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'Nobody Knows Me But Everybody Knows Urban Sea': Jean Lesbordes Recalls The Extraordinary Mare

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Jean Lesbordes, trainer of Urban Sea, at home in Chantilly | Emma Berry

By Emma Berry

On the day of this year's French Guineas, Jean Lesbordes perused the runners in the paddock for the Prix de la Seine, made his way to the stands to watch the race, and then back to the winner's enclosure for another look at the victrix Hidden Dimples (Ire), a daughter of Frankel (GB).

Thirty years earlier, Lesbordes had a much stronger connection to the winner of the same race. He was her trainer and the filly's name was Urban Sea. The fact that her name appears in the third generation of the pedigree of Hidden Dimples will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed the progress of that great mare. It is an understatement to say that Urban Sea's influence has been profound; she is arguably the

most significant matriarch of the modern era. Without her there would be no Galileo (Ire), and therefore no Frankel (GB). No Sea The Stars (Ire), who would come to emulate his mother by winning the race for which she is best remembered of her seven stakes victories, the 1993 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

It is at Epsom that Urban Sea's legacy runs the deepest, however. When Sea The Stars followed his half-brother Galileo by winning the Derby in 2009, the guest of honour that day was trainer/breeder Arthur Budgett, whose broodmare Windmill Girl (GB) had been the last mare before Urban Sea to produce two Derby winners, starting 40 years earlier with Blakeney (GB) and followed four years later by Morston (GB).

It doesn't end there, of course. Galileo is now the sire of five Derby winners and grandsire of another two. One of those, Masar (Ire) (New Approach {Ire}), has Urban Sea on both sides of his pedigree as his third dam Melikah (Ire) (Lammtarra) is one of her four daughters, three of whom are now black-type producers themselves.

Sea The Stars, too, has sired the Derby winner Harzand (Ire) as well as Oaks winner Taghrooda (Ire), and he has the favourite for this year's Oaks in Emily Upjohn (GB). Nine of the top 10 in the betting for the Derby are all sons or grandsons of Galileo. Of the horses remaining in both Epsom Classics this weekend, 14 of the 18 potential Derby runners have Urban Sea in their pedigree, as do seven of 12 in the Oaks, not to mention 11 of 18 for Sunday's Prix du Jockey Club.

The Prix de la Seine of May 31, 1992 was really just the start for Urban Sea, certainly as far as the racing public was concerned. Though she had won an October maiden as a 2-year-old, this Listed contest was her first black-type victory, having finished third in the G2 German 1,000 Guineas on her previous start. For Lesbordes, however, it was really just the affirmation of a feeling he had had about Urban Sea ever since he first saw and fell in love with the chestnut daughter of Miswaki and Allegretta (GB) as a yearling at Marc de Chambure's Haras d'Etream.

Everybody could ride her, even the girls who came to help at my stable on a Sunday. She was so straightforward. In our stable her name was 'La Mule'.

In partnership with Michel Henochsberg and Maurice Legasse, de Chambure bred Urban Sea at Denali Stud in Kentucky under their shared name of Marystead Farm. Her dam Allegretta, from a family with its roots deep in Germany's outstanding nursery Gestut Schlenderhan, was no one-horse wonder at stud. Her later foals included the 2,000 Guineas winner King's Best (Kingmambo) and G3 Prix de Flore winner Allez Les Trois (Riverman), who went on to produce the Prix du Jockey Club winner Anabaa Blue (GB) (Anabaa), but none would leave their imprint on the breed in the manner of Urban Sea.

"In the beginning I chose her on pedigree because she was by Miswaki and I remember when I went to Keeneland I saw Mr Prospector and I loved him," says Lesbordes, who bought the yearling filly for FF280,000 (circa €33,000).

“I saw her in the stud, a grand-daughter of Mr Prospector, and I just felt that everything was right. That was just before the August Sale. When I saw her, I don't know why, but something about her spoke to me. So when she came to Deauville I said, 'this one is for me'.”

That first important decision made, Urban Sea returned to the Chantilly stable of Lesbordes, whose passion for horses was sparked by attending the races with his father in Bordeaux, close to where he grew up. From stints on a stud farm while still studying, he worked for several trainers before eventually training in his own right in the south-west of France, including a successful period with jumpers in Pau.

