

KANNEMEYER POSITIVE ABOUT SEASON PROSPECTS

LANCE BENSON

In spite of his string having gone through an uncharacteristically quiet period in the past few months, Cape trainer Dean Kannemeyer stepped off the plane in Durban on Friday in a confident and positive mood. Having won the Vodacom Durban July twice with Dynasty and Eyeofthetiger, he is a man who knows how to train graded race winners and is very much at home in Durban. Besides enjoying the horse-friendly weather and local conditions, he feels that every trainer owes it to his patrons to go for the Champions Season riches, assuming they have the horsepower to back it up.

The first wave of thirteen Kannemeyer horses arrived at Clairwood on 28 March under the care of Assistant Albie Going. The string includes 6 unraced and, as Dean puts it, 'exciting' two year olds as well as the seasoned campaigner Jagged Ice and his Guineas trio of Tan Can, Galaxy and the promising First Honour- the latter having had his first local start at Scottsville behind Umngazi in the Byerley Turk recently. "I gelded First Honour at the end of January and had to get a run under his belt. He ran a slightly disappointing fourth but definitely needed it - he will strip a much fitter horse on Saturday."

When questioned about his Guineas prospects for this coming Saturday, Dean indicated that there was little to choose between Galaxy and First Honour: "Tan Can will probably find the 1600m at Greyville a trifle sharp but it will be a nice preparatory run for the Daily News. Galaxy ran a great race when flying up for third in the Cape Guineas but then the muddling pace in the Derby found him out. He choked up in his last start and I will be tying his tongue down on Saturday. First Honour is a classy son of Fort Wood out of a Secret Prospector mare. He is blessed with plenty of speed which he gets from his dam-line and I have an inkling that he will only go as far as 1600m. My stable-jockey MJ Byleveld has opted to ride him and while we all know that jockeys get it wrong sometimes, I must read something into this. We have always rated him and he is lengths better than his last start."

Kannemeyer has five Vodacom Durban July nominations, headed by the impressive son of Western Winter Jagged Ice. He will be going for a third-time lucky tilt with the chestnut at the big one in July: "Mr Mike Rattray has never won the Vodacom Durban July and this gelding absolutely thrives here. He ran a terrific third to Hunting Tower last year and if one considers that none of the older horses would have improved since then, barring a star three year old coming to the fore, he must be a runner this year again. He runs in a pipe-opener next Saturday and then possibly into the Gold Challenge. Wonder Lawn is another horse looking in top trim since his arrival here. He is better off in handicaps and I will probably take our chances in the Astrapak 1900 and then make a decision later on as regards the July. The three year olds will be assessed as we go along and hopefully they will

prove us correct in our assessment of them. That being the case, they will take their chances in the July."

Kannemeyer went on to say that he and stable jockey MJ Byleveld would be commuting between Durban and Cape Town, and he had a few interesting comments about Cape racing in those awful winter months of July and August: "We shouldn't be racing in the Cape in these months. The training conditions are atrocious with the tracks under water. I take my hat off to the race-course managers as they work miracles to keep the racing going. It is still, however, unfair to the trainers and the punting public. I realize there are related economic and practical considerations to be taken into account, but a solution must be found."



Kevin Shea arrived in Hong Kong late Monday evening minus his luggage, but that did not stop him borrowing the necessary kit from here and there to work his Audemars Piguet QEII Cup mount Archipenko at Sha Tin on the turf on Tuesday morning.

In trainer Mike De Kock's absence, his assistant Trevor Brown watched the workout clocking a final split of 23.3 seconds, and both he and Shea were happy enough with the effort. Speaking as the horse paused in the straight to take in his surroundings on the way back to his stables, Brown was looking forward to Sunday's race.

"I am very pleased with the horse. He only came to us in Dubai in December, and it has taken time for him to come to himself. What I like about him is that he's progressive, and he's shown improvement in each of his last starts. He had the chance to take a gap in the Dubai Duty Free, but wouldn't take it - Kevin [Shea] shifted him out and he went the second time he was asked - if he he'd gone first time, he'd just about have won."

