the possibility of doing so.

Racing colours are the livery of an owner and they look much more classy in their pristine state, rather than covered in logos and resembling something better suited to a speedway circuit. The question of colours is obviously very subjective; but a more traditional and plain design is far more sophisticated and seems preferable to many of the fussy designs in current use. It would be well worth our buying and reregistering as plain a set of colours as possible if we intend to be serious players; like personal car numbers they will always hold their value. Plain gold and plain cerise were amongst those recently sold, and either would have made an excellent statement of intent to succeed for an aspirant owner. Plain colours originally tended to be those of the aristocracy, and to imply a certain amount of style, which would have been understood to decrease in direct proportion to the flashiness of the colours' design. In the words of Oscar Wilde, "All vulgarity is crime."

Naming of yearlings is another field in which the general standard has dropped dramatically, although many owners do still take the time and trouble to find a name that bears some relevance to the names of the sire and dam. There is some truth in the saying that a good horse can't have a bad name, but it may be better to give our string decent names to start with, rather than rely on their turf record investing ridiculous ones with respectability! Overnaming is also to be avoided, as there will always be very pretentious names such as Emperor's Diamond attached to animals that will finish (or even commence) their careers at the lowest level. The Royal string is invariably cleverly named and demonstrates that attractive names sound equally at home in any circumstances. Recent examples include Whitechapel (Arctic Tern x Christchurch), Feel Free (Generous x As You Desire Me), Hebrides (Gone West x Sleeping Beauty) and Nightingale (Night Shift x Grey Angel).

Horses and their lads must always be well turned out at the races, although that does not necessarily imply horses need both mane and tail plaited and their quarters covered with designs applied from a plastic pattern sheet. Quarter marks should be limited to those applied with a brush; the intricate ones used to be done with a comb or a matchbox and those now applied with a plastic template can hardly be regarded as evidence of much skill in the groom. Plaiting tails was traditionally an amateur practice never associated with flat racing, although careful plaiting and knotting of the lower part of the tail can be sensible in very sloppy ground. Racehorses in Europe tend to have their tails cut fairly short, but in America tails tend to be left in the natural state. The theory behind the latter style is that a following horse is less likely to run up onto the heels when a long tail streams behind. A very idle horse, that requires a lot of hand-riding, should have his mane either pulled short or plaited so that it does not make his rider's task even more difficult. Too long a mane might easily cost this type of horse a close-run race should the jockey get momentarily entangled at

a crucial point in the proceedings.

There is no reason to suppose that horses from a well-run yard should look any smarter at the races than when we look round at evening stables, although whether that is invariably the case with some stables that regularly receive Best Turned Out awards is very questionable judging by the standards delivered by their lads when they change stable. We should look at every horse stripped, with his lad standing him up for inspection, every night when we are at home, except Saturday and Sunday. The horse should at least appear clean, including his face, his mane should be damped down, his tail free from tangles, and he should have both a regular quarter mark and another one curving down from loins to flank. On Saturday the rugs can be refastened as soon as the horses are done because half the lads are off, but we still see every horse's legs. On Sunday the horses are not dressed over at evening stables, although they will have been wiped over quickly in the morning, and we need only inspect the legs of any that went out. Monday and Tuesday runners will require some exercise on Sunday, and any runners from the previous day must at least be led out.

Most stables employ a travelling head lad to ensure that the lad with the horse attends to his charge correctly at the races. However, it is probably good policy firstly to allow only lads that are reliable to go away, and secondly to share any travelling head lad duties between two or three individuals, so as to encourage some competition. Travelling head lad is a position that invites contact with regular racegoers, the Faces, whom we will not wish to be kept informed about our horses. Any outside betting moves on a previously unraced horse of ours should be regarded as cause for concern in this department. Owning and training racehorses is an expensive business and we are not doing it for any outsider's benefit. If we could keep a pool of different lads, all reliable enough to take their horses on their own without a regular Travelling Head Lad, then this problem might be largely avoided. Even if the lads have telephone punters their relationship with those people is unlikely to become as close or as much of a problem to us as when there is regular physical contact at the races between outside influences and a single individual. Because bettors are generally extremely chauvinistic there are most unlikely to be any problems with punters involving female members of the team, and in fact most girls will also put their horse away better after his race than will most males.

The care of the horse after his race is easy enough, but is often not carried out correctly due to lack of interest, particularly in beaten animals, once the race is over. The horse will need to be cooled out, carefully watered, then loosed and given a little time to relax before being loaded. He must not be allowed to get cold. Those horses required for routine tests after their race deserve the same consideration and the test should not, as is frequently seen, be an excuse for the lad to abandon his charge and to go for refreshment. The testing team are only too willing to allow that to happen as they have no interest in the welfare of the horse. Our lads should understand that they are never to leave the horse completely, and that he is not to be let loose in the sample box until his breathing has regularised, despite any initial bluster from the testers. We will require an accurate report on how long all our runners blew for, and whether anything untoward was observed, including in the testing procedure. Apart from treating any minor cuts not obvious immediately after the race, that is all there is to it. The evening feed will be left by the head lad, although many stables feed mash after racing, our runners be will fed as usual but at slightly reduced level. If possible we should see every horse after he returns from racing.