

# Strong Irish bond at Usha

In the third of a four-part feature on Indian racing and breeding, Leo Powell meets Ameeta Mehra

**T**HE history of horse racing and breeding is a long one in India, with evidence that races were held in Madras as long ago as 1780. These races were confined to country-breds.

Under British rule racing thrived and India started importing horses from various countries. In the latter part of the 1800s there were almost 100 racecourses in the country.

In 1927, the National Horse Breeding and Show Society of India published the first volume of the *Indian Stud Book*. However, this not only contained thoroughbreds but other breeds such as trotters, Marwari, Desert Arabians and half-breds.

A quarter of a century later, in 1942, the Royal Western Indian Turf Club Ltd became the keepers of the *Indian Stud Book* and, using the model of Weatherbys, issued the first volume of the modern stud book. This committee has further evolved to become the Stud Book Authority of India and the stud book was recognised internationally in 1980.

Together with Japan, India represents Asia at the annual meetings of the International Stud Book Committee.

## MEHRA, USHA AND INTERNATIONAL STUD FARMS

The ties between Usha Stud Farm and Ireland are strong. Whether it is the fact that the owner Ameeta Mehra is an award-winning graduate of the Irish National Stud Management Course, or that the stud's most recent stallion acquisition was sourced and brokered by the late Brian Grassick, there is a bond. Hopefully many who know



Owners Ameeta Mehra and Jaydev Mody, jockey Imran Chisty and trainer Bezan Chenoy following Yana's victory in the Group 1 The Poonawalla Stud Farms & Breeders Stayers' Cup at Hyderabad

Ameeta will get to see her at the forthcoming Goffs November Sale.

Horses at Mehra Stud Farm, the yearling division, are shown in a most peaceful setting, where the spirit of Ameeta's inspirational father, her mother and sister is very evident. There is a monument to her family members erected on the manicured lawns, a sad reminder of their untimely and tragic death on January 1st, 2001 in a helicopter crash.

Major P.K. Mehra did not follow his father into medicine, but instead was an eminent army man and a polo player of international renown. As a child, Ameeta, his first born, developed a love of horses, especially when seeing her father regaled as Commandant of the President's Bodyguard, a hugely prestigious ceremonial role.

From humble beginnings, Major Mehra nurtured a small but successful breeding operation before finally establishing Usha. All of this started less than 40 years ago, yet Usha has built a reputation to rival any farm in India, their list of classic winners including an unprecedented

11 Indian Derby winners and 10 Indian Oaks winners, six of the latter in successive years.

The original Usha Stud Farm is the breeding farm and has expanded over the years to incorporate Mehra Stud Farm, where the yearlings are housed and raised, and Ameeta's own project of the International Stud Farm.

## SIRE

From the very first horse to go to stud at Usha, the emphasis has been on quality and success. All the sires who have graced the stallion boxes have left – and are continuing to leave – their mark on Indian breeding. On my short visit, this was quite evident at the big international day at Hyderabad. Two of the four Group 1 winners were bred at Usha and both were sired by the phenomenal Razeen.

With a record of more than 100 classic winners and the champion sire on many occasions, Razeen is one of the great success stories in India. The Predominate Stakes winner (beating Epsom Derby third Elmaamul) who also ran with distinction in America, Razeen is a son of Northern Dancer and a grandson of the

champion two-year-old filly Numbered Account. Thus he comes from the immediate family of Woodman.

Steinbeck went to stud in 1993 and this son of Mr Prospector has enjoyed consistent success with his offspring. The winner of the Prix La Rochette and the Prix Daphnis in France, this son of Mr Prospector was the only foal of the Group 1 Grand Critérium winner Femme Elite. His early runners included the 1999 Horse of the Year Running Flame, while another who was especially pleasurable was Alameda, winner of the Usha and Mehra Stud Stayers Trophy.

The globetrotting China Visit accounted for some of the leading international performers during his racing career, including Captain Steve, War Chant, Jim And Tonic, Domedriver and Bachir. A smart juvenile, his winning debut at Deauville caught the attention of Godolphin for whom he raced when landing the UAE Derby at three, beating the subsequent Irish and French 2000 Guineas winner Bachir by four lengths. He was a commendable sixth in the Kentucky Derby before



Boards tell the story of success for horses bred at Usha

being temporarily sidelined.

At four he bounced back and won the Group 2 Prix du Rond Point and he was runner-up in the Group 1 Prix de la Foret. His first crops have shown that he too will make a significant impact in the years ahead.

Multidimensional is the new kid on the block. The former Henry Cecil-trained son of Danehill and the Diesis mare Sacred Song was bred by and raced for the Niarchos Family. The winner of the Group 2 Prix Guillaume d'Ornano on his first time over 10 furlongs as a three-year-old, Multidimensional won the Rose of Lancaster Stakes last year and was just beaten a neck by Macarthur in the Hardwicke Stakes at Royal Ascot last year, while later in the season he ran fourth to New Approach in the Irish Champion Stakes.

He is the first foal of the Group 3 winner Sacred Song who just missed out on a success at the highest level when runner-up in the Yorkshire Oaks. Her half-brother was a multiple Grade 2 winner who finished second in the Grade 1 Secretariat Stakes, while their stakes-winning dam was a half-sister to the champion Chief Bearhart and the Hollywood Derby winner Explosive Red.

Could he follow Razeen as yet another former Cecil-trained colt to make his mark

at Usha? His looks, pedigree and performances, together with an exceptional first group of mares, give him every chance.

## BROODMARES

The broodmare band belonging to Ameeta Mehra reflects her interest in the globalisation of racing and breeding. Mares by A.P. Indy, Danehill and Lord Avie mix well with some top-class Indian families. Many of the yearlings shown to us were by China Visit, while one very interesting filly was by Captain Rio out of Glorieuse. Her Bering dam is a full-sister to the Group 1 Fillies' Mile winner Gloriosa, herself the dam of the German stakes winner Gentle Tiger.

## A HAVEN OF LOVE

A fascinating person to meet, Ameeta Mehra is not just passionate about the horses she breeds. She has a vision too for education and spent four years as a teacher before events in her life forced a change. However, she continues her interest in education with the Gnostic Centre, based at Usha. A tranquil place of learning, it caters for the young and old, as well as the very young through the playschool called L'Avenir (the future). More details on this fascinating aspect of Ameeta's life and work can be found on gnosticcentre.com

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