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# **THE BLACK HORSE NEWSLETTER**

**Shining a fierce light on the GREED, CORRUPTION, EXPLOITATION  
and INJUSTICE in horse racing and bloodstock around the world**



**Coolmore Stud is like a country, isn't it? John Magnier owns most of Tipperary and swathes of Cork and Kildare and Dublin and loads of other places worldwide. But demand for his stallions after the latest sales is under pressure and as Coolmore pleads for support, listen, it's not always dark at 5 o'clock you know. If only that was true.**

## **PART 1**

# **THE HARD SELL AFTER THE HARD FALL**

## **PART 2**

# **WHY ARE SO MANY OF GORDON ELLIOTT'S HORSES DYING?**

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# **THE HARD SELL**

## **AFTER A**

# **HARD FALL**

Coolmore Stud is, naturally, the biggest draw on the Irish Stallion Trail, a golden two day opportunity every January for the last ten years for studs around the country to showcase their finest stallions to breeders, pinhookers, trainers and racing fans ahead of a new breeding season.

This year the studs had a bit of explaining to do - many breeders and pinhookers lost money hand over fist at the yearling and foal sales and some are threatening to pull out of the game. That's the last scenario Coolmore needs, its stallions are usually a runaway money machine.

No one had to explain more than the lads from County Tipperary, where the bottom fell out of a market previously dominated for so long by Magnier's farms. The best stallions now belong to his arch rival, Sheikh Mohammed of Dubai, and a few smart independents who are just as clever.

The Sheikh's stallions are producing more of the best winners but they are also not required to cover unlimited books of mares like the vast numbers Coolmore churn out. Relative scarcity value can help sell yearlings and foals.

It was no time to pretend any longer that the bloodstock downturn in Ireland and the UK is just a blip, a minor correction in an overheated market.

This is now the start of a serious decline that has been coming around the world for a while. Stallion fees have been constantly rising for no other reason than to satisfy the power and greed of the biggest stallion masters. Everyone follows what the big boys do, whether they want to or not.

While the top end of the Thoroughbred market, which is dominated by the super rich buyers who aren't governed by mundane financial constraints, continues in an upward egotistical spiral as the millionaire owners compete with each other to own

the perceived best yearlings of any year, the bottom layer has slowly disintegrated. Except now it's not so slow.

While the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) and Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) view the lowest rungs as unimportant because they are made up of mostly hobby breeders and small time farmers with only a broodmare or two, the contagion has spread to the vitally important middle tier where the majority of the industry's players make a living.

In simple terms, there is a decreasing number of owners prepared to buy the seemingly never ending line of yearlings and foals on offer at the prices expected and too much money is being lost, it's time for some to get out.

The situation is so serious that Coolmore's Mark Byrne delivered a Churchillian State of the Nation Address at the Stallion Trail.



## **MORE SO THAN EVER BREEDERS WILL NEED TO STEADY THE SHIP**

*There are several ways to look back on last year's market. It was tough. Nobody is doubting it was tough. But it was tough in every aspect – tough for people selling horses but also tough for people buying horses as well.*

*We tried to acquire stallions, yearlings, mares, you name it, and it was still very hard to buy them so there is still a lot of money in the market.*

*It was just so competitive to buy the nicer horses. In that respect, the market was so unusual. I've never seen it so strong at the top and then it falls away rather steeply. I know it's a word we keep hearing a lot but things have become very polarised.*

*Nobody outlays more money in the game than stallion masters do. They put so much up to buy these stallions and they have to make it work. Everyone wants it to work and there's no point in saying the stallion masters charge too much or that the mares aren't good enough. We're all in this together and we have to make it work as a collective.*

*I was looking at some of the figures at the end of last year and on paper it was probably the second best year of all time for turnover, just behind the best year we ever had, which was in 2023.*

***Breeders have to keep going. What's the alternative? If you stop you won't have a product to bring to the sales. But this is an important year for them and now more so than ever breeders will need to steady the ship and use the good stallions that they can afford.***

***There's always an element of risk involved but you don't overstretch that risk by leaving yourself exposed by using a stallion you can't afford.***

***The 2022 yearling sales season was one of the best I ever attended so, the people who decided to pull up during Covid, they might have been left rueing that decision in 2022.***

***I think there are similarities with the dilemma some people are faced with this season in light of the market last year but who's to say what's happening today will be happening tomorrow? It's not always dark at 5 o'clock.***



Slipping effortlessly from Churchill to George Bernard Shaw, Byrne waxed lyrical that it's not always going to be dark at 5 o'clock. Try telling that to the breeders who were at Goffs Sales last November and couldn't even get a bid of E10,000 on a foal by Saxon Warrior who stood at a E35,000 fee. Many foals received no bid at all.

Or the breeders of 264 mares covered by Saxon Warrior in 2023 who will produce foals in the next few months and will be offered for sale at Goffs in late 2024 when it will most definitely be dark again at 5 o'clock.