“I had some results so I ended up moving to Chantilly,” he explains of his journey north in 1986. “My ambition was to win every type of Classic, and the horses who weren't good enough for Classics could go jumping. On the Flat I didn't want to run in handicaps.”

Bar one period when the number of horses in his stable rose to around 60, Lesbordes usually trained around 25 horses. Urban Sea was one of 20 horses purchased for a single owner.

“I bought Urban Sea for a Japanese owner with a big string in France,” he explains. “I bought her in August and then by February the Japanese owner had a financial crash.”

Faced with the prospect of losing the horses, Lesbordes was fortuitously introduced to Hong Kong businessman David Tsui through a mutual acquaintance, and Tsui, originally in partnership with a friend, ended up buying the entire group.

“Our friendship has continued for more than 30 years,” says Lesbordes. He remains closely connected to the Tsui family and was present at Longchamp for the Arc victory of their homebred Sea The Stars, who raced in the colours of David and Ling Tsui's son Christopher.

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That year was a momentous one. Urban Sea died from complications after foaling her final son, Born To Sea (Ire), in March 2009. Come April, Sea the Stars started his extraordinary romp, month after month, through six Group 1 races: the 2,000 Guineas, Derby, Eclipse, Juddmonte International, Irish Champion Stakes, and finally the Arc itself.

It is easy to see how Lesbordes is so strongly attached to his clear favourite of Urban Sea's offspring. It was not, however, instantly obvious to the trainer that he had a future champion on his hands when Sea The Stars's mother first entered training. In fact, Urban Sea was given a nickname that is certainly not befitting of her now-legendary status.

“In the stable at the beginning she was the easiest to ride,” he recalls. “Everybody could ride her as a yearling, even the girls who came to help at my stable on a Sunday. She was so straightforward. In our stable her name was 'La Mule'.

“My son Clement started to ride her and when she started to work she was fantastic. As a two-year-old she had a little issue with her fetlock so we had to stop. But it was no problem and then she ran later at two and won the second time she ran at Maisons-Laffitte. She was very easy to train. She was asleep most of the time, but every time we showed her something she picked it up no problem.”

In my life as a trainer only three times I said 'I will win'. Three times. And the Arc was one of them.

It is this equable temperament that Lesbordes says he believes has been key to the success not just of Urban Sea but of her offspring. Of her 11 foals, nine raced, eight of which were black-type winners, four of those at the highest level. Certainly in assessing the phenomenal success Ballydoyle has had with Galileo, Aidan O'Brien refers regularly to the strength of his temperament and to that of his offspring.

“Sea The Stars had the same character,” says Lesbordes, who ceased training a handful of years after Urban Sea retired from racing as a five-year-old. He later spent eight years working for the *Paris-Turf*. “He started in training when I was working as a journalist so I had more opportunity to follow him. I saw Sea The Stars for the first time at Epsom for the Derby and when he came into the parade ring he was so quiet, almost asleep, just the same. Urban Sea gave him this disposition.

“It's incredible because all of her produce were fantastic. When you have a horse like Galileo you think that is pretty special, but then after that you have Sea The Stars. Incredible. Then there were the good fillies, and now they are all good producers, too.”

For Lesbordes, though the memories of Urban Sea are still fresh decades later, they come with a bittersweet edge. His son Clement, her daily exercise rider who was 20 at the time of the mare's Arc victory, was killed in a cycling accident four years later. He had accompanied Urban Sea on her many trips abroad, to Japan, Hong Kong, England, Germany, Canada and America, with that road once travelled so happily together coming to the most tragically abrupt ending.

“I remember everything about Urban Sea,” says Lesbordes, now 76 and still resident in Chantilly.

He adds wistfully, “Nobody knows me but everybody knows Urban Sea. When I am finished Urban Sea will always be remembered. For me, it is extra special as my son took Urban Sea everywhere. It was magic.”

Of the most magical of all those days, he says, “I felt sure she would win the Arc. I was sure. I don't know why. In my life as a trainer only three times I said 'I will win'. Three times. And the Arc was one of them.

“On the day of the Arc I was quite nervous and I saw one of the breeders of Urban Sea, Michel Henochsberg. The race just before the Arc, Verveine (Lear Fan) won the Prix de l'Opera and Urban Sea had beaten her in Deauville in August. In the stables, Michel Henochsberg said to me, 'C'est dommage'.

