

The sales supremos



Lissa Oliver meets renowned bloodstock agents, Peter and Ross Doyle

If they were to come up for auction with the sales companies, the blacktype-laden pedigree and track performance of Peter & Ross Doyle Bloodstock would top the sale every time.

The father and son team know a sales topper when they see one, but more often than not can pick up future champions for a good deal less.

Recent Group 1 stars and subsequent stallions Paco Boy and Canford Cliffs, for example, could have been picked up for 30,000gns and 50,000gns respectively, had you the eye and the expertise of the bloodstock doyens. Last season alone Peter and Ross' purchases won 231 races, including 12 group races.

It could be said that their eye for a horse has come from over 60 years of experience, if not all gained first hand from Peter, and latterly Ross, themselves, but from a wealth of inherited family knowledge.

Peter's mother owned the 1947 Irish Grand National winner Revelry, while his father, Jack, purchased such champions as Mill House and it was the earlier purchase of the subsequent



Ross and Peter Doyle

Champion Hurdle hero Another Flash that established Jack as a bloodstock agent.

Jack Doyle cemented a successful business relationship with trainers John Sutcliffe and Ryan Price, purchasing horses like Mummy's Pet and Right Tack, the first horse to win both the English and Irish 2000 Guineas.

When Peter started working with him they bought stars like Jellaby, Bruni and European champion sprinter Sandford Lad. "I started off following my father and Ryan Price around at the sales and it was a very informative education," says Peter, "Price was some man and he certainly didn't suffer fools gladly."

FORTUITOUS

The happy link with particular trainers seems to be a trait and when Peter Doyle established his bloodstock agency in 1978 with his wife Anna he enjoyed a fortuitous association with Liam Browne, and Carlingford Castle and Dara Monarch were among their many stars. "Liam was also a great trainer of jockeys," Peter reminds us, "with Tommy Carmody, Mark Dwyer, Stephen Craine and Mick Kinane.

"In the early years we also had a very good association with the late Paul de Moussac, owner of the Haras du Mezeray in Normandy, and Andre Fabre trained all of his horses." These included Grand Prix de Paris winner Homme De Loi and Grand Prix de Deauville winner Borromini."

In 1985 another famous working partnership was formed. "I was at Deauville and Richard Hannon was there. My father told me I should go and

Paco Boy, bought for 30,000gns, won eight group races including two Group 1s and has his first crop of yearlings this year

meet him, so I did. He told me he was in Deauville on holiday and had no intention of buying a horse, but he might drop into the sale for a drink on the way home from the racetrack. He did and we bought two. We bought four in that first year," recalls Peter, "and now we buy 80 or 90 every year."

Ross and Richard Hannon junior began working together 12 years ago, ensuring the association will continue into the future. "Richard junior and I hit it off" and we're very privileged to work with them," says Ross. "As they keep raising their game so we have to raise our game, which is good for all of us." Recent successes for the Doyle/Hannon team include the luminaries Olympic Glory, Law Enforcement, Maureen, Canford Cliffs, Dick Turpin, Alhebayeb, Anjaal, Toormore, Sir Prancealot, Strong Suit, Lilbourne Lad, Harbour Watch, Chandlery, Trumpet Major and Zebedee.

The selection process for such a large number of animals involves a great deal of studying of catalogues, foot work to view every animal in the book, but ultimately the impression a horse makes in the first 30 seconds of viewing is vital.

That may seem unfairly brief to the breeders and consignors who have invested three years in their final product, but it's all that's needed to spot a good-looking athletic future racehorse.

"We always look at the individual, the way it walks, its attitude," says Peter. "If it's a good athletic horse, we're willing to forgive any shortfalls or negatives on the page. We didn't always have the budget for a good pedigree. You can pick up a bargain where otherwise a good pedigree would make it too expensive. Ryan Price always used to say to me, 'You can't train paper, Peter'."

Ross agrees. "The horse has to look the part. If you're buying a few on spec and you're left with one, it's you paying the training fees, so you want a racehorse. In the

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It's a Doyle/Hannon one-two in the 2010 St James's Palace as Canford Cliffs beats Dick Turpin



Ross and Peter with Richard Hannon - "Richard junior and I hit it off and we're very privileged to work with them."

30 seconds a horse walks out of the box you can see its head down, showing it's relaxed. You want a horse to look good physically and mentally. That they show themselves very well and stand up in a relaxed way is of major importance.

"I always like to see them in the pre-race, as that mirrors the racecourse, with all the people and the activity and noise. I like to see them relaxed and striding out. It's the final tick in the box. Not every horse is at its best on the day and some go home unsold, but to even get a horse through to the sales in good shape with no issues is a pretty mean feat. We have fantastic horse people across the board and that's why the breed is so sought after across the world."