But Byrne told them to suck it up and get on with it – stallion fees that are too high and broodmares that aren't good enough are not reasons to pull out. And the Coolmore partners are having such a tough time, too, when trying to buy the best yearlings on the planet against fierce opposition from other rapacious millionaires. Adding insult to injury, Byrne also bragged that his employers had just enjoyed a stellar year for turnover.

Breeders, however, live in the real world and are facing some big decisions; it's not whether they will keep going if Coolmore or anyone else will knock a few grand off the fee for a stallion's services, it's whether their broodmares, in the cold light of day, are good enough to be covered again as so many of the best mares have been sold abroad in recent times as breeders cashed in on the bull market.

The good times were bound to end eventually but the difference is this time it's a deep dive.

No one could keep avoiding the warning signs of an impending crash. In the latest round of yearling sales, 12 of the biggest auctions in Europe saw 6,424 yearlings offered for sale but only 5,252 were bought.

Once yearlings bred for flat racing fail to sell there is limited opportunity to spin the roulette wheel again and too often many of the unwanted end up on the slaughter trail, which has a somewhat different ending to the stallion trail.

- **Gross turnover for these yearlings sold in 2023 was £345.8 million, a reduction in spending of 7% amounting to a colossal £27.3 million less in revenue compared to the previous year.**

What if it becomes a permanent downward spiral in Ireland like the rest of the bloodstock world which has witnessed a global decline in the Thoroughbred foal crop over the last thirty years?

The racing and breeding industries in close neighbours Britain are already in clear decline. Why would Ireland be any different? The top ten per cent of the market worldwide appears to be thriving but the rest, as Byrne said, is irreversibly falling away. It's not going to change; it's going to get worse. Thirty years of declining crops and still a surplus of foals in the marketplace can mean nothing else.

Don't look for any leadership from Coolmore Stud. As their latest breeding incentives demonstrate, they are the biggest culprits who want to flood more foals than ever on to a withering market for only one reason – greed.



The bronze statue of the stallion who built Coolmore Stud and made John Magnier a billionaire – Sadler's Wells.

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# **The global decline in foal crops**

- **The big picture.** The latest confirmed global figures from multiple sources up to the end of 2021 for the 62 countries breeding Thoroughbreds reveal 84,213 foals were registered that year, a decrease of 32% from a peak of 123,568 in 2005.
- **North America's foal crop, the largest numerically worldwide, has been declining for over thirty years after hitting a peak of 51,296 in 1986. The 2023 crop is estimated to be 18,500 and is expected to decrease by at least another 500 in 2024 when final figures are in.**
- **Australia is the second largest producer and its bloodstock industry is on a similar downward path despite the usual small cohort of super rich buyers spending millions of dollars on the best yearlings when the sales come around every year to give the industry a false veneer of rude health. Australia's foal crop peaked in 1989 with 23,697 born but almost halved to 12,961 by 2022. Even more, it is expected the 2023 total when confirmed will be the lowest in the country since 1977.**
- **Ireland is the third largest supplier and recorded its highest breeding figures in 2007 (12,633 foals) and 2008 (12,419 foals) which coincided with the excesses of the Celtic Tiger era. Two years later the total reported foals had plummeted to 7,588, but numbers have been rising again since 2015 and for 2023 the total number born has been recorded at 9,082.**
- **According to the latest official records the UK foal crop for 2023 was 4,356, down from 4,518 the year before, which puts it in 6<sup>th</sup> place globally behind Japan (4<sup>th</sup>) and France (5<sup>th</sup>). The UK doesn't have much left of any lasting value; it's horse breeders have been selling the family silverware abroad for years and quality of its racing is crumbling fast.**

**It is a sobering fact in Britain that Coolmore Stud stallions cover more mares annually than all the stallions in the UK combined.**

However, revelations made by a whistleblower to The Black Horse Newsletter show a darker side to the bloodstock industry.

A longstanding equine haulier, whom we shall call Jack, has told us of how they were approached recently to quote a price for taking a mare and newly born foal from Newmarket to Castlehyde Stud in County Cork to be covered by one of Coolmore's stallions on a "walk in" basis without the mare and foal staying in Ireland.

A "walk in" is a bloodstock version of a McDonald's drive through. It used to mean a mare which is in season could be taken to a stallion on a farm reasonably close by, covered immediately and then returned home without having to incur the not inconsiderable cost of boarding at the stud.

The mare could then be scanned by a vet at home around three weeks later to determine pregnancy. With modern veterinary practices it is possible to know exactly the optimum time for an in season mare to be covered by a stallion for a successful mating and a "walk in" could save the breeder considerable expense.

But a growing trend now is for these mares in the UK to be transported across the Irish Sea to be covered by an Irish stallion and transported back home to the UK without staying at the stallion stud even for one night. A "walk in" to a different country.

If all goes well an hour at the stallion stud is all that's required. The total journey will take two days and the mare will only leave the transport vehicle for the act of covering by the stallion before starting out again on the journey back home.

