



“Canford Cliffs was probably the best horse I ever bought,” Peter Doyle \ Peter Mooney

The start of something wonderful

It didn’t take the pair long to unearth a Group 1 winner together, Peter says: “In the first year, we bought good horses that won listed races, but in the second year, we bought a horse called Tirol. He was the first good horse, really good horse we bought.”

Since then, the Doyle/Hannon honour roll has grown extensively, featuring the likes of Barney Roy, Canford Cliffs, Dick Turpin, Mehmas, Olympic Glory, Paco Boy, Pether’s Moon, Tiggy Wiggy, Toormore, and many more.

Together, the pair forged a reputation for sourcing talented individuals, often unfashionably bred, usually at an affordable price, their budgetary requirements focussing their success at two sales in particular.

“Donny (Goffs UK) and Fairyhouse (Tattersalls Ireland), in those days,” Peter confirms. “See, Richard had owners that wanted results. They weren’t into breeding or standing stallions. If they got a good horse, and somebody came with a good offer, they’d sell them, but they wanted to win early. They didn’t want to be paying keep all the time.”

Considering his success with precocious types, I’m eager to get Peter’s take on those who criticise the market’s focus on speed. The agent replies: “It’s up to everybody’s individual thoughts, what they want. I’ve always liked speed, but I’ve also always liked to have a good horse. There was Carlingford Castle, second in the Derby for Liam Browne. Ross [Doyle] bought Mojo Star for Richard Jr. They weren’t all just speed, but we just buy a nice horse.”

So, what then does he make of the planned changes to the Windsor Castle Stakes? “It’s nonsense, really,” he says. “It’s a five-furlong race, it was set up that way, and the people who set up the whole system years ago knew what they were doing. And why shouldn’t it be a five-furlong sprint?”

Anna adds: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. Why would they mess with it? You need a range of distances, don’t you, to make it interesting?”

Something that keeps racing interesting is a lack of hard-set rules, with horses constantly defying odds determined by their pedigree, conformation, or stereotyped characteristics. Flashy markings are something generally frowned upon by most yearling buyers, but the Doyles bought a particularly distinctive and talented horse in Kool Kompany. Buying him demonstrated Peter’s people skills, if his recollection is anything to go by.

“I remember that distinctly well,” Peter says of the day at Goffs UK. “I saw him the day before, with a big white face, like a cow, but he walked, he had great movement, so I didn’t tell Richard about him until we were leaning over the ring.

“I said, ‘That horse walks well, Richard, doesn’t he? Look at him. Saw him yesterday. You wouldn’t like him, would you?’”

“‘What do you mean I wouldn’t like him?’ he said. ‘What about his face?’ I asked. ‘He doesn’t run with his face, you know?’ he replied.

“And we bought him, because he was a great mover. But if I had brought him down, and he came out looking like that, he might have put him back in again.”

Anna chips in: “It’s really funny like that, isn’t it? Because, generally, the Hannon’s didn’t like a flashy horse - most trainers don’t like four white socks and a big flashy face. But Richard was taken with the walk, which was what he loves most about a horse; a good walk.”

Peter Doyle on...

The best horse he ever bought

Canford Cliffs. He won five Group 1s. Now, Ross and Richard Jr bought Paco Boy and he won five Group 1s as well. I mean, they’re two horses of outstanding quality.

The year Canford Cliffs came to win the Irish Guineas, while they were saddling him, he pulled his shoe off and they had to get the blacksmith. I was leaning against his box, and he put his head on my shoulder and went to sleep, and he never moved while this man fixed the shoe.

There was a legitimate reason why he didn’t give Frankel a run in the Sussex Stakes; he broke down when he came to challenge.

There was very good horse in there that doesn’t get enough credit, a horse called Barney Roy. He broke the track record at Ascot [in the St James’s Palace Stakes].

The best National Hunt horse he’s bought

The best horse we had our hands on was probably Silver Buck, who won the Gold Cup and two King Georges. That’s a long time ago now.

Ross has bought some very nice National Hunt horses in recent years including Il Etait Temps and Lost in Translation.