“I remember at the time it felt like a knife in the heart. But after the Arc it was not a shame at all!”

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Dubawi At Twenty

Thursday, January 13, 2022 at 8:30 am | [Back to: Europe, Shared News Europe](#)

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Dubawi turns 20 on Feb. 7 | *Darley Stallions*

By *Emma Berry*

Strip away the brass name plates, parade the Darley stallions in front of seasoned horsemen and ask them to pick the horse who last year sired three Breeders' Cup victors among 38 stakes winners and was the broodmare sire of the Derby winner. Of those who haven't seen him before, it is unlikely that many would choose Dubawi (Ire).

Unlike his sire, the brilliant but ill-fated Dubai Millennium (GB), he is not a horse who 'fills the eye' with those long classic lines and fluent stride. On the short side and fairly close-coupled, with a habit of growing a coat as thick as a native pony in midwinter, Dubawi is not your archetypal elegant Thoroughbred. But those same seasoned horsemen will doubtless have seen enough in their time to know that when it comes to racing and breeding, handsome is as handsome does. And Dubawi does it all.

That started on the racecourse. An unbeaten juvenile who became his sire's first stakes winner in the G3 Superlative S. and went on to land the G1 National S., Dubawi then graduated to his Classic season with a warm-up fifth in the 2000 Guineas before winning the Irish equivalent. The Derby distance proved too much for him, but he was not disgraced when third to Motivator (GB) and Walk In The Park (Ire). Dubawi then emulated his sire by winning the G1 Prix Jacques le Marois, and signed off by finishing second to Starcraft (NZ) in the G1 Queen Elizabeth II S.