"The extra furlong here will be in his favour. There's some form line between our stable's Sun Classique and Viva Pataca and Quijano from the Sheema Classic, and I think he's up there with them. Viva Pataca is obviously going to be tough on his home patch, and I like the chances of the local Derby winner [Helene Mascot] as well, but I think we'll be on top of them in the finish."

New Zealand galloper Sir Slick's workload was stepped up when a full stretch 22.4 gallop for the final 400m on the turf followed a cantering lap on the dirt, prompting trainer Graeme Nicholson to declare the gelding looking "pretty good".

"He thrives on his work and simply revels in whatever you ask him to do. It's pretty warm this morning but he didn't mind it. He has a marvellous temperament, ate everything we put in front of him last night and just looks to be in great shape.

Nicholson predicted his six-year-old would set a strong tempo, one that may even test the 2000m course record of 2 minutes 0.1 seconds set by Jim And Tonic in this very race nine years ago.

"He will set a very fast pace and if the track is good he'll run close to 2 minutes. He will be right there, I'm confident of that. If he wins on Sunday, trust me there will be tears rolling down this face."



Balius and Musical Way, who will be trying to emulate 1999 winner Jim And Tonic and take the prize home to France, both continued their preparation with some light activity on the all-weather track.

Balius was calmer than on Monday and did not attempt to unseat work rider Maurice Richard as he had done the previous day. Richard reported: "No problems at the moment."

However a change of jockey is anticipated with Miguel Blancpain unable to make the journey to Hong Kong. Olivier Doleuze is expected to take over.

Quijano was also out on the track, looking much less sweaty than he had the previous day. As usual he was ridden by assistant trainer Ilke Hildebrand who is maintaining her enthusiasm ahead of Sunday's big race: "I love this horse," she said.

Japanese trainer Sakae Kunieda arrives in Hong Kong on Tuesday afternoon with two horses aiming for international glory on Sunday.

Matsurida Gogh in the Audemars Piguet QE II Cup and Meiner Segal, bound for the Champions Mile, prepped with laps of the all weather track to the satisfaction of racing manager for 'Team Kunieda', Masamitsu Tsuchiya.

"Both horses have put back on the weight they lost since they left Japan," Tsuchiya reported after watching the pair paddock school. "I am very impressed how well they travelled, despite some turbulence from the typhoon on the way over. They are very settled now."

"In the paddock ring, the horses walked no problem. We will breeze both horses over five furlongs on the turf track tomorrow with our jockey Masayoshi Ebina on board. But we may consider a slightly easier breeze seeing how hot it is today."

Good Ba Ba's bid for the Champions Mile may involve a special sliver of history. Not content with trying for the fifth straight victory and his fourth consecutive at Gr.1 level, the Andreas Schutz-trained gelding will also attain the unique status of becoming the first Hong Kong horse to win two international Gr.1 races in Hong Kong during the same season.

"He worked yesterday [Monday] with Olivier Doleuze riding and I was very happy with what I saw. He pulled up well and even gave a little buck and a kick afterwards so you'd have to look on that as a pretty positive sign."

"He will have one more blow between now and Sunday but that will be a more straightforward, lighter canter," he said.

Looking ahead to the HK\$8m third leg of the Asian Mile Challenge, Schutz had no hesitation in nominating Armada as the horse to beat. "He has beaten the rest of these horses a few times now. Armada is the only one we haven't met at his peak this season but we beat him last year in the Chairman's Trophy and I'm hoping he can do it again. A good draw will be important. We beat Sacred Kingdom last time but maybe we were a bit lucky that day. "Having said that, Good Ba Ba started his run at the 800m and was very wide and he did well to win. He's in the same sort of form now so I am looking forward to another big run."

DAVID THISELTON

Mike Bass's first string of Champions Season horses travelled well from Cape Town and arrived at Clairwood last Thursday. Another ten will follow this week.

The first ten to arrive included his big Vodacom Durban July hope, Pocket Power, whose planned route to the big race is the same as it was last year.

Bass will obviously be hoping that things go more smoothly for the five-year-old Jet Master gelding this year.