Jack highlighted the safety risks for the driver and the welfare of the mare of travelling virtually continuously for two days. When a young foal of around three weeks of age is also involved this practice is a scandal, but there are no boundaries in the bloodstock world anymore.

So how much of this is going on; there will always be one or two crooks pulling strokes, but is it more than that?

*"It's happening daily in the breeding season," Jack said. "This is having a massive resurgence. All the customs and vet paperwork between the UK and Ireland is done in advance online so it's usually an easy process getting through Holyhead and Dublin ports, but it's two days of long hours driving and sometimes two rough ferry rides. The charge to do this trip in an HGV without breaking the law is up to £2,000 but the going rate in an unregulated non HGV 3.5 tonne horsebox, which is the size of a large van with a driver on a car licence, is around £1,200."*

Jack is angry about the way the industry is going.

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Doing it this way is a young man's game fudging the driving hours and mileage which they have to write in a log book and living on Red Bull and caffeine. As for the welfare of the horse there is no welfare for the horse or a young foal.

The mare owner pays the haulier when the job is done and then Coolmore and other Irish studs knock the cost of the transport and ferry off the stud fee the mare owner has to pay if the mare is in foal.

It was going on before because of Brexit but not as much as it is now because hard-up breeders cannot afford to keep a mare and foal at foot for weeks and even months at a stud while the mare gets covered and scanned.

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# **The key European foal sales in 2023**

Henry Beeby, CEO of Goffs Sales: *“The world’s highest priced foal this autumn at E700,000 has topped four days of lively trade at Goffs as, once again, pinhookers and end users alike battled for the cream of the Irish foal crop. A huge group of buyers set off with enthusiasm and determination on Monday and continued right through to close of business today.”*

Except they didn’t, as the statistics below prove. Such ridiculous hubris is common fare from representatives of Thoroughbred horse sales. This rusty old drum gets rolled out at every sale and given a good beating. One horse making a big price should mean nothing to a racing industry which is said by Horse Racing Ireland to be worth E2.46 billion to the country’s economy every year, but right now it’s all the bloodstock industry has to shout about.

The problem is that no one believes Irish racing contributes this much, it’s just propaganda pumped out like effluent from a slurry tanker to justify the generous amount of public funds gifted every year (almost E100m in 2024) to prevent the horse and greyhound industries from imploding.

The Thoroughbred Daily News (TDN) cut to the chase on the sale Beeby eulogised over: *“Of the 902 foals offered this week, 714 were sold at a clearance rate of 79%, which was 2% down on last year. The turnover dropped 12% to E25,950,500 and the average fell 9% to E36,346.”*

These declines underpin the way most sales are now heading in the UK and Ireland. The naked truth is two of the four sessions at Goffs were a desperate experience for breeders, who went home nursing crippling losses and deep concerns about what the future holds for their businesses.

A shortage of buyers means fewer breeders which means less competitive racing which means less gambling which is the lifeblood the sport cannot survive without. It all starts with owners and breeders and always ends with gambling.

These are the main statistics, supplied by Goffs, which cover the four days of their November foal sale. They show that days 2 and 3, when the best foals are traditionally sold, were broadly profitable for the breeders involved, but days 1 and 4 not so.

In fact, these latter two days were a disaster that graphically explain the continuing fall of the racing industry and the growing welfare scandal it causes.

#### **GOFFS NOVEMBER 2023 FOAL SALE**

DAY	OFFERED	SOLD	TURNOVER [€]	AVERAGE PRICE	MEDIAN PRICE
1	212	159	3,170,500	19,941	16,000
2	250	210	7,654,000	36,448	30,000
3	202	172	12,375,500	71,951	50,000
4	238	168	2,621,500	15,605	12,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>25,821,500</b>	<b>36,420</b>	<b>24,000</b>

The key to the big picture is not the number of horses sold from which the average and median prices are calculated, but those foals not sold and why they have been rejected.

It is important to concentrate on days 1 and 4 which determine the real health or otherwise of the breeding industry. The stats for the full sale are above, but these are the figures that matter:

- Total foals OFFERED FOR SALE on days 1 and 4 combined: 450
- Total foals receiving NO BID or sold for the MINIMUM BID (€3,000): 63
- Total foals NOT SOLD including VENDOR BUY BACKS: 123
- Total foals recorded as SOLD for up to €10,000: 124

**CONCLUSION:** On paper 63 foals effectively received a market valuation of zero for a NO BID or sold for the MINIMUM BID of €3,000. In addition, 247 foals were not sold, were bought back by their breeders without selling or sold for up to €10,000 which represents a significant loss for most at this stage.

Combining these three figures – 310 – show the number of foals which have so far lost money for their breeders out of a total of 450 that were offered for sale over days one and four.

The profitability of the remaining 140 will depend on the cost of the stud fee involved and the charges incurred in rearing and preparing them for sale as yearlings later this year. Losses are more likely to grow than turn around into profit.