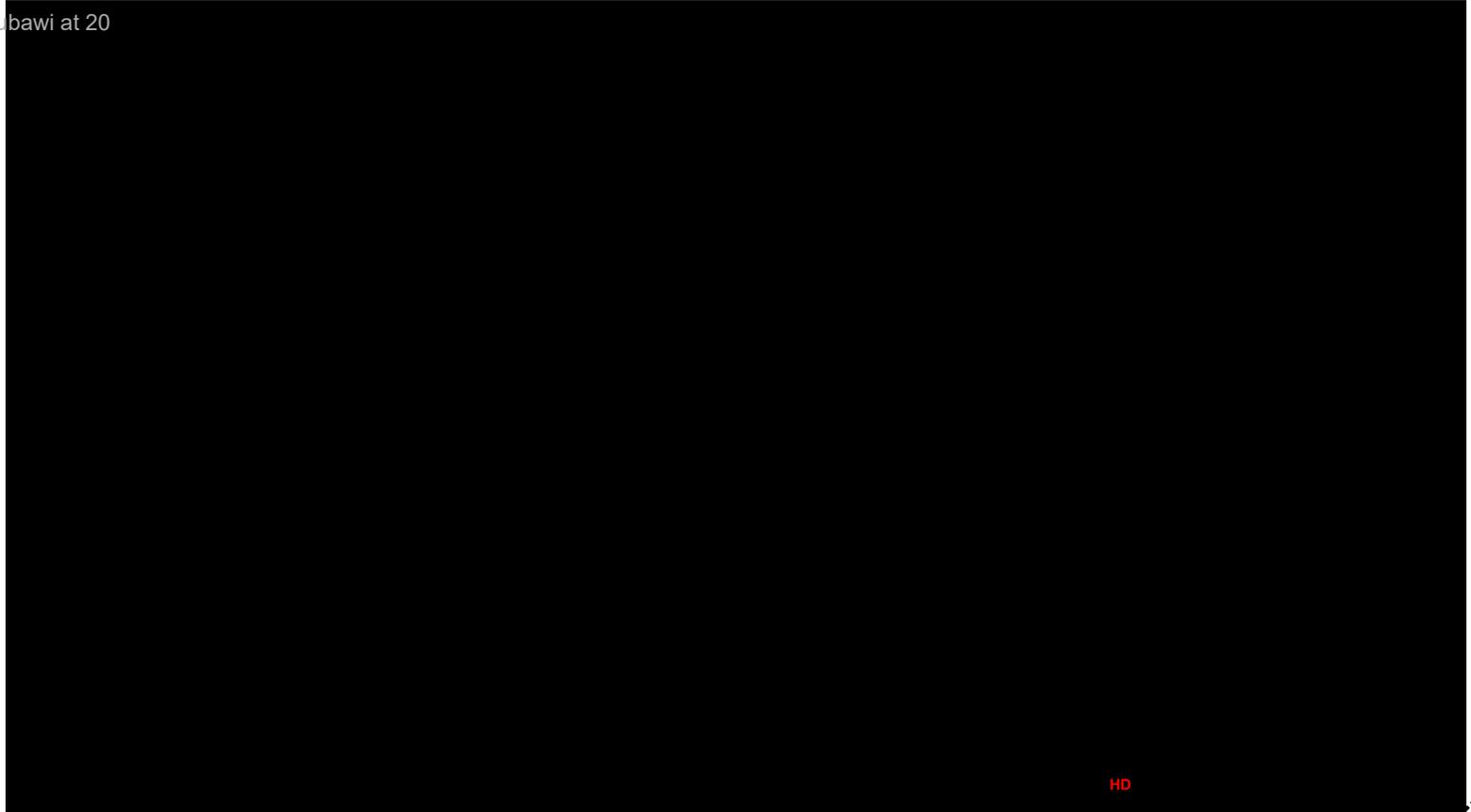


Since then, he has spent all bar one of the Northern Hemisphere seasons at Dalham Hall Stud in Newmarket, while he also made three visits to Darley Australia in the early years of his second career. As his 20th birthday approaches on February 7, Dubawi is rightly revered as an outstanding stallion, a burgeoning sire of sires and broodmare sire, and the main conduit of the Mr Prospector line in Europe, making him a more-than-useful mate for mares from the dominant Northern Dancer lines. For four years, he was accompanied on the Darley roster by another son of Dubai Millennium, the €1.2 million yearling purchase Echo Of Light (GB), who died in 2012.

“With one of his two stallion sons, the great Dubai Millennium has delivered for us, and that means everything,” says Sam Bullard, Darley's director of stallions.

“Now we want sons of Dubawi to be successful. Night of Thunder has got off to such an incredible start, and Time Test, Zarak and others doing so well is testimony to the horse. We are very fortunate that we've got horses like Ghaiyyath, Space Blues and Too Darn Hot all coming through on the roster.”

Dubawi at 20



The first foal of his dam, the Italian Oaks winner Zomaradah (GB) (Deploy {GB}), Dubawi was born at Kildangan Stud, where he later stood one season, and he hails from the same family as a sire who was already ensconced in the Kildangan stallion unit at that time, the Breeders' Cup Turf and Coronation Cup winner In The Wings (GB). More pertinently, though, he was also one of a small number of foals expected that year by Dubai Millennium.

Sheikh Mohammed's pride in his homebred so prophetically named to win the Dubai World Cup of 2000 was renowned. Dubai Millennium's racing record was hugely impressive. He was beaten only once in ten starts when finishing ninth behind Oath in the Derby, and on what would transpire to be his final performance in the G1 Prince of Wales's S. at Royal Ascot, the applause started ringing out when he was only halfway up the straight, so emphatic was the manner of his victory. But a little over six weeks later his racing career was over when he suffered a hind-leg fracture on the gallops. Brutally, Dubai Millennium's stud career was even more brief when, during his first covering season, he was struck down with grass sickness and died on April 29, 2001.

“The whole stallion operation at Darley was set up on the back of Dubai Millennium really,” recalls Bullard. “We had this wonderful racehorse, the greatest horse that Godolphin had ever had, and when he retired to stud that was the catalyst really for the stallion operation that is here now, and always the number one goal was to get the top stallions of tomorrow.”

Clearly, those mares to have visited Dubai Millennium before his untimely death were of a decent calibre, but the odds were stacked against him making a meaningful impression on the breed when the foaling season of 2002 was complete and his sole crop numbered just 56. Sheikh Mohammed set about buying up a number outside those bred by his operation, but ultimately it was a homebred who would become not only Dubai Millennium's best son, but one of the best stallions in the world.

Most importantly, Dubawi's influence is now growing through his sons. He stands alongside five of them on the Darley roster: Ghaiyyath (Ire), Too Darn Hot (GB), Night Of Thunder (Ire), Postponed (Ire) and the recently retired Space Blues (Ire). And up to 20 sons of Dubawi are at stud around the world, including in America, Japan and India.

