

Racing Post Bloodstock

Kingman and Nahrain to the fore as Elmalka sparks Varian memories

Tom Peacock

KINGMAN and two special broodmares were the stories behind the significant fillies' races at Newmarket yesterday.

The last-gasp success of Elmalka in the Qipco 1,000 Guineas was Juddmonte sire Kingman's first in a British Classic and his 11th individual score at Group 1 level.

As Roger Varian noted in the immediate aftermath, the victory was particularly

poignant as Elmalka is a daughter of Nahrain, who provided the trainer with the first Group 1 of his career after taking over from his mentor Michael Jarvis when striking in the same yellow silks of Sheikh Ahmed Al Maktoum in the Prix de l'Opera of 2011.

Bred, as was 2,000 Guineas winner Notable Speech, by Godolphin, Elmalka is from a branch developed by the Maktoum family down from champion New Zealand filly La Mer. Her half-brother by

Dubawi is Godolphin's flag-bearer Benbatl, the winner of £6 million in prize-money and top-level races around the world who is standing at stud in Japan, with Varian also training his full-sister Foorat to stakes places.

Kingman, who was beaten half a length by Night Of Thunder in the Guineas ten years ago before landing the Irish equivalent, had earlier been the sire responsible for Friendly Soul taking her dam In Clover's exemplary record as

a producer to seven black-type winners in the William Hill Pretty Polly Stakes.

Owner-breeder George Strawbridge bought In Clover's mother, the Group 3 Prix de Royaumont winner Bellarida, in 1997 after she had had some success for the Wertheimer family.

In Clover, by Inchinor, has been more prolific. She carried Strawbridge's colours to a Group 3 victory over an extended mile and a quarter at Saint-Cloud in 2005 for Freddy

Head, who trained many of her best early progeny.

They are headed by a Group 1-winning trio. Call The Wind, by Frankel, landed the Prix du Cadran, while Dansili sisters With You and We Are took the Prix Rothschild and Prix de l'Opera respectively. Further siblings Incahoots, Dream Clover and In Crowd all won Listed races in France.

Friendly Soul was a late foal, born in mid-May 2021, who had her first outing at Kempton before Christmas and returned

with a game performance to beat Kalpana in this traditional Classic trial. She is the result of In Clover's first mating with Kingman, a likely influence on her joint-trainer John Gosden's suggesting a mile and a quarter would be her trip. He added that she "might be a filly for a visit to Chantilly" for the French Oaks.

In Clover did not produce a foal from a subsequent visit to Kingman and Dubawi, most recently going back to the former for her latest cover.

Stud owner Ameeta Mehra tells of her labour of love putting a family legacy into print

Tom Peacock



USHA STUD'S impact on racing in India is practically beyond

comprehension. So far, it has claimed close to 400 domestic Classic wins and, last year, produced a feat as yet even beyond the grasp of Coolmore when its colts and fillies filled the first four places in the Indian Derby.

The 50th anniversary of the first horse to be born under the farm's banner brings with it the publication of a new book, *Grit, Grace & Glory: The Usha Story*.

A labour of love by Usha's owner, Ameeta Mehra, it includes a rich collection of rare photographs and memories of the stud's history.

Mehra took over the reins tragically prematurely from her father, the stud's founder Major Pradeep Kumar Mehra, who died in a helicopter crash in 2001 along with his wife, Veena, and another daughter, Radhika.

"Several eminent racing journalists have been asking me to bring out a book on Usha and its horses, after my father passed away, but somehow the idea at that time did not evoke much enthusiasm in me," she explains of the tome's origins.

"When I realised that we were approaching Usha's golden jubilee, I felt a strong inner impulsion to bring out the long sought for book. I guess the time had come to chronicle the horses and story of Usha."

She says it is "for the reader to decide" what the book achieves, but adds: "To my mind it will serve in time to come as an important historical document on not only the most celebrated thoroughbred farm in India, but will showcase the best of Indian breeding and racing to the world."

Pradeep Mehra served in a mounted regiment in the Indian army and became an

New book celebrates Usha Stud's half-century of excellence



Ameeta Mehra tells the rich history of Usha Stud in the book *Grit, Grace & Glory*

international polo player, sharing the field on occasion with the late Duke of Edinburgh as well as his son, now King Charles.

He had initially wanted to breed polo ponies but decided thoroughbreds could be more lucrative and bought four mares from Britain which set the process going; Eagle Don, Nut, Dusty Marta and Traxana would, remarkably, all breed Indian Classic winners.

With the help of a loan from the bank, he bought a few acres of land outside Delhi and acquired British stallions, such as Grey Gaston and Common Land, who would have transformative results for the Indian industry and set the family up for life.

The stud expanded geographically and other well-known names joined over the years, headed by the Sir Henry Cecil-trained Predominate Stakes winner Razeen - a son of Northern Dancer - and Mr Prospector's Group 3-winning son Steinbeck.

Ameeta, his eldest daughter, had been groomed to succeed him in running the stud, having attended the Irish National Stud management course and worked in a

placement at Kentucky Equine Research.

"There was a lot I learned," she says. "My stint at KE set me up for success and gave me a huge advantage over my competitors. The Irish National Stud taught me the value of working - mucking out, sweeping, taking mares for covering, foaling mares down, farriery etc - with my own hands and gave me a solid grounding in horse breeding and management."

Mehra, who is guided by a strong spirituality, had to show resilience in her early days as a female breeder in a famously patriarchal society, facing down buyers at one yearling sale who were not granting her the same respect as they had her father and were demanding she reduce the prices she valued her stock at.

She has emulated the international ambition of her father and Usha's current roster includes champion sires Multidimensional, another Group winner for Cecil with the Niarchos family who has been a similar Indian breeder to Razeen, and Speaking Of Which, a Moyglare-produced son of Invincible Spirit who had

success on both sides of the Atlantic.

"It is of paramount importance to me to introduce new genetic bloodlines into the farm to create a better and better phenotype, and a good genetic pattern," says Mehra.

"Presently, I'm a little concerned over too much Danehill/Danzig blood in all our pedigrees, but that is a world phenomenon that needs to be looked at and managed. I'm always looking for class and quality, as we all are. The art and science of breeding is to be able to recognise the right horse to stand as a stallion."

Mehra has broadened the variety of stallions at Usha, most recently introducing Dubawi blood through the Prix du Muguet winner Plumatic. She seems to have strong hopes more imminently from the first crop of Deauville, the son of Galileo who won the Belmont Derby and placed in

the likes of the Queen Anne and the Irish Champion Stakes when with Aidan O'Brien before moving to Fawzi Nass's Bahrain operation.

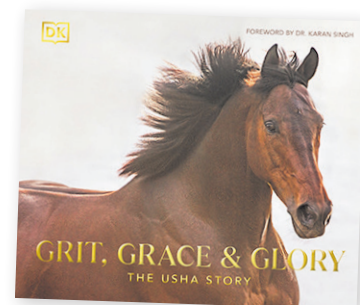
"I was looking out for a Group 1-winning sire with a good pedigree and Deauville just fell into my lap," she says. "He was bought [by Shaikh Nasser's Victorious Racing] for racing and due