

# EDITORIAL

How long are you going to live?

A recent study into the likely length of time that you will live has been publicised and two simple tests are put forward....so if you are in your fifties ...the first test is how long can you stand on one leg with your eyes shut and the second is how many times in a minute can you from sitting on a chair, stand up and sit down. Ten seconds for the balancing act is good as is 40 times for the sitting and standing up routine. Simple but alleged to work , in other words how fit you are has a direct correlation to how long you can be expected to live.

How long will Harness Racing live, is it fit or unfit?

The Canadians thought they were very fit a few years ago, now they are in trouble. They can't stand on one leg very long. Once the crutch of income from Slot Machines is taken away things aren't too rosy.

The Americans are looking north and getting worried. The States that are doing well are funded to a large degree by slots. Go to New York and you will see hundreds of adverts for Empire City Casino at Yonkers Racetrack. The advert features the number of slot machines not the racing. Go to the track and beneath the grandstand is a huge "Casino" full of one arm bandits, roulette wheels fronted by electronic screens picturing a glamorous girl. Loads of people some very elderly pumping money into the machines. Go watch the racing and not many people

there at all. States without slots are struggling. Sure the big races like the Little Brown Jug, Hambletonian etc will always be well supported, Fair Racing has it's devotees but bread and butter stuff the "overnights" as the Americans refer to them are not well patronised and rely on artificial revenue.

In Australia and New Zealand the racing is well supported and has a healthy revenue from on track and off track gambling. In Australia it's a niche sport smaller than Thoroughbred racing but doing OK, in New Zealand no one is far from a "Standie" as they are called, people know, understand and like the sport.

In Europe racing is a mixed bag, not faring too well in Germany, strong in Scandinavia but not getting better, improving after some bad years in Holland and Belgium, strengthening in the Balearics (Majorca Minorca Ibiza) going downhill fast in Italy due to the economic crisis but faring very well in France. And not a slot machine in sight. The French have the best funded horse racing anywhere, they look after the product, they have a zero tolerance to drug use, promote the French trotter as Le Cheval Francais and are always ready to help us. The BHRC has a very strong allegiance with the French association, now called "Le Trot" and both sides want to build on that relationship. We work as one on drug testing and are looking to send Stewards to their Stewarding Schools. They are looking to send horses here.

The French Trotter is not a Standardbred. It has more English blood flowing through it's veins than American courtesy of the Norfolk Trotter exported from here in boatloads in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

and English Thoroughbred blood (some as late as the 1930's with Gladys a TB mare who raced at Chester, later to become the grand dam of the immortal Jamin). American Standardbred blood was added in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries with a later addition of select horses in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The stud book is closed, the best horses seem to be about  $\frac{1}{4}$  American  $\frac{3}{4}$  French, they come to their speed later than Standardbreds are a bit more difficult to train but stay better and last a bit longer, generally. There are a lot of them bred each year in France and the French are eager to sell horses that may well be good honest horses but not quite top flight and are struggling to keep up in the monies won classification system. Many countries have bought this type of horse, gone on to set Trotteur Francais races up, received sponsorship and ultimately developed stand alone programmes gambled on the French PMU system where they receive 3% of the betting turnover. Holland for example uses some of this revenue to fund not only Trotteur Francais races but races for straight Standardbreds as well.

In recent years the French have had a series of "projects" selling horses to other countries, giving sponsorship and encouraging the breeding of French horses outside of France, subject to strict controls and where the sire and dam are registered in the French stud book. We could do this here.

I introduced Mick Welling to the key French officials at the Prix d'Amerique in January and discussions progressed towards having French races at York in 2014 and beyond. We had a meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> April in Paris where Bill Green

joined us and a meeting to explain the situation was held at York on 26<sup>th</sup> April. An immense interest in the "project" and buying horses was shown and I fully expect the matter to progress successfully.

I would make these points, hopefully strongly:

- 1) Despite the UK spending vast amounts of money at the American sales over the years (principally Harrisburg) no sponsorship has been received, despite me asking politely and properly
- 2) The French WILL sponsor but terms and conditions have to be finalised.
- 3) The French have explained that even they are limited in how much money they can offer but are very keen to make this initiative succeed.
- 4) The BHRC is there to facilitate this business in whatever way we can. We are not there to run it. I understand that Trot Britain will develop a fund of money from which races will be supported and that is a commendable effort
- 5) The French are very happy to work with the BHRC, races will be run under our rules with drug testing done by the BHRC. They have no issues working with an organisation that governs pacing races as well, but if French Trotters were to be bred here there would have to be some separate contract

Just how far this business goes is up to you. In 20 years time maybe the only trotters of earning capability bred in Europe (not Scandinavia) will be entered in the French stud Book. There might be a pan European trotting culture dominated by French horses. We could be

part of that. The breeding bit I think is  
someway down the line but could I see  
British owners and trainers going to the  
French sales and buying yearlings.  
Breaking training and developing here  
and the good ones going back for forays  
into France, Belgium and Holland? Yes I  
can.

But what effect will that have on pac-  
ing? There might be a bit less, but with  
good horses racing in a healthy culture.

If we want to live we had better get  
good at the “ balancing act and stand-  
ing up/sitting down routine” French trot-  
ting might be our passport to a long life.

Bon chance, mes amis.

*Gordon Garnett*

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