Night Of Thunder, his second 2000 Guineas winner, was the champion first-season sire in Europe in 2019, while the Aga Khan Studs' Zarak (Fr) led the French freshmen last year, and the National Stud's Time Test (GB) was another young son to make a favourable impression with his first runners in 2021.

A top-five finisher in the stallion table in each of the last nine years, and on four occasions runner-up to Galileo (Ire), Dubawi had to settle for third in 2021 when Frankel (GB) nudged his own sire down a slot to second. But Dubawi's 54% winners-to-runners strike-rate was higher than both Frankel and Galileo, and was a figure that only his son New Bay (GB) could match in the top 50 stallions in Britain and Ireland. On worldwide earnings for last year he was at the top of the table, those lucrative Breeders' Cup victories no doubt helping in this regard.

In his 39 years with Darley, head stallion man Ken Crozier has worked with both Dubai Millennium and Dubawi and describes the horse now regarded as the king of the stallion yard as “straightforward, uncomplicated, a hard, gutsy horse”.

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He continues, “When Dubawi first arrived here, he's obviously physically a very different animal to his father, but he was coming in as a Classic winner with a high profile and I guess we had high expectations given that, sadly, Sheikh Mohammed and Darley had lost Dubai Millennium so young.”

While Dubai Millennium's short stud career was beset with illness from an early stage, the only concerns Dubawi ever gives those looking after him is how to keep him trim.

Crozier adds, "We have him on shavings. He would eat everything in sight. He gets fed a little and often. He will get fed hay three times a day because he would eat a bale of hay in a half an hour. So that's the only problem we have with Dubawi, keeping the weight off him."

Even within the sons of Dubawi just on the Darley roster, it is easy to see that he is not a horse who stamps his stock in the manner of his old friend and rival Shamardal.

"They come in all shapes and sizes," agrees Bullard. "You can't look at them and say, 'I can see Dubawi in that'. But what you can't see is what's between their ears, and that is consistent with all of them. They just have these extraordinary temperaments, he really does pass that on."

Darley's head of nominations Dawn Laidlaw has, like Crozier and Bullard, worked with Dubawi throughout his stallion career and has witnessed the change in attitude towards him.

"I think every breeder, agent and ourselves would be honest enough to say that we probably didn't see the success of Dubawi coming in those early days," she says. "Obviously he was a great racehorse by a fantastic stallion, so he had a special place in our hearts from the beginning. But I think it would be fair to say that people didn't necessarily take to his early progeny. I mean, everybody's seen him and he's a little bit on the short side, a little bit dumpy, not the greatest walker. I think initially that's what people thought about his yearlings. I think right until they started running, and it was when they started winning that people very quickly realised he was a special stallion."

Dubawi's first crop included the 2000 Guineas winner Makfi (GB), who, in an example of the blossoming of the line, sired the G1 Poule d'Essai des Poulains winner Make Believe (GB) in his first crop, who in turn is the sire of G1 Prix du Jockey Club winner Mishriff (Ire) from his first crop. Along with Makfi in the class of 2007 were the Group 1 winners Lucky Nine (GB), Poet's Voice (GB), Dubawi Heights (GB), Monterosso (GB) and Prince Bishop (GB), as well as the Group 3 winner and Irish 1000 Guineas runner-up Anna Salai (GB), who would later become the dam of Adayar (Ire) (Frankel {GB}).

Among his 142 Group winners, Dubawi is now the sire of 48 Group/Grade 1 winners – six of those having come from his three stints down under – with the group including the 2020 Horse of the Year Ghaiyyath. From an opening fee of £25,000, he stood his fourth season at £15,000 before gradually climbing to his fee of £250,000 for the last six years, making him the most expensive stallion in Europe.

"It's very typical in a stallion, and his third and fourth years were a little bit more difficult to sell," recalls Laidlaw. "Even the best of stallions usually go through that dip. Then as soon as he had his winners, he just absolutely took off. One of the most difficult things since then has been selecting the mares. There's always an upper limit on the numbers he'll cover, so unfortunately every year there have been mares that we would have loved to have that haven't always been able to come to him. The quality of mare that comes to him every year is fantastic. It's like a who's who of the broodmare band in Europe and beyond. We're lucky to have him and I say that every day."