He was scratched at the start of his Champions Season pipe-opener last season, the Grade II Drill Hall Stakes over 1400m, a scenario that Bass reckoned could have been avoided had he been on course to offer advice about the perennial foot problem the gelding suffered from.

The handsome bay was then very unlucky in the Grade I Gold Challenge over 1600m at Clairwood when baulked at a crucial stage before flying up for a short-head second to Successful Bidder.

His July preparation

was then interrupted not only by his bothersome foot but by some unseasonable rain.

Under the circumstances his 0,35 length fourth carrying

top weight was a fine effort.

Bass will be hoping to silence the critics who have questioned the two-time Queens Plate and J&B Met winner's claims to be ranked alongside the last to have achieved that feat, Politician, they having reasoned that he won those races on more favourable weight terms and is yet to

win outside of Cape Town.

Bass was asked to compare Pocket Power to his all conquering former stable mate, Sun Classique, who recently won the world's joint richest turf race, the \$US5 million Dubai Sheema Classic over 2400m:

"Sun Classique was always going to get better as a four-year-old but River Jetez was not far behind Sun Classique last year. Pocket Power was better than both of them and better than Jay Peg too. Those were great achievements by Sun Classique and Jay Peg but they were still only races that they ran in and I think Mike De Kock could have done the same with Pocket Power had we sent him over."

Bass's other two July contenders have arrived, also both Jet Masters', Floatyourboat, and the full-sister to Pocket Power, River Jetez.

"Floatyourboat can't be discounted from the July," he said, "He ran a cracker in the Met and looked like he was just about to win it at one stage. That was from a wide draw and he was at level weights to Pocket Power. In the July he is going to be getting 3,5kg from him as far as merit ratings go. If we can keep him sound he will be a big runner."

Floatyourboat's route to the big race is likely to include the Grade II Astrapak at Greyville over 1900m.

River Jetez's route is undecided as there are not many races for her and she might have to take on the colts. Bass said:

"She will be a much better horse this year as a four-year old and we are expecting big things from her. She was a Grade II winner in the Oaks over 2400m in Durban last year. We will play it by ear with her and see if we can get her into the July maybe with bottom weight."

Hilgrove won't go for the July, Bass feeling it could

be a touch far for him, and will instead be kept to the lesser features although, having come third in the Queens Plate over 1600m, a tilt at the Gold Challenge is a possibility.

Bill Of Rights, Naughty Prince, Zooming Zellie and Skyblaster will be kept to the lesser features.

Bass is not sure at this stage whether Meteor Shower is good enough to run in the Canon Gold Cup but the five-year-old Danehill horse will run in the Grade III Lonsdale Stirrup Cup over 2400m at Greyville on June 7.

Journal, a three-year-old Saumarez filly, was the only three-year-old on the first float but more younger horses will follow. "Journal will go the Guineas, Woolavington and Oaks route," said Bass



DAVID THISELTON

Atmosphere is building as Durban racefans begin bracing themselves for the 2008 Champions Season and trainer James Goodman will once again brighten up our screens together with his equally charismatic colleague, Paul Lafferty.

However, behind Goodman's wisecracks and big cigars is a great love for horses and he said, "Horses are God's gift. All of us trainers are passionate about what we do."

He is well qualified as both a trainer and racing analyst having trained about 25 graded stakes winners in his time, including about seven Grade Is.

However he is not one to dwell on the past.

"In this industry no matter what breed of horse you are involved with you can never stop learning about them and it's also important to remember that everybody from the top trainer and jockey to those on the bottom of the log keep the industry ticking. I know what it's like to be at the top and am currently at the bottom. But I will build up again. I don't believe in numbers and my mission at the moment is to attract some top owners and have a small, good quality string. I am friendly with most trainers and still look at everybody to find out what is going on ... how they are feeding, what techniques they are using, etc. Training methods have changed, horses are fitter, better fed and probably better cared for today. Veterinary science is improving all the time and plays a vital part too. As Ricky Howard-Ginsberg, who I was assistant to, used to say 'Veterinary science will always beat Jewish mozzel!'"

