

BLOODSTOCK WORLD



MARKET WATCH

THE year at Goffs got off to an upbeat start. Demand for the quality lots was strong and mirrored the happenings of the major sales towards the end of 2011. The opening day saw the better yearlings sell well, but it was still tough going for many as just over half of the 269 lots offered were sold. Buyers could afford to be selective. The level of activity yesterday was heartening, with domestic buyers and a varied international presence doing battle. This allowed the auction to match last year's clearance rate.



Ryan McElligott reports on the concluding day of the Goffs February Sale

AT €500,000 Teofilo's winning sister dominated the second and final leg of the Goffs February Sale yesterday when the company's first auction of the year posted a much-improved set of final returns. A total of 103 more horses came under the hammer at the latest renewal, which saw its turnover double from around €1.8m to just over €3.7m. The

€500,000 for Teo's Sister helps turnover to double

average improved by 54 per cent, from €8,700 to €13,381, while the median progressed by ten per cent to €5,500. The clearance rate held firm at 62 per cent. Jim Bolger exerted a profound influence on the company's 2011 November Sale and his decision to offer Teo's Sister this week provided the February Sale with a new record. The bidding for the four-year-old daughter of Galileo, who won

a Leopardstown maiden on her debut in July, opened at €200,000 before the hammer came down in favour of Frank Benillouche, of the prominent French stud Haras de Bernesq, at €500,000. "She's a lovely filly and a very well bred one," said Benillouche, whose farm has been a successful French operation for several years and stood the likes of Marchand De Sable. "We were looking to buy a quality mare like her for the stud and we are very pleased to have got her. She's from a top family and is a really good mare to bring back. I thought she was good value."



Teo's Sister: contributed towards improved set of returns

Shortly afterwards the Castlebridge Consignment offered the Grand Lodge mare Tarbela, whose New Approach foal made €120,000 here on Wednesday. The dam of the Chesham Stakes winner Big Audio was sold in foal to Arcano to agent Cormac McCormack at €160,000. "I've bought her for a long-established client and she will

be visiting Canford Cliffs this year," reported McCormack. "She's already bred a Royal Ascot winner and comes from a strong and current family." In his end-of-sale statement Henry Beeby said: "There has never been any doubt in our minds that the Goffs February Sale is a class above in terms of auctions at this time of year, and

trade over the last two days has clearly illustrated that this is Europe's premier mid-winter sale. "The sale of Teo's Sister set a new record price for the February Sale and, as with Banimpire here in November, Jim Bolger has proved yet again that when you bring the best to Goffs you get the best prices." **Lot-by-lot details, page 20**

Using genetics as a test for top talent

VIEWPOINT

Byron Rogers explains how he believes the idea of determining elite talent in the thoroughbred through genetic testing is becoming increasingly possible



TALENT identification is an inexact science, even when science is used to identify it. It is possible for a genetic test, or a cardiovascular and splenic evaluation, to eliminate a lot of variables, especially those you can't see at a yearling sale, and take away those horses with a low percentage chance of becoming an elite performer. But in the end, as much science as we wrap around it, it is prediction, and there are exceptions to the rule.

Performance Genetics is a company formed by myself, along with pedigree authority Alan Porter and geneticist Dr Steve Tammariello from Binghampton University in New York two years ago. We have since added Dr Greg Fox, a respected trainer and veterinarian, as an equine performance specialist.

Our goal is to identify an elite thoroughbred talent before it races and as of today the company has developed three tests – the Sales Select, Performance Genetics and Optimal Distance Test.

The Performance Genetics Test and Optimal distance test are genetic tests only. We developed them by gathering 400 DNA samples; 200 horses who were Grade 1 winners and 200 who were well-bred but had failed to run a 78 or better Beyer speed figure in at least five starts and had no known disease or injury.

The groups were evenly split between fillies and colts,

and sprinters and distance horses. From there we compared each of the groups (fast vs. slow, slow sprint colts vs. slow sprint fillies, etc) and found there were about 200 genetic variations within genes that made the elite and non-elite horses what they are. We pared the 200 down to the most influential and put this into a prediction model that plotted if the horse was more likely to be a sprinter or a stayer, and what it was likely to be in terms of class. This is the Performance Genetics Test.

The Optimal Distance test is the same but looks at the variants that determine distance.

OUR flagship test, the Sales Select, is different in that we don't rely on genetics alone. We took the view that performance identification is like tackling a disease. You don't just take DNA, test it and say you have a greater chance of getting cancer. Doctors evaluate that as well as family history and personal habits, and put it into a clinic-genomic model to give you a predicted outcome. We are also mindful that in testing DNA you are missing environmental interactions with the DNA that can influence outcomes, so we added into the model a cardiovascular and splenic evaluation via ultrasound.

Even within the model there are pockets of higher predictability. If we test

yearling colts who come back as elite sprinters, and they have certain cardio and spleen dimensions, the model can confidently predict they will become elite sprinters. There are cases of horses becoming stakes winners when the model says they should not (this occurs a lot in Listed and Grade 3 races where trainer effect is high), but the model is good at predicting the best horses.

We have exceeded our expectations in terms of the Sales Select report and the market in America seems to have taken the test on board. Genetics and performance evaluation is not for everyone and we do not want to force it along any faster than it wants to be embraced.

We have a breeding model that we are working on and hope is something that can be embraced to help breeders make better decisions with their matings. Genetics is helping people make significant gains in the cattle and plant industries and we are hopeful that in time the equine field will catch up.

We are also involved in investigating a lot of the diseases that limit performance. With our genetic bank on some 400 horses, we have a good control group to investigate various diseases. We have joined up with a couple of universities to use our genetic database, one university looking at wobbler syndrome and another looking into laryngeal paralysis.

As much as we are pleased with what we have done so far, we are more excited to see if it is possible for researchers to understand how these diseases work and how we can improve the breed as a whole.

Monsieur Bond (IRE)

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