The sense of pride in their star stallion is quite clear at Dalham Hall Stud, where they have now had many years to bask in the reflected glory of Dubawi. Now entering his third decade and about to embark on his 17th stud season, he fortunately shows no waning in enthusiasm for his main task.

"When covering season comes, he will go down to that barn roaring and shouting, whether it's at the 8am covering session or the fourth session at midnight," says Crozier. "You'll hear him coming. You know, if he was a human, he would have his neighbours round knocking on his door."

With a reputation so hard earned, Dubawi has every right to shout about it.
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'He's Absolutely Going To Cover Flat Mares Only': Bjorn Nielsen on Stradivarius's Future Stud Career

Tuesday, June 28, 2022 at 10:17 am | [Back to: Europe](#), [Shared News Europe](#)

Updated: September 23, 2022 at 5:41 am

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Bjorn Nielsen, right, with Stradivarius at Goodwood, where he was won the Cup four times | [Racingfotos.com](#)

By *Emma Berry*

We have heard much about Frankie Dettori since his ride in the Gold Cup at Ascot, but less so about his luckless mount, Stradivarius (Ire) (Sea The Stars {Ire}).

By his owner and breeder Bjorn Nielsen he is referred to as 'The Strad', talked of as one would a favourite son or best friend. The eight-year-old stallion has earned his place in Nielsen's heart, just as he has earned the wider affection of the racing public. He remains equine box office, with this season regarded by many as a prolonged farewell tour.

The fact that the longed-for fourth victory in the Gold Cup did not go to plan is of course a source of frustration for those directly involved with Stradivarius, particularly as Nielsen believes that the Goddens had him note-perfect for his return to Ascot.



“John never really gets carried away beforehand saying anything's going to win but just reading between the lines, I know John felt like he had the horse absolutely spot on for that race,” he says.

“I think it's been a remarkable job actually, by John and his staff, of keeping this horse on the go all these years and getting him to every race. It's the one great thing about John, if you have a top horse, he'll be there on the day. You don't have to worry about him being overdone or underdone. He's surely done that with The Strad's career throughout.”

And what a career it has been: 34 races to date, seven Group 1s among his 20 wins, nine more top-three finishes, and then there's the not insignificant matter of two Stayers' Million bonuses. Unfortunate timing for the enterprising folk at Weatherbys Hamilton who launched the initiative which sounded fiendishly difficult to win, but for it starting in the year in which Stradivarius really came into his own as a four-year-old and sailed through a magnificent 2018 season unbeaten.

“He's happy in himself and he's eating well,” reports Nielsen of his star in the aftermath of Royal Ascot. “It would seem fairly obvious that if he's sound and well he's going to go to Goodwood.”

In a sense, Goodwood was where it all began for Stradivarius in 2017. He arrived for his first attempt in Group 1 company on the back of victory in the G2 Queen's Vase, and in some respects he was the villain of the piece in the Goodwood Cup when beating another popular member of the staying ranks, Big Orange (GB) (Duke Of Marmalade {Ire}), who at that stage was looking for his third win in the race. Stradivarius effectively then took ownership of the Goodwood Cup, with four straight wins until he was withdrawn on the morning of last year's race following heavy rain.

“Even though it's an incredibly long career, it seems like almost yesterday when he won that first Goodwood Cup but it's five years ago,” Nielsen says.

“He has so many qualities, but soundness is one of the most amazing qualities he has, in that he's never missed an engagement in his entire career, except when we pulled him out of Goodwood, because they had 60 millilitres of rain last year, the night before. Otherwise, he's never missed, never missed at all. It's hard to say that about any horse.”

He's never missed, which is one of the reasons Stradivarius will be so missed when he eventually retires. There are few top-class Flat horses who remain in training for seven seasons, fewer still entire males.

Which brings us to what happens next.

A sensible observer would agree that Stradivarius has all the attributes required to have a chance to make it as a stallion if, that is, that person prizes soundness, durability, toughness, and a killer turn of foot. And what breeder wouldn't look for those qualities for their future foals? The problem is that a section of breeders have become fixated on trying to satisfy a fickle market rather than breeding what they believe

will make a racehorse. It is a situation that means we now often find the winners of the best races in the programme book – you know, those that you'd give your right arm to win: the Derby, the Gold Cup – overlooked when the time comes for a stallion career.

Nielsen, naturally, is convinced of his horse's potential for a second career as a stallion, and it is hard to argue with his reasoning.