As well as son Ross, who joined his father in 2001, and Peter's wife Anna, the team includes Carol Tinkler and for the bigger sales, Fanny Hannon. They divide each catalogue between them, ensuring every horse is inspected.

"We go over two days ahead to look at the yearlings and we meet in the evening and discuss our notes and make a short list," explains Ross. "Then Dad and I look at the horses left on that list and come up with a short-short list. We narrow it down to which horse suits which client and then check scopes and x-rays and once they've been through all the hoops we head to the sales ring."

While the sales team are flat out from August onwards, the invaluable office team are holding the fort. "We couldn't operate without Davina Doyle - no relation - and Robert Alexander in the office," Peter says, "they keep the whole show on the road." He also gives special credit to his wife Anna. "Anna and I have been working together for 35 years, longer than most marriages, and never a cross word - but lots of head butting and eye gouging!" he laughs.

Although best known these days for the Hannon association, the Doyles have clients across the globe and also buy for Norwegian trainer Wido Neuroth, Scandinavia's leading trainer for the past 12 years.

"We've been working with him for 18 years," says Peter, who purchased the triple Derby hero Valley Chapel for Neuroth, winner of the Derby in Norway, Sweden and Denmark as a three-year-old, as well as dual Derby winner Appel Au Maitre, who won the Norwegian and Swedish runnings, and Swedish Derby hero Handsome Hawk.

"We bought a very good filly from the late Con Collins called Kill The Crab

and she went on to become the champion mare in Norway, winning both the Norwegian 1000 Guineas and beating the colts in the Norwegian 2000 Guineas in 1995, which got us started over there."

With newer clients including Paul D'Arcy and Amanda Perrett, as well as clients from overseas and a shopping list of up to 90 a year for Richard Hannon, it's little wonder Peter & Ross Doyle Bloodstock figure heavily as signatories on sales docket.

They purchased eight yearlings two weeks ago at Arqana in Deauville, Europe's first yearling sale of the year, including the €1m Dubawi colt consigned by Ballylinch Stud. "There's room for everybody and there are always plenty of horses," Peter points out, "the one thing we'll never run short of is horses!"

"A bit of juggling has to go on," Ross concedes, "and sometimes one or two horses will clash for different clients, but a lot of our clients know each other well and they'll chat it through. Our clients are all very understanding and they give us free rein. We're not tied down to looking for a particular sire or type, allowing us to be very focused on the horse as an individual. The pedigree is just a bonus, a nice pedigree just makes the horse more expensive. Where others might be put off by a not so good pedigree, we're often able to get the horse at a reasonable price."

Many of the Peter and Ross Doyle purchases are going on to prominent stallion careers, which Ross finds particularly rewarding. "It's very satisfying to see them going on to stud and I can't wait to see Zebedee's first crop next week. We've also the first crop of Paco Boy to look forward to." Peter is also looking forward to seeing Fairyhouse purchase Pether's Moon shape up into a possible Cup horse for the Hannon team next year.

There seems to be plenty for the father-son team to look forward to, but is this a reasonable reflection of the industry as a whole? "The industry is doing very well," Peter believes, "racing is a popular sport and sales figures are up and European horses are in demand worldwide. The USA is looking for good European horses again, because they're not medicated, they're sound and they last. One of the first horses we sold to Hong Kong won the Hong Kong Derby and the Scandinavian market is also strong."

"The market has been remarkable,"

Ross agrees, "there's a uniqueness to the racing business, an adrenalin rush. A person could be a hugely successful businessman or sport's star, but nothing compares to a win. Racing is seen as another investment vehicle and it's such a

fascinating process, that's what makes it so attractive. It can be very tough at times, but it keeps on attracting people.

"European breeders are recognised as the best in the world," he continues. "At the sales we're buying from the best horsemen and we know that horse has been raised on good soil and has had the best possible preparation.

"When Richard [Hannon] gets them he will often say, 'this has come from a good home'. They're a credit to the people who raise them. There's huge competition and a worldwide market, but people keep coming to European sales looking to get these horses. The racing here is recognised as top class and it's a huge attraction to the rest of the world."

This doesn't mean the industry can afford to become complacent and the race day experience, in particular, can still be raised a level, Ross feels. "Owners like to have their own facilities and be made to feel a little bit special. Every track should have an owners' facility where you can sit and eat. Not all race-tracks offer the same level of hospitality to the owner; for instance when an owner has a winner, the tracks that stand out are those who offer a glass of champagne and a DVD of the race to take home. These are small touches that don't cost the earth but make all the difference."

Small touches indeed, but it seems the biggest help any owner can get is having Peter & Ross Doyle Bloodstock on their side. Looking back at their star-studded lists of purchases, you can't help but feel tempted to become involved with one of the many stars they're sure to buy for the future.

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