**It is clear in general terms at the end of the Goffs November Foal Sale at least 70% of the foals who came under the auctioneer's hammer on the two days we have highlighted have incurred substantial losses for their breeders.**

The figure of E10,000 is a low base line estimate of the costs involved in breeding, rearing and preparing a foal for sale at an auction; the reality of the breeding game in Ireland is that most flat stallions stand for over E10,000 – 45 of the latest list published by the Irish Field of 80 leading stallions in Ireland fall in that category with just four standing for less than E5,000.

Costs for upkeep of an in foal mare for the gestation period of 11 months and then rearing a foal for approximately 6 months before it goes to a sale and veterinary bills, administration charges and general expenses will add another E5,000 MINIMUM on top of the stud fee.

As an example, only one of Coolmore's flat stallions stood below E10,000 last year (Arizona at E5,000); Sheikh Mohammed's Kildangan Stud has a roster of nine stallions which includes two below E10,000 (Cloth Of Stars at E5,000 and Raven's Pass at E7,500); and Yeomanstown Stud, with a long history of achievement in County Kildare, has two of its four stallions under E10,000 (Invincible Army at E7,500 and Sharman at E5,000).

There are several reasons why foals fail to sell but the overriding one concerns a growing lack of players wanting to invest in bloodstock whether to keep the foals to race later on or rear them for another year with the intention to sell them back into the market the following autumn as yearlings which could subsequently race as two year olds and upwards.

And so the bloodstock wheel keeps turning year on year; propaganda is pumped out by the racing elite to persuade breeders to keep producing foals that the market doesn't want and to hell with animal welfare.

As with the statistics for the Goffs sale, those supplied by Tattersalls follow a similar pattern. The best foals are listed for sale on days two and three and make a profit for their breeders, but the figures for days one and four were a car crash.

**TATTERSALLS DECEMBER 2023 FOAL SALE**

DAY	OFFERED	SOLD	TURNOVER [£]	AVERAGE PRICE	MEDIAN PRICE
1	226	135	1,517,450	11,240	8,000
2	249	202	8,307,450	41,126	31,000
3	214	187	17,943,000	95,952	62,000
4	194	145	2,075,002	14,310	9,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>29,842,902</b>	<b>44,608</b>	<b>21,000</b>

Tattersalls is the leading auction house for Thoroughbreds in Europe. A breakdown of these figures reveal the depth of the problems facing the UK bloodstock industry.

- Total foals OFFERED FOR SALE on days 1 and 4 combined: 420
- Total foals receiving NO BID or sold for the MINIMUM BID (£1,000): 69
- Total foals NOT SOLD including VENDOR BUY BACKS: 103
- Total foals recorded as sold for up to £10,000: 169

**CONCLUSION:** On paper 69 foals effectively received a market valuation of zero for a NO BID or sold for a MINIMUM BID of just £1,000. In addition, a remarkable 272 foals were not sold, were bought back by their breeders without selling or sold for up to £10,000 which represented a significant loss for most at this stage.

Combining these three totals – 341 – show the number of foals which have so far lost money for their breeders out of a total of the 420 that were offered for sale over days 1 and 4.

The profitability or otherwise of the remaining 79 will depend on the cost of the stud fee involved and the cost of rearing and preparing them for sale as yearlings later this year. The omens do not look good.

According to the Irish Field 31 of the main 61 flat stallions in the UK stand for £10,000 or more and only 3 for £3,000. The biggest farm is Sheikh Mohammed's Dalham Hall Stud in Newmarket with no stallion listed at less than £10,000 on its roster of 13.

**At the end of the Tattersalls December Foal Sale over 80% of the foals who faced the auctioneer on days 1 and 4 incurred significant losses for their breeders.**

Where do the breeders of these foals go from here? In the majority of cases a relatively worthless foal (in monetary terms) will more than likely be a worthless yearling the following year but with 10 months extra keep charges added to the costs side of the ledger.

It's a terrible scenario for the breeder and the foal, who faces into a very uncertain future. The breeder will live but the foal or yearling might not.

And the situation will become much worse by the end of this year because even more mares were bred in 2023 and will be foaling around now.

**Number of mares covered in Ireland in 2023: 12,386, an increase of 9% on 2022.**

**Number of mares covered in Britain in 2023: 6,186, a decrease of 6% on 2022.**

It must be remembered, of course, not all mares that are covered will produce a live foal, for a variety of reasons, but these figures send a strong signal of what might happen later this autumn at the yearling and foal sales, when more youngstock will be offered than last year.

What of the stallion masters?

There are no restrictions on how many mares their stallions cover in any one season: Sioux Nation was the most popular flat stallion in Ireland or the UK with 289 mares last year. Blackbeard, who only raced for one season as a two year old, was legless after mating with 195 mares in his debut season as only a three year old.

Crystal Ocean, a champion racehorse trained in England by Sir Michal Stoute, led the stud's National Hunt stallions from the front when covering 335 mares. He now has over a thousand foals on the ground since he retired to stud in 2020 with none having yet proven whether they can actually run and in the process will have earned Coolmore well over a million euros in stud fees.