Goodman has travelled extensively and on an American trip struck up a friendship with top Californian trainer, Ron McAnally, and also became good friends with the trainer he regards as the best he has ever seen, Angel Penna.

Before taking out his license as a twenty-three-year-old he spent time in the National Hunt racing yard of Toby Balding in England where he remembers grooming a horse owned by England Footballer, Terry Payne, who is now well known in South Africa as a football coach and analyst as well as a keen racehorse owner.

Goodman then spent time at the Newmarket yard of Sir Mark Prescott, who has a big following among punters in Britain as one with a high strike rate not to mention an ability to land gambles in big handicap races like the Cambridgeshire.

"Sir Mark had an indelible impact on my life as a trainer as he was one of those unsung heroes who never had a lot of money to spend but always did the job, and I hope that that is the way I will be remembered too," said Goodman.

His feat of training the winner of the Grade I Premier's Champion Stakes on July day two years in succession in 1998 and 1999 with Gold Tax and Highborn illustrates the point.

Goodman also might be remembered for his fun-loving nature which might have rubbed off from his father, who was one of a set of flamboyant twins. His uncle was in fact romantically linked to American screen legend and outspoken socialite, Zsa Zsa Gabor.

"The twins were famous for being playboys so I am cast in the mould and people think I am a playboy too," smiles Goodman, "but I am serious about this business."

He in fact brooks no nonsense and remembers in his first season as a trainer as a twenty-three-year-old in 1975 offering a ride to a jockey on a horse called Profhewmo to which the jockey replied, "I'd rather watch it from the stands."

Shortly thereafter the horse won the Germiston City Handicap - today the November Handicap - as a 33-1 longshot and the said jockey never rode a horse of Goodman's again.

Goodman grew up on a farm in Witkoppen, Johannesburg, that has now disappeared into the vast series of shopping centres, housing estates and the like in Fourways, and here his parents owned, bred and raced horses.

They then moved to Blair Atholl in Lenasia which his father later sold to Gary Player and it now forms part of the Player's Blair Athol golfing estate and stud farm.

His colours, red with black spots, have now been in the family for three generations.

His father was a Springbok polo player too and James was virtually born on a horse, taking part in showjumping and equestrian sports. Later he spent time playing polo in Argentina under the guidance of top nine goal player, Eduardo Moore, and made the junior Springbok team upon his return.

In his year of national service he and a group of his horse-orientated colleagues were instrumental in starting the horse unit, a unit both Mike De Kock and Paul Lafferty later went through.

Likewise, he has always involved himself in innovations to improve the horseracing industry and became the first on-course presenter back in the 1990's after suggesting the idea to Tellytrack.

A few years ago television viewers were entertained by the highly amusing banter between himself and Mike Azzie that formed part of a short documentary-cum-soap opera series that covered all aspects of horseracing.

He also founded Randjesfontein training centre in the late 1970's, having been unhappy at his original spot at the Vaal and his application to move his yard to Durban not being accepted due to a lack of boxes.

Goodman is one of the cogs in the racing industry that makes it a brighter place to be and as he said, "It would be boring if this game was only about the top few trainers and jockeys."



OWNER OF THE MONTH - GEORGE SUBRAMONEY



The Gold Circle Owner Achiever Award for the month of February has been bestowed on George Subramoney.

The dream of one day leading in a Grade 1 winner has kept George Subramoney a religious supporter of South African racing for the past 25 years - and the dream lives on.

His love of the horse and passion for racing has seen him investing heavily in racing stock and, in his own words, has lost count of the number of horses he has owned in that time. However, he currently has 15 horses in training and believes in spreading his wings among a number of trainers. His dedication has had its rewards and during the month he enjoyed a double in one weekend with Excellent Money from the Paul Denysschen yard and Twilight Samurai trained by Patrick Lunn.

His dedicated support of the industry in KwaZulu-Natal is greatly appreciated and worthy of the monthly award.

Well done George!

ARCHIPENKO ARRIVES IN RAINY HONG KONG



QEII Cup hopeful Archipenko steps off the float in Hong Kong, assisted by Trevor Brown. "He ate up on the plane and travelled well," said Mike de Kock. (hkjc.com)

"He is very well," said Brown, "he would have had a month between races next week and that is perfect. We are confident he can win it."

