



## **AFRICA'S THOROUGHBRED SHOWCASE TO THE WORLD**

The eyes of the world are now firmly focused on Southern Africa, and Durban in particular, where the continent's most spectacular racing festival, Gold Circle's Champions Season, showcases the high standard of thoroughbred produced in the land. In addition, the superior track and public facilities at its training and racing centres and the professionalism of the organizing and controlling bodies, have earned international acclaim.

With the success of South African bred and trained horses in America, Hong Kong and, more recently in Dubai, together with the outstanding international performances of South African jockeys and trainers, eyes have been opened wide and the industry here is regarded with the utmost respect.

South Africa has many outstanding races carrying Grade 1 status that are recognized internationally, but it is Champions Season in KwaZulu-Natal where the regional champions come together and, in most cases, meet for the first time to establish the national champions, that has drawn the greatest international interest.

The R3-million Vodacom Durban July has been the catalyst for the industry for many decades and the programme of Champions Season has developed around it to become the ultimate stage for the display of racing excellence on the African continent.

In spite of the impressive performances of the great Hawaii in America and other locally-bred horses that raced in the United States many years ago, it was not until some 20 years ago when the winner of the Vodacom Durban July in 1996, London News, beat an international field in Hong Kong that the world sat up and took greater notice.

Then it was the mighty Horse Chestnut that made a brief but very impressive appearance in America before his trainer, Mike de Kock, took a team to the Dubai Racing Carnival. In that team was Vodacom Durban July winner of 2002, Ipi Tombi, who stunned the racing world with brilliant wins against some of the best the world had to offer and, after her sensational win on Dubai World Cup night, she was rated the world's best race mare.

South African bred National Currency, winner of the top sprint races during Champions Season, shook the world of speed horses with his brilliant performances in Dubai before his untimely death, adding respect for another section of the country's breeding industry.

The Dubai World Cup is the richest race meeting in the world and the exploits of Mike de Kock have become legend. He has made the UAE Derby his own by winning it for the last four years in a row and, between him and Herman Brown, they won three of the races at this year's meeting and scored a number of places.

For South Africa's racing industry, the sensational win by Jay Peg in the US\$5-million, Grade 1 Dubai Duty Free over 1 777m, has brought international buyers from about 15 countries scuttling to our shores. They now see South Africa as a source of potential champions with active bidding at the National Yearling Sales, while huge offers are being made for horses already proven on our tracks.

Jay Peg, trained by Herman Brown with Anton Marcus in the irons, broke the course record at Nad El Sheba and beat a number of international Group 1 winners home. As a South African-bred horse his gutsy win has raised the bar of thoroughbred production in terms of the strength and durability of the locally produced horse.

Champions Season, featuring the best of South African bloodstock through the full range of disciplines from the speedsters to the stayers and from the two-year-olds to the handicappers, is undoubtedly the country's thoroughbred showcase and the spotlight of the world is now firmly focused on it.