If Crystal Ocean is no good Coolmore will just replace him with another hot prospect but it won't be so easy for breeders with youngstock still to be sold over the coming years. The market for National Hunt foals has contracted even more than their flat counterparts at Goffs and Tattersalls.

Of course, Crystal Ocean could turn out to be a raging success and if so he could easily end up champion sire, but if that happens it's because he has covered a

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**couple of thousand mares whereas other National Hunt stallions will be lucky to get a few hundred such is Coolmore's domination.**

**It appears that little can be done to strike a balance in the Thoroughbred breeding world – money dictates what is going to happen. The super rich are having a whale of time buying million dollar horses while many others are drowning.**

**In the US, the Jockey Club would like to restrict the number of mares any one stallion can cover, perhaps to about 150, to encourage more diversity in the stallion gene pool which would also help studs other than those owned by millionaires and billionaires.**

**Coolmore and a couple of the biggest studs banded together and started legal action alleging restraint of trade amongst other issues. Faced with such power and financial might the Jockey Club soon backed down and the interests of three or four of the wealthiest stallion owners again took precedence over the wellbeing of the Thoroughbred breed and the survival of smaller players in the game.**

**The worldwide model for breeding in 2024 has been created by the elite for the benefit of the super rich and horse welfare is a distant secondary consideration.**

**Statistics from America for last year plainly show what all this means.**

**America's five leading stallions by number of mares covered all stood at Coolmore's Ashford Stud in Kentucky. Preliminary numbers (they may go up a few when returns are finalised) and stud fees are:**

- 1. Golden Pal – 293 (\$25,000)**
- 2. Epicentre – 262 (\$40,000)**
- 3. Practical Joke – 252 (\$65,000)**
- 4. Jack Christopher – 247 (\$40,000)**
- 5. Uncle Mo – 234 (\$150,000)**

**Golen Pal, Epicentre and Jack Christopher were standing their first season so they have no offspring available to test**

**the market – breeders sail in blindfolded. Most stallions turn out to be failures at stud, but high numbers of mares going through the breeding shed means stallions need not be financial failures.**

**Whoever would have thought a US stallion would only be a few mares short of 300 coverings? This number has been routine for years in Ireland, but the majority of American horsemen are usually more circumspect.**

**If history is anything to go by there is a welfare scandal brewing. Around 2009, as the Celtic Tiger era came to an inglorious end, thousands of Thoroughbreds and other breeds that were unwanted ended up in abattoirs when owners couldn't afford to keep them and the market for reselling them evaporated.**

**It is still happening today, as the Horse and Hound magazine reported earlier this month.**

**An overloaded transporter was stopped at Dover with 26 equines on board, of whom only 19 had the necessary paperwork for the journey. Many had health issues, making them unfit to travel, and at least one pony was infected with equine influenza.**

**The horses were abandoned at a Kent holding yard when authorities discovered they were being smuggled out of the UK most likely to be slaughtered for their meat, and have been rescued by World Horse Welfare.**

**It's organised crime along the same lines as people and drug smuggling.**

**The Departments of Agriculture on both side of the Irish Sea clamped down on the illegal transport of horses through Dublin and Rosslare ports to the UK after the Panorama programme exposed in 2021 the wretched conditions in which these horses are transported to British abattoirs.**

**The Black Horse Newsletter has received verified information that the crooks simply moved on to a different route – horse dealers from the Republic now haul their sad cargo to Northern Ireland and take the ferry from Belfast to Scotland and on down into England with little or no regulation as there are no effective border controls in place post Brexit.**

**Trucks transporting these horses to their deaths have become bigger to make the journey more cost effective but the biggest difference is felt by the horses, who are cramped up even tighter for a trip that takes many hours longer without feed or water.**

**Documentation for 13 of the horses revealed they had been signed out of the food chain, which is what happens when racehorses have been treated with certain medications and their passports are amended to show their meat is not fit for human consumption, but that is the least of worries for the criminals.**

**Horse meat is a recognised delicacy in Europe and will openly appear on restaurant menus and in butcher's shops, but corrupt traders also sell it into the food chain masquerading as beef for use in prepared meals. It's a growing market.**

**World Horse Welfare's chief executive, Roly Owers, told the Horse and Hound:**



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We applaud the authorities for taking action in this case and stopping the vehicle, but far too often these lorries cross borders unchecked.

From our initial investigation, the horses were allegedly travelling from the Republic of Ireland to France, using Britain as a land-bridge. Regardless of whether they started their journey in Ireland or Britain, it is highly likely they would have been travelled for hours to potentially end their lives in a European slaughterhouse.

Some are pregnant mares, others had health conditions making them unfit to travel and one had to be euthanised because it was in such a poor state.

This case highlights the tragic reality we believe equines have to suffer through being exported to slaughter. Drivers and vehicles are switched, horses pass through multiple hands, sometimes on fraudulent passports, and are moved between local authority areas and from country to country, before they are exported. All to make it harder to trace the people involved, the individual equines being moved and the long journeys that they are subjected to.