EMPEROR NAPOLEON DIES

FOUR-year-old gelding Emperor Napoleon has died of a heart attack after a workout in Mike de Kock's yard. "This is the first time in 20 years I've had a horse die of a heart attack in training," said De Kock. "It was routine workout. He completed it well, then fell over and died. I feel sad for owner Mike Destombes, as the horse had turned the corner. We were looking forward to the Gommagomma race and the KZN season. He was unlucky not to have won several graded races. I also feel sorry for his groom, Bruce, who looked after him since he was a yearling and had to watch him die. It is a sad loss for all concerned."

John Frederick Newsome

John Frederick Newsome Chairman of the Motram Group plc and founder of Fieldspring Racing passed away after a long illness. He was a graduate of Caius University College, Cambridge. He first visited South Africa to look at our racing in 1997 and decided to establish a home and racing base in South Africa the following year.

John was known for incisive business judgement and a biting wit and was an intensely private person. He was a generous host and was a huge supporter of racing charities, especially the Grooms' School, Horse Care Unit and Western Province Owners and Trainers Benevolent Fund.

His thoughtful interest in the future of SA racing was translated into tangible benefit in many ways for racing. Two striking examples come to mind:- his aim to contribute to our breeding industry was demonstrated in the importation of mares and stallions. In just 4 seasons, the first five runners out of the mares he imported are already stakes winners and one of these mares has also delivered the record price yearling filly in SA. John was also the first to respond to the call for the establishment of a new training facility for Cape Racing and immediately secured a west coast property with the intention of handing it over to racing for the benefit of all. Despite being made the highest offer for any horse on record in the history of South African racing, he refused to let Dynasty be sold for export as he had immense respect for his sire Fort Wood and believed that his best son in SA should be allowed to make a contribution as a stallion here. Everyone associated with John knew that his love of racing bordered on altruistic as he did not capitalise his successes.

John was the driving force behind the establishment of autonomous corporate racing image in SA as the first to race his horses without the name of a nominee in the racecard. Through a series of appeals he got the Jockey Club of SA to change the rule that dictated that all runners had to have a nominee carded. His dream was to establish a racing entity that would survive beyond his own existence so that the name Fieldspring would not be associated with just one owner and so that the team that delivered each win take credit for Fieldspring's successes. He

also wanted Sam and Karen to carry on the racing entity that was built for them. John enjoyed Fieldspring's horses becoming public celebrities on their own merit. He always felt that the public "owned" Dynasty and enjoyed their appreciation of his racing status.

Fieldspring have won races in England, Ireland, France, United States, Dubai and Singapore but it is in South Africa, with no disrespect to the honour of winning the Dubai Guineas or their brilliant 2nd in the greatest classic race in England, that they enjoyed their most sustained and best successes. A search of John's trophy room in Cape Town reveals no less than 58 trophies which he collected in just 9 years including 6 Equus Awards (two of which were for Horses Of The Year for Dynasty and Free My Heart). Two Cape Owner of the Year Awards (2002 and 2005) and Two Vodacom Durban July's.

Thankfully John lived to see Fieldspring's most recent successes; two runners, Russian Sage and First Honour, in the GR2 Selangor (the race most considered a pointer to the Cape classics) - they ran 1st and 2nd. Russian Sage ran 2nd in the Gr1 Cape Guineas and then won the Gr1 Investec Derby beating Fieldspring's other runner in that event, Tan Can.

He would never allow us to document Fieldspring's achievements but from our records we know that the horses that raced in the familiar burgundy silks, in just 9 racing seasons, achieved a formidable stakes strike rate incl:- Dynasty (Horse of the Year and Equus Champion 3yo - 4 Gr1 wins), Free My Heart (Horse of the Year and dual Equus Award winner - 7 Gr1 wins), Rabiya (the only horse bred in John's own name in SA - Equus Champion 3yo with 3 Gr1 wins), Eyeofthetiger (Equus Champion 3yo, a record breaking Gr1 Durban July), Russian Sage (Gr1 winner), Roman Charger (Cape Champion 2yo), Honour the Guest (2 x Gr1 wins), and many other stakes horses incl:- Royal Opinion, West Coast Gold, National Title, Ivy Green, Spring Lilac etc.