“With racehorses, half the battle is training them and getting them to the racetrack,” he says.

“[Stradivarius] has soundness and longevity and consistency in spades. If he passes that on, he's a long way to being a good stallion. Apart from his tremendous will to win, another hallmark of his is his turn of foot.

“In his case, in a hell of a lot of races going way back now, it's always been a game of, 'okay, we're going to have to keep him boxed in for as long as possible and not let him out, because once he gets out his acceleration is why he wins'. It's happened in the last three races, which is really where Frankie's got into trouble with him.”

On the theme of this year's Gold Cup, he continues, “What people don't know is what the riding instructions were. With what happened last year, twice where Frankie sat so far back and down on the rail, he was told, 'Whatever you do, don't sit on the rail and get far back on the horse this year.'

“For some reason, he went and did what he did. By the time we had a chance to get out again, it was an impossible task to make up the ground. If you look at how he was travelling when they turned in and how the winner was travelling, the winner was being ridden strongly and so were some others. The Strad was sitting there on the bridle turning in and through no fault of his own he didn't get a run. It was not a case of the others having younger legs than him. It was a case of he got no run and he was put in a position where he had no chance, unfortunately.

“But he and Frankie have had a great partnership, and Frankie has ridden more group wins on him than any other horse he has partnered. Of course I am truly grateful for the partnership they have had and I don't want recent events to overshadow that.”

Nielsen is taking a race-by-race view towards the remainder of Stradivarius's racing career. A shot at a fifth Goodwood Cup on July 26 seems likely to be his next public outing.

“There's just no other way to do it. We'll see how he goes,” he says. “Hopefully he stays sound and he turns up there. I'm sure he will, with John training him, he's going to be 100 per cent when he turns up a Goodwood.”

The decision at this stage that Nielsen can have greater control over is where, eventually, his horse will stand. Offers have already been forthcoming from studs in France and Germany.

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“I feel if I ever sold him out of this country, I'd probably get hung,” he says. “He deserves his chance in England and the one thing he's not going to do is cover jumping mares. He's absolutely going to cover Flat mares only. I'm going to give him a chance to prove that he can do it with Flat mares. I really want to keep him in England. With the history and traditions of English breeding I'd like to give him the chance in England, where there's the best racing in the world, and where he's been a bit of an icon really for the last five years.”

Nielsen continues, “There are two particular studs in England who have shown a lot of interest. I'm going to wind up almost certainly owning the horse entirely myself, without anybody taking any equity in him. I'll offer incentives and I've got six, seven, eight mares that I have in mind at this stage that I'd breed to him, that I think would suit him well.”

Though stud plans, or even retirement plans, are still a way down the road, the advertising campaign has already begun, highlighting how Stradivarius's speed compares favourably to other horses in shorter races run on the same course on the same day. For example, when winning the Goodwood Cup in 2020, the stayer's last four furlongs of the two-mile contest were run in 46.50s compared to 46.80s for Space Blues (Ire) over the final four of his seven-furlong spin in the G2 Lennox S. Similarly, in good to soft ground on Champions Day in 2018, Stradivarius recorded 36.82s over the final three furlongs of two miles, while Cracksman (GB) over the same stretch during ten furlongs of the Champion S. stopped the clock at 36.58s (finishing six lengths ahead of Crystal Ocean).

"I know commercially how things have gone, and people have got into thinking that they have to breed a six-furlong mare to a six-furlong stallion to wind up with a racehorse, but it's absolutely wrong," says Nielsen.

"Obviously it's a combination of the stallion and the mare but some of the greatest horses that have ever been bred have been by so-called stayers. The Tetrarch was the best two-year-old who ever lived. He was seven from seven as a two-year-old, over five and six furlongs, and was a great influence on the breed. He was by a Doncaster Cup horse out of a mare that won over 11 furlongs. Ribot was the same. He was the champion two-year-old in Italy, won the Arc twice, the King George, and was undefeated in 16 races. He was by Tenerani who won the Goodwood Cup when it was over two miles and five furlongs."

Nielsen also points to the influential Deep Impact (Jpn), whose 12 wins came between ten furlongs and two miles, while ruing the demise of stamina influences in Australia and America.

"We've still got our stamina in Europe. I think it's really important that we hold on to whatever stamina we have, because the rest of the world, unless they just wind up running over six furlongs, they're going to need to breed to our stallions, our mares," he says.