To put an end to these abhorrent movements and to protect our nation's horses, it is imperative that the UK Government gets the Live Export Bill onto the statute book, finally implements a robust and digitalised equine identification system, and establishes an effective system for enforcing all equine legislation so that smugglers cannot hide behind a smokescreen of confusion.

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## **NEXT UP**

### **22 RACEHORSES TRAINED BY GORDON ELLIOTT HAVE DIED**

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# WHY ARE SO MANY OF GORDON ELLIOTT'S HORSES DYING?

They all shied away from using the F-word when Andy and Gemma Brown suddenly announced they were quitting racing and auctioning off their impressive string of 29 horses within 12 days.

In this extraordinary story F stands for fatal. The news hit the wires when the Browns' company, Caldwell Construction, which is based in Stoke-on-Trent, issued a statement on social media on 25 January.

Their young horse, D B Cooper, had suffered a fatal injury at Fairyhouse the day before on only his third run under rules and his death, which followed Smooth Player's a fortnight earlier and the loss of four time Grade 1 winner Mighty Potter last season, caused the Browns to hastily walk away from racing.

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Further to the sad loss of one of our young horses D B Cooper again as a family we are absolutely heartbroken. Also we lost Smooth Player only just two weeks ago. Having a young family it's hard to cope with such losses and therefore we feel it is time for a break from the sport. We would also like to thank Gordon and his team for their hard work and support the last few years and wish them all the best.

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Andy and Gemma Brown (pictured below) have made no further public comment of any kind. Their bloodstock manager, Joey Logan, was unable to elaborate on the decision to disperse the racing stock.

*“It was a shock when I got the news yesterday morning. Andy and Gemma released a statement and I’ve nothing to add to that,”* Logan said as the often used racing cloak of secrecy was wrapped around another tricky storyline.



Trainer Gordon Elliott added to the mystery. He told the Racing Post: *“We didn’t go into their reasoning for it too much so I don’t know exactly – I only got the phone call myself this morning. There has been absolutely no falling out. They just wanted to take a break from the game and I couldn’t say enough good things about them. They’ve been very good to me and we’ve had some very good years together.”*

The spin machine was fired up. Richard Pugh, a director of the Tattersalls Ireland sales company, could hardly contain his excitement about the upcoming sale: *“Everyone is so enthused by it, there hasn’t been anything like it before and there might not be again and we have to do our best by it – it has really captured the imagination.”*

No, racing people just couldn’t understand the sense of it all, what was the real reason behind the decision to sell all the horses in little over a week, it doesn’t happen like this, there had to be more to it?

There was no stopping Pugh dribbling away. *“Once the decision was made to stop, it made sense to sell the horse as soon as possible. The decisiveness shown throughout their time in the sport is the same as they have shown in their approach to their sale. They arrived into the industry a little over three years ago, they have chosen one manager and one trainer, and look what they’ve achieved.”*

Maybe it’s the one issue Pugh and the unusually silent Irish racing authorities are afraid to discuss – horse deaths.

Pugh’s dribble turned into diarrhoea talking about what the Browns had achieved, which only provided more questions than answers. *“The horses perform to a high level on a regular basis, they keep coming back. That takes a good eye to find a tough horse, a good pedigree to be robust enough and a good trainer to be able to produce that level of relentless consistency, so that they don’t bottom out in any way. That the team is able to pick them up is a testament to Gordon and his staff.”*

Yes, yes, so what about the three dead horses? Didn't they do even more than bottom out? What good is it having these supreme athletes performing to a level of relentless consistency if they are dead? Perhaps this is actually what killed them - they were so relentless they suffered catastrophic injuries.

Within a week of the Caldwell sale it was announced Pugh had left Tattersalls for a new job with Horse Racing Ireland as Head of Racing and Insights. Is "Insights" the new woke name for horse shit?

Dead horses are a real problem, which is why the Browns said they have left the game, but Logan, Elliott and Pugh avoided mentioning the F-word. Pugh is now a senior manager at HRI. We presume the opinion he shared in his glowing tribute to Elliott hasn't changed in one week now that he's wearing a different hat.

Then we found out the three dead Caldwell horses are far from alone.

**Official records show that 22 horses trained by Elliott for a variety of different owners have died in the last 14 months.**

This is the full list and their deaths have been confirmed on the HRI website.

ANNABELLE MAGIC	MIGHTY POTTER
BOLD GETAWAY	MORTAL
IBIRIQUE DU SEUIL	SMOOTH PLAYER
CATO CAPONE	SPOILED ROTTEN
THREE STRIPE LIFE	QUINTA
ERIC BLOODAXE	BRAVO TEAM
TOP BANDIT	AMIR KABIR
VISIBLE ATTRACTION	RAINBOW LILY
WESEEKHMHERE	NO TURN UNSTONED
PENCILFULLOFLEAD	D B COOPER
GLENLOE	ABSOLUTE NOTIONS



Mighty Potter (right)

We asked Elliott to comment and we have also attempted to contact Andy and Gemma Brown at Caldwell Construction, where we were told they have nothing further to say. The Caldwell website has been down for several weeks and the Browns appear to have gone to ground.