Fieldspring currently has four really useful looking youngsters coming through the ranks. We wish Karen and Sam every racing success in future.



Peter O'Connor

Peter O'Connor, a former steward of the Durban Turf Club and part-owner of Kenwin Stud in Mooi River, passed away after a long battle with cancer.

O'Connor matriculated at St. Charles College in Pietermaritzburg before studying Geology at Rhodes University. He then worked for the famous Oyster Box hotel and restaurant in Umhlanga Rocks that was owned by his father Ken. He also managed another of his father's hotels called Edge Of The Sea and was made a director of some of his father's subsidiary companies, including the Oyster Box hotel.

His father owned a farm in Mooi River called The Loop upon which Kenwin Stud was founded.

In 1978 Peter and his brother, Michael, started a breeding operation on Kenwin Stud under the name K. O'Connor & Sons and when their father died in 1983 they amalgamated this into Kenwin Stud.

Peter and Michael inherited 43 mares from their father but cut this down to 19 and later to 12.

However, unlike their father, they believed in buying shares in Natal-based stallions and had success in this way with the annual shares they bought in an imported stallion called Piaffer.

They kept those horses that didn't make their sales reserves in



training and Michael recounted, "One of the best things that happened to us in horseracing was when Ormond Ferraris agreed to train some of these unsold horses for us. Every year he would select some of them for his yard."

Ferraris trained for the O'Connors for some 25 years.

Peter took care of the financial side of Kenwin and the brothers decided upon matings as well as stallion shares in agreement.

Peter's hotel management career was full-time as was Michael's career as a Doctor of Pathology so the farm was managed by Dave Trollope.

Peter was a member of the Thoroughbred Breeder's Association and the Jockey's Club and owing to his passion for horseracing never had the heart to do away with Kenwin Stud completely after the brothers recently sold five of their remaining mares in a dispersal sale.

The Stud has only one mare left although the brothers have two horses in training with Ron Phillips and two with Ian Jayes as well as two yearlings on Orangewood Stud in the KZN Midlands.

"Peter always had the interest of racing at heart. He was a member and steward of the Durban Turf Club and seldom missed a race-

meeting. His passing is the closing of an era but the memory of him in racing will not be easily forgotten," said Dave Furness, Managing Director of Gold Circle and former General Manager of the Durban Turf Club.

Hospitality Packages - 2008

A variety of hospitality packages at varying prices are available from the following companies. Please contact direct to ascertain availability and to place reservations.



MARQUEE VILLAGE - INFIELD

Company	Site No	Name	Contact No.
Berea Round Table	F2	Tim	083 766 4657
California Hospitality	P	Ken Nicky / Bessie	083 412 4343 031 303 1146
Event Solutions	F6	Karen Le Grange	082 650 8227
Magic Pan	F4	Vernon / Kuben	031 301 0180
Reel Productions	F9 & F10	Devan	084 430 5249
Rosa's Kitchen	F5	Rosa Ross	031 332 2747 083 283 1427 083 349 6955
Fashion Lounge	Ascot Village	Diane (Rusco) or Callie (Kream Lifestyle Industries	031 263 2170 021 423 8996
Sharks Magazine	F12&F13	Carlos Dos Santos	082 460 7777 carlos@psmi.co.za