His favourite type of horse to buy – National Hunt, flat, foal, yearling?

A winner. Or a profit maker.

The greatest lesson learnt from his father

Listen. Listen to the people you’re dealing with.

Listen to people you’re working with. Don’t always open your mouth, you know, listen and learn. Imagine what I picked up from Richard Hannon and Liam Browne. Captain Ryan Price, Jack Doyle, Jack White...

What he would like changed at the sales

Quicker selling. Why do you have to stand there at 9.30 at night waiting for another 10 horses? Particularly in England, in Newmarket in particular. The staff with the horses have been going since half five, six o’clock in the morning.

Changes he would like made in racing

Prize money; we need to do much better, in Ireland and in England. The owners are the life blood of racing.

Everything’s getting more expensive - trying to feed the kids at home, feeding the horses, everything. They make excuses with the prize money, but they’re only blowing hot air. It’s very simple. All you have to do is watch the States, Hong Kong, Australia, even in South Africa; the prize money compared to the costs is so much better.

When I went out there [South Africa] first, 32 years ago, I bought a couple of fillies and, if they won a race, they paid nearly 60% of the training fees for the year. That’s fantastic.

Trainers in England for instance, if they send their horses from Dorset up to Musselburgh or to Carlisle, to win a £2,500 race, and probably get £1,700 for winning it. Then the jockey’s fees come out, and all the little things come out, and it costs you to go to win a race.

Eye for a horse

On the subject of Hannon’s priorities, Peter tells me: “He gave me a lesson one day in Newmarket, at the outside ring. He says, ‘look at that horse over there,’ [waves hand in time with the horse’s gait]. ‘See that? Music. See? Rhythm.’”

What’s clear is that Doyle and Hannon both have a natural instinct when it comes to spotting talent, and perhaps their often limited budget pushed them to take a chance when opportunity arose without much notice. Usually buying on spec, the pair had to trust their guts, and an established pattern of it working out only encouraged them further.

“We were in Fairyhouse one year – we’d buy six there every year – and we’d already bought six or seven when he [Richard Hannon] said it’s time for lunch,” Peter recalls. “So, we have lunch, we start drinking and decide to back to the hotel.

“We’re walking past the parade ring, and this filly goes by, and we both look at each other and walk in after her. We bought her for six grand, and she ended up being a good filly. She won the Weatherby Super Sprint. Miss Stamper was her name.”

That rare good eye for a horse is something Anna shares, and it didn’t take long for her to unearth her own flagbearer, Peter tells me. “Anna was always a spotter, all the way through for us, and her claim to fame came up early enough,” he says.

“She put a filly on the list that Richard and I bought, and she was called Indian Ink. She won two Group 1s as a two-year-old and three-year-old.” Bought for 25,000gns from Killeen Castle Stud at the Tattersalls Book 1 Sale, the ‘neat filly,’ as Anna described her, later resold for 2,000,000gns after winning the Cheveley Park Stakes and Coronation Stakes.

Ross’s success in rugby (he played for Leinster and for Ireland’s seven-a-side teams) and third-level qualifications gave Peter hope that their son would choose an easier career path than he and Anna, but the signs were there from an early stage that Ross, too, was a lost cause, Peter says.

“When we came back in from the races, and Ross was only three or four, he was sitting in front of the television with Ed Byrnes’ book, The Racing Year. He had the book in front of him, watching racing on the telly.

“And he’d tell me what happened to Sandy Barclay, or what happened to Lester Piggott. How Lester let Wally Swinburn up his inside, when he won the King George on Shergar.”

By 2000, Ross’s name had joined the business and, with Richard Hannon Sr having since passed the baton to his son, the Doyle and Hannon names have continued to fly high together.

Peter and Anna have taken a step back but remain part of the spotting team at some of the sales, along with Carol Tinkler, Patrick Keogh, Catherine Greensit, Andrew Hickman and, last but not least, Fanny Hannon.

As Peter says, “It is great to see Ross and Richard Jr working so well together.”

**Anna Doyle selected Indian Ink, a dual Group 1 winner that cost 25,000gns as a yearling **

Tattersalls/Laura Green