Their short statement on social media at the end of January has been followed by total silence, so we've written them an open letter.

## Dear Andy and Gemma

We, along with many people in Ireland, find it hard to believe your reason for cutting and running so precipitously from Irish racing was the death of two of your horses you mentioned in your statement on X (formerly Twitter).

Added to those, of course, was the fatal injury suffered by Mighty Potter, last year. We understand how difficult it must have been for you and your young family. We also note that Elliott won 53 races in Ireland for Caldwell Construction for prize money of E1,081,070 and the sale of 29 horses also realised an impressive E5,290,000 for your company.

**You hired Gordon Elliott as your trainer and started to build your stable of racehorses during the 2020-21 racing season. In early 2021 Elliott was banned from training for six months by the Irish Horse Racing Board (IHRB) when a photograph of him sitting on a dead horse on his gallops was posted on social media to universal condemnation.**

**Your trainer was banned when you were starting out on your racing adventure because of his despicable action. It wasn't your horse that had died on Elliott's gallop, but should that matter?**

**Later that summer, Elliott was identified after the highly damaging Panorama programme, The Dark Side of Racing, aired on prime time television, revealing that a large number of Irish based horses were being transported to England to be killed in abattoirs at the end of their racing days.**

**Vyta Du Roc, shortly after his first run under rules for Elliott, was filmed being slaughtered in an abattoir near Swindon. His gruesome death was compounded by a long and demanding journey from Ireland to England without food and water, which is the way it is for thousands of Irish horses unwanted by their owners.**

**Prior to his unfortunate move to Elliott, the gallant grey had won over £180,000 in prize money for owners Simon Munir and Isaac Souede, who were reported to be "shocked and furious" about what had happened.**

**The said they had instructed Elliott to have the horse rehomed to enjoy a decent retirement, but Elliott said Vyta Du Roc had been "given to another rider as requested by its owner."**

**That doesn't appear to be true. Elliott clearly failed dismally to care appropriately for the horse and Munir and Souede subsequently took all their horses away from the trainer, as did other owners in the aftermath of the dead horse on the gallops and the dead horse in an English slaughterhouse.**

**This wasn't your horse dying in an abattoir, but should that matter? Andy and Gemma, you stuck with Elliott, which was your free choice. Surely you were aware these two shocking instances of horse abuse starkly demonstrated that Elliott had caused irreparable reputational damage not just in Irish racing but worldwide.**

**In 2021 you were becoming an important part of Elliott's stable and there were no hiding places.**

**You knew how dangerous jump racing could be yet you chose arguably the most toxic trainer in Britain or Ireland at that time and you also knew your choice of racing manager came with an asterisk.**



Logan (pictured) was banned from racing for two years after the Turf Club decided he was acting as a shadow trainer for Like A Diamond, who was backed from 50-1 into 3-1 on the morning of his debut run at Ballinrobe with Logan admitting he had placed a substantial bet on the horse.

Acting on a tip off, Chris Gordon, the Turf Club's Head of Security, had the horse withdrawn before he could run and an investigation was conducted. At an appeal heard in February 2017 the Turf Club confirmed Logan's two year disqualification and he was ordered to pay costs in excess of E14,000.

An inquiry determined that *"it was a carefully and detailed scheme to conceal the true trainer of a horse entered to run in a race."* Had it succeeded Logan's fraudulent scheme *"would have seriously undermined the integrity of racing and the confidence of the public in horse racing. It was an offence of very considerable gravity."*

Like A Diamond met an ignoble end after slogging away for a variety of trainers on both sides of the Irish Sea for the next five years. He was fatally injured in a handicap hurdle at Sligo on 21 August 2018, aged eight, when trained by Ian O'Connor and owned by Philip O'Connor. He won four out of 29 races for prizemoney of £27,393.

Why did you stay with Elliott through all this mayhem but then leave now so abruptly two seasons later after two horses died?

Do you find the reason you gave for leaving the sport like this at odds with your questionable thanks for all Elliott's hard work. For sure you couldn't blame his staff who will always give their all, but who do you hold accountable for the death of your horses, or do you believe they were both just unavoidable accidents?

What about the other 19 of Elliott's horses who have died in the last year or so, were they all plain unlucky, in the wrong place at the wrong time? Is this what tipped you over the edge?

What did you think about the money laundering case involving Elliott that's been going on for a few years, you must have seen it in the media? It's kicking off again now.

Seven years ago next week, Labaik stunned the Cheltenham Festival crowd by winning the Supreme Novices Hurdle when trained by Elliott in the name and colours of bloodstock agent Aidan J O’Ryan. It was worth E71,000 to the winner, but O’Ryan and Elliott hid a secret about who really owned the horse.

Two people were photographed celebrating enthusiastically in the winner’s enclosure - John Boylan and his friend Anthony O’Sullivan.

At the time Boylan had 67 convictions for offences including cocaine dealing, criminal damage, threatening and abusive behaviour and theft. O’Sullivan was also said in court proceedings brought by the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) to be involved in criminality.

Elliott sold 90% of the horse to a company owned by O’Sullivan but it was Boylan who paid the £28,000 purchase price. Elliott claimed to have never met or even talked to Boylan, though they were both at Cheltenham and in the winners enclosure after Labaik won. If he knew nothing about Boylan and O’Sullivan’s criminal history why did he hide their involvement with the horse?

Elliott and Ryan each kept 5% of Labaik and when he ran in O’Ryan’s name and colours they breached the ownership rules in Irish racing. The Turf Club’s corrupt chief executive, Denis Egan, subsequently decided Elliott had done nothing wrong and would face no inquiry or sanction for effectively training and running the horse for a secret owner who was a career criminal.

Considering how this story has played out, Egan sent out a clear message to the criminal world that Irish racing, and especially Elliott, was open for any kind of dodgy business dealings.

They would have got away with it but for a police profiler who saw the photograph of Boylan and O’Sullivan enjoying themselves with Labaik at Cheltenham and initiated an investigation into Boylan which ended with CAB seizing his E Class Mercedes, his 90% stake in Labaik, a mobile home and a house in Dublin as the proceeds of crime. CAB said Elliott wasn’t involved in criminality.

O’Sullivan was in the High Court in Dublin last week when CAB sought to take possession of two of his properties which are also said to come from the proceeds of crime. The case is ongoing.

Labaik was allowed to keep racing and at one stage had an armed police escort as CAB believed there was a risk he could be stolen and sold as his value had now rocketed to around E300,000. He refused to start in his first race after Cheltenham and in the second a few days later he suffered a career ending injury which made him worthless in monetary terms.

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And, of course, it should be no surprise that Labaik's story ended in tragedy as yet another horse died in Elliott's care. Social media was alive with accusations he had put the horse back into training but suffered a leg injury and was euthanised.

This didn't look good so Elliott was forced to come out and tell a different narrative. *"Labaik died of colic two or three months ago here in the yard. It has been reported on social media he sustained a cut to a leg and had to be put down, which wasn't true. He wasn't being ridden out and had been retired."*

This was in late 2020 – perhaps you saw him when you were looking at your horses in Elliott's yard?

How do you reconcile the way you suddenly dispersed your horses when you were actively working to develop your own long term breeding programme to produce young horses to join your racing string?

Only a few weeks before you dropped your bombshell news Logan spoke of your ambitions to grow a select band of five or six broodmares and the first, Pure Fantasy, who is in foal to No Risk At All, was already boarded at Logan's farm in County Kildare where you kept the young stock you have bought before they went into training.

Mollys Mango is named after your daughter and was destined to join your embryo broodmare band, but instead you sold her for E170,000 in the dispersal sale. It all changed overnight. Is Logan still your bloodstock manager? Are you continuing with your breeding programme?

To finish, Andy and Gemma, we have to tell you that there are strong rumours around Ireland that the real reason you departed the racing scene in a hurry is because you and/or your company are under investigation by CAB for alleged money laundering and you have been forced to liquidate your stock.

We don't know if this is true or not, we have been unable to ask you directly which was how you chose to play this. Either way we would be happy to publish any comment you might wish to make in our next newsletter.

**Yours in Sport**

**The Black Horse Newsletter**

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## BUBBLING AWAY FOR NEXT TIME

- **The wait goes on for the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board to publish the independent Mazars Report into the bombshell revelations by chief executive Darragh O’Loughlin of possible criminality in the regulator’s annual accounts.** We understand the delay is down to the refusal of former board members Martin O’Donnell (chair) and Peter Allen to cooperate with the investigation. Both resigned as directors since Mazars started asking questions last summer. You can run but you can’t hide, The Black Horse Newsletter is after you.
  
- **The BHA and the IHRB have announced a new joint anti-doping initiative which they claim will prove they are world leaders in the fight against doping.** They claim that in recent days their staff have visited 14 different training yards in Britain and Ireland to take 250 samples from 120 horses entered at the Cheltenham Festival. They have refused to reveal which yards they’ve visited but social media will know.

While these inspections have been carried out jointly they have agreed that the IHRB remains in control of the samples taken from Irish trainers and the same protocols are in place for samples taken from British trainers in their own country. They are each responsible for having their own samples analysed. It’s a joke – IHRB can do what they regularly do which is chuck samples into a rubbish skip. No one will know, no one is watching. The BHA can do the same and both can proclaim how clean the sport is.

The essence of proper regulation is that the authorities responsible for running any sport are subject to Freedom of Information laws so that media can ask tough questions about what’s going on. Few believe racing is clean, but the secretive BHA and IHRB refuse to answer FOI requests. This alleged collaboration is a sham and totally meaningless. Until they start acting like grown-ups these ineffective quangos with their snouts stuck in the trough of corruption will continue to be viewed with the contempt they deserve.