GRANDSTAND SIDE

Company	Name	Contact No.
One Stop	Angela / Chris	031 303 1444

Storm Cat Experiencing Breeding Problems

US sire Storm Cat (who carried the world's highest stud fee at US\$500,000 from 2002-07 & is standing the 2008 season for US\$300,000 at the Young's family's Overbrook Farm in Kentucky) "has been experiencing difficulties impregnating his mares this breeding season" & "fewer than half of the 31 mares the 25-year-old stallion has covered are in-foal," reported bloodhorse.com. Farm advisor Ric Waldman noted Storm Cat's "overall health is good, especially for a stallion his age" & confirmed: "We've been dealing with his fertility, but as long as he's comfortable covering mares & we think there's a chance for pregnancy, then we'll continue to breed him. We have limited his covers, sometimes breeding him to 1 mare, other days to 2." The sudden decline in fertility "is startling compared to 2007, when Storm Cat (Storm Bird-Terlingua, by Secretariat) impregnated 70% of the 91 mares he covered". Meanwhile Overbrook "has taken steps to aid Storm Cat: breeding shed staff have been collecting dismount samples after Storm Cat breeds, centrifuging the sample & adding extenders before re-infusing it into the mare". Storm Cat (sire of 160 stakes-winners) has twice been leading US sire (by year-end progeny earnings) & 13 times has ranked in the Top 15. And his "influence is in full force on this year's leading US sires list: 3 of Storm Cat's sons (Giant's Causeway, Stormy Atlantic & Tale Of The Cat) rank in the Top 10"

Relief all round as Great Leighs gets off to smooth start

AFRESH chapter in racing's history books started on Sunday as Great Leighs became the first new racecourse to open in Britain for more than 80 years - to the relief of the management and praise from professionals.

Last-minute maintenance, even as eight maiden fillies paraded for the historic opening race, told the tale that the former Essex County Showground is nowhere near ready to entertain the paying public.

Cash-carrying racegoers will come on to the site for the first time on May 28-29, six meetings into Great Leighs's programme, but before then an enormous amount of work has to be done, most notably on the main, semi-permanent grandstand.

However, simply staging seven races safely and with no undue alarms, was more than many regular visitors, including BHA course inspectors, had imagined possible even a fortnight ago - and still questioned after the first track trials seven days previously.

BHA chief executive Nic Coward, whose BHB predecessor Greg Nichols steered the governing authority into giving Great Leighs formal approval in March 2004, summed up: "It's great that the course has opened."

BHA racecourses director Tony Goodhew, who has trodden a well-worn path between his Wiltshire home and the Essex countryside over the last three years, added: "The management has done remarkably well since this time last week, and they've met all the criteria.

"There's a good feeling about the place. There's still a lot to do, and no doubt today will throw up new things to think about, but it's all about detail.

"It's been a long time coming, but it's great to have got there." Paul Dixon, on hand in triple capacity as BHA director, Racehorse Owners' Association president and owner of third-placed Cerebus, also referred to "work in progress".

He said: "The place is going in the right direction and it could be a very good venue for the future. You can imagine it being heaving on a Saturday night.

"The track itself looks superb. It's big and galloping, and there shouldn't really be a draw bias, so if they continue to put up good money, people will bring their horses here."

Course promoter John Holmes, for whom yesterday was the culmination of 11 years' planning since he bought the site, said: "We've created a charming destination, but I'm not ready for the public just yet."

Still, Holmes was both relieved and heartened by the general reaction, saying: "I'm overwhelmed how nice and how supportive everyone has been. They seem genuinely pleased for

us."

"We'll be controlling numbers all through the year; you won't see 20,000 people on the site for a while yet. We're treating this summer as a series of parties."

Describing himself as "a visionary" to a posse of media members, who made up a significant part of the privileged attendees, Holmes pinpointed a list of items on his forward-looking agenda.

He said work would begin next year on the permanent grandstand, which was part of the original £40 million scheme but slipped into phase two as the buildings, and budget, were halved.

However, Holmes allowed himself the proviso that he may change his mind if the current stand - a huge construction last seen at the Ryder Cup in Ireland in 2006 but still to be fitted out - served its purpose.

A possible Breeders' Cup trial meeting on Saturday, September 27, with racing that mimics at least four races at the real thing at Santa Anita, is on the cards.

However, Holmes has yet to sign contracts with a potential sponsor, and broadcasting deals with the east coast of America are still being explored.

The turf course, inside the Polytrack, will be seeded this year, for use in late 2009 or more likely some time in 2010.

For now, Holmes reflected: "The great thing is that we're open."



Great Leighs: first new racecourse in Britain since Taunton opened in 1927