"The authorities start to cater for a slightly faster horse and start to bring down the racing distance. If you're breeding for a mile-and-a-half race, people are trying to breed the mile-and-a-quarter horse who just about stays. Then you bring it down to a mile and a quarter, everybody starts to try and breed milers to just about last out the mile and a quarter to have that necessary speed. Once the racing authorities start to bring down racing distances, we're on a slippery path."

Stradivarius's dam, the Wildenstein-bred Private Life (Fr) (Bering {GB}) was herself a winner at a mile and ten furlongs. His third dam Pawneese (Ire) (Carvin {Fr}) won the Oaks, Prix de Diane and King George. The record of his sire Sea The Stars is familiar to most, but it is worth repeating that he was the pre-eminent colt of his generation, from a mile to a mile and a half. His trainer John Oxx recently told TDN that he has no doubt that Sea The Stars could have won the St Leger. He is also the sire of the top-rated horse currently in training, the outstanding miler Baaeed (GB). It is easy to see whence Stradivarius derives his talent, with forebears of the highest calibre over a range of middle distances.

"I'm going to send him mile or mile-and-a-quarter mares, and I see no reason why he's not going to come up with the goods," says his breeder. "If you do that, with the soundness, his will to win and his temperament, he only has to pass on some of those traits and he'll be a good stallion."

Nielsen also has confidence that he will be backed by his fellow breeders.

"I think he will get a decent book, but of course he's going to have to prove it himself," he says. "The reason I put some of those ads out is to underline his speed. You can ask him to quicken in his races and then join the leaders and then you can actually stop with them again, which is very rare. Then he'll just sit again and relax, and then you can ask him again when it's time to go. Yes, I'm trying to influence people who think

you've got to have speed into seeing that he really does have speed, because he does. He's very fast over two or three furlongs and horses like Earthlight and Space Blues, who were terrifically fast horses, he's run faster closing times than them comfortably.”

Nielsen has consistently set out his stall when it comes to what he wants as a breeder, and that is to breed a Derby winner. Stradivarius was not that, but in a way he became so much more, especially to the many people who have become his fans over the last five or six seasons.

“It is great to hear from people when they come up to me and say, 'Thanks for keeping him in training.' Either people who run race tracks, or even members of the public will say it sometimes when you walk between the pre-parade and the paddock. It catches you by surprise, when you hear it,” says Nielsen.

“Obviously, it's great that the public love the horse and that he's had the career that he's had, and I'd like to keep him in training for another 10 years if I could. I must admit, this season now, I start feeling the heat a little bit, because I feel like he actually hasn't lost his ability. It's been more down to what's happened in his races. He didn't lose a race last year that I felt was really because he wasn't good enough.

“I do feel the pressure a little bit now, especially because if he'd run the other day and he'd been beaten ten lengths, then it would've been easy to say, 'He's older now and he's done enough and he's clearly not the force he was', and I think everybody would understand it very easily. That's the way it is, but if he runs again at Goodwood like he ran the other day, I think the people might be saying, 'Why would you stop with him?’”

Certainly, the knowledge that the number of opportunities left to see Stradivarius at the racecourse are now few will add numbers to the gate at Goodwood, whoever else turns up to oppose him on the day. And for Nielsen, his appeal is as much about his character as his innate ability.

“Everybody loves watching him walk around the paddock. He's got that great walk, like John Wayne, and they always tell me he screams and shouts down at the stables before he comes up to the parade ring. But when he gets up there, he just puts his head down. He's all business. He knows he can't be messing around now. It's time to concentrate.

“He goes down the start and he looks around him. He doesn't seem to be bothered at all that he's got a race coming up. He just stands there and looks across the Downs at Goodwood as if to say 'I've been here before, I remember'. He's got that air about him.”

Nielsen's Derby dream may remain unrealised but he knows that in Stradivarius he has been given the rarest of gifts.

“Even if I managed to somehow get lucky enough to breed the Derby winner, which was the goal even with him really, it's impossible that I could have as much fun as he's given me, because it's just been so enduring,” he admits. “Normally, if you had a Derby winner, he might run twice as a two-year-old and five times as a three-year-old and then you'd be looking at retirement, unless you kept him in training at four. With him, it's 34 races already. He's just going to be impossible to match.”

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