

'Every one is a success story'

He's one of the most powerful men in racing, with a breeding empire worth millions, but Sheikh Mohammed has now turned his attention to racehorse rehabilitation. Carl Evans reports on Britain's first 'in-house' rehoming scheme



Sheikh Mohammed has always had an interest in horses that have served him well

John Ferguson



IT'S not often you get the chance to buy a former Classic hopeful for £100. But with some regally bred racehorses passing through the Badlingham Manor retraining facility in Cambridgeshire, including Descartes, a son of the great Dubai Millennium, this fantasy is becoming a reality for some lucky owners.

In most respects, Badlingham is little different from other rehoming schemes. All aim to prepare former racehorses for a second career and to educate potential owners on the pros – and cons – of taking on an ex-racer.

But what differentiates Badlingham is that its residents are individually chosen and funded by Sheikh Mohammed, the ruler of Dubai and owner of the influential Darley stallion operation.

"Sheikh Mohammed has always had an interest in horses that have served him well," explains John Ferguson, the Sheikh's chief bloodstock adviser. "For example, if we have a five-year-old entire that has won at Group Three level [most colts need to win Group One races to have any chance of making viable stallions], we wouldn't want him to continue racing, but would like him to have another role.



Sheikh Mohammed personally selects the horses on the scheme

"In the past we've found such horses new homes on an informal basis, but Badlingham offers a more thorough and organised way of matching horse to person."

Sheikh Mohammed owns thousands of racehorses worldwide, but so far Badlingham, which was set up in 2006, has found new owners for 10, has six out on loan and can cater for 20 equine residents at a time.

But Sophie Candy, who manages the scheme, argues that the numbers are immaterial.

"It is a worthwhile project," she says. "Each horse that is rehomed is a success and worth every bit of effort."

'I'm amazed at his attitude'

ONE such project is Old Kent Road, a six-year-old rehomed with event rider Clare Chamberlayne. By Two Punch, a son of Mr Prospector, 'Punch' won a Listed race on dirt in America. Clare, who has had him since December, has the long-term goal of competing the gelding at top level and is thrilled with his progress so far.

"He's very bright and has read the manual on life," she laughs. "I took him to a Pony Club event recently and you would have thought he was 25 rather than six. He finished third and has such a great attitude. I'm chuffed with how far he's come in such a short time."

Clare said she was won over by Punch's good looks when she first saw him at Badlingham but, since taking him on, it is his temperament that has impressed.

"I think people expect ex-racehorses to be spooking at everything and jumping sideways, but that's not the case – they've seen so much of life and had so much experience," she says. "He's brilliant in traffic, there's no gawping at plastic bags and he has a very sweet nature."

Punch will be tackling pre-novice classes next, and while Clare thinks he has bags of potential, she warns

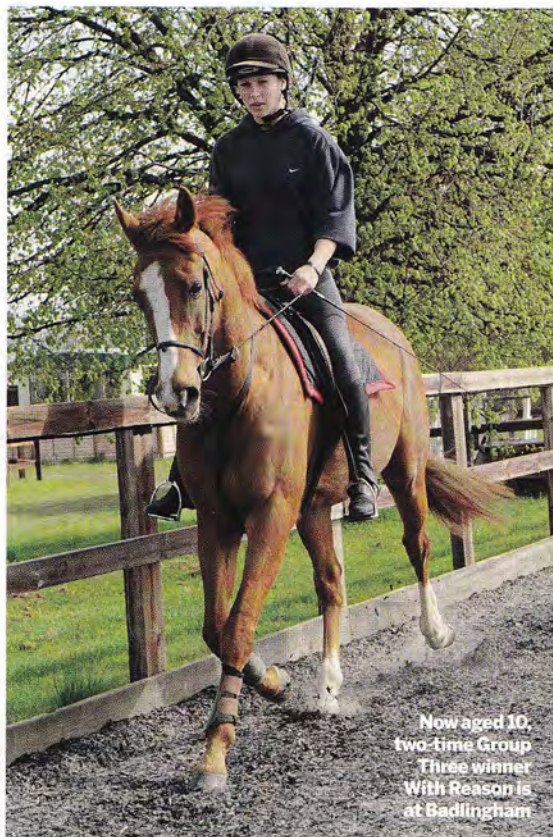
Descartes, a son of Dubai Millennium, gets to grips with some polework



Pictures by David Miller and Trevor Meeks



It's early on in his eventing career, but our cover star Old Kent Road, a Listed winner in America, is impressing new owner Clare Chamberlayne



Now aged 10, two-time Group Three winner With Reason is at Badlingham

» people to think carefully and be prepared before taking on an ex-racer.

"For one, he can really shift," she says. "The first time I took him out, we had what I thought was going to be a little canter – he shot off like a Ferrari!

"Also, coming from a dirt background, Punch has got to learn how to go on grass. When it came to doing dressage at the Pony Club event, he was less than impressed at the grassy field he was expected to work in!"

Clare is so impressed with Punch that she is about to take on another Badlingham horse, Opera Cape.

"I must admit, I was very dismissive of him when I first saw him," she says. "Punch is very good-looking, but Opera Cape looks like an overgrown Pony Club pony.

Then, I found out he finished placed in two Group Ones as a two-year-old [the Dewhurst and Grand Criterium] and decided I'd better have him!"

A steady process

HORSES end up at Badlingham for a variety of reasons, but injury and problems at stud are the main ones.

All horses are gelded upon arrival and new owners have to sign a contract stating the horse will never race again, including in point-to-points – each horse's passport is stamped "non-racing".

To date, no mares have been rehomed through the scheme owing to the fact that the Sheikh's fillies are so well bred that those who fail to make an impact on the course are kept as broodmares.

"When horses first arrive we give them a holiday by turning them out to grass for a minimum of two months, although it can be up to a year," says yard manager Victoria Jones. "From the moment we start working them, they are treated as non-racehorses – this includes teaching them to stand at the mounting block and being tied up outside their boxes.

"When hacking they are ridden quietly on a loose rein, but in the school we teach them to go in an outline, on the bit and move away from the leg. As racehorses they went forward when the string moved or contact on the reins was tightened."

Some horses are deemed suitable for hacking only, due to injuries that could reoccur if put under pressure, but others take to jumping with enthusiasm.

Victoria adds: "Once the horse looks safe, I'll start looking for a new home by inviting people who have expressed an interest to come to the yard.

"If we are happy a person has the right facilities we allow them to take the horse on a three-month trial, although we are always ready to step in if problems occur. At the end of the trial we visit them and if we are happy, the final agreement is signed."

The cost of a horse through the scheme is £100 plus VAT, but have they had any rehoming failures?

"Only one so far," admits Victoria. "It was with a horse that kept jumping out of his field in order to get to horses in adjacent fields. By putting him with another owner, who had just one other companion horse in the same field, the problem was solved."

Link to overproduction?

WHILE the Badlingham project testifies to Sheikh Mohammed's passion for his horses and their welfare, »

Badlingham Manor success stories

Summoner

THE son of Inchinor is the most high-profile horse to be rehomed via the Badlingham Manor scheme to date.

Although he won the Group One Queen Elizabeth II Stakes at Ascot in 2001, he never sired any foals and, at the age of 11, is now enjoying a different career – hunting with the Eggesford in Devon.

Beatnik

A leg problem meant Beatnik never made it on to the racecourse. But that hasn't stopped him enjoying a new life with Bedfordshire-based Yvonne Taylor, who is a convert to ex-racehorse ownership.

She explains: "Beatnik is a gentleman in every way. He's only four, but incredibly grown-up – to get to bridleways near my home I have to ride along a bypass, but he's bombproof in traffic.

"One day I hope to start showing him, but I'm in no hurry. He means the world to me and I can't thank Badlingham enough."



Summoner: from racing to hunting

“

I was dismissive of him at first – then I found out he'd been placed in two Group Ones!

Clare Chamberlayne

”

Pictures by Trevor Meeks



By registering ex-racehorses we can counter claims that racing doesn't care about the end product

Di Arbuthnot



Listed winners into The Dark (left) and Winged Cupid are currently undergoing retraining

» his Darley stallion operation, the biggest in the world, contributes to the number of thoroughbreds produced.

John Ferguson denies there is a link between the rehoming scheme and the issue of overproduction – too many foals being bred for the number of potential buyers. “There is no connection between them,” says John. “The area where overproduction bites is at the lower end of the yearling sales where people won't buy because of prize-money [in moderate races] being so poor.”

In Britain and Ireland in 2007, 18,500 foals were born and there were almost 15,000 horses in training in Britain.

In both countries the respective racing industries have tried to accommodate the additional numbers by staging more meetings, something that suits racing in financial terms, because more racing means more betting turnover – of which the sport gets a share.

But the issue of what to do with horses at the end of their racing days, or those that are simply not good enough to race, remains problematic. Di Arbuthnot of Retraining of Racehorses (RoR), a project set up eight years ago by the racing industry, urges anyone who has

an ex-racehorse to register it with her (www.ror.org.uk).

She says: “It is estimated some 4,000 horses leave racing each year, but we don't know where they all go. We know many are rehomed straight from trainers' yards, and it is said up to 1,500 are in polo, but by registering where these horses are we can build a database to counter accusations that racing doesn't care about the end product.”

Horse welfare is taken seriously at the Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (TBA), according to chief executive Louise Kemble.

She says: “Weatherbys is about to produce a book designed to give mare owners additional information about the marketplace. This will help breeders make informed decisions about foal production.”

John Ferguson adds: “My view on overproduction is that if somebody owns a mare and wants to breed from it, we can advise them that commercially it may not be the best plan, but if they want to race the progeny, who are we to say no?” **H&H**

► READERS interested in the Badlingham Manor scheme should call Sophie Candy, tel, 01638 569130.

Rehoming in numbers

20

horses can be accommodated at Badlingham

£100

the cost of a horse through the scheme

18,500

foals born in Britain and Ireland in 2007

15,000

horses in training in UK

4,000

horses leaving racing each year

Why do racehorses need retraining?

RACEHORSES tend to have habits and traits that mean they need to be retrained for life outside the sport.

While in a racing environment they rarely stand still under saddle, are used to being mounted at walk, ridden in a string, taken on the same route each day, and they perform extended canters or gallops on a daily basis. Few are taught to adopt a rounded shape and their faster paces are usually taken with a rider perched high up their necks.

Ex-Flat horses are taught to accelerate rapidly, while ex-jumpers are encouraged to get from one side of a fence to the other at maximum speed, traits that can make them dangerous in tight situations away from a racecourse. In addition, many retire from racing with minor injuries or physical problems – from splints to back and pelvic issues – owing to the exertions of racing from a young age.

Yet most racehorses are adaptable and some are bombproof, although their natural agility and speed should always be considered when trying to match horse and rider.



Sophie Candy and Howick Falls, a former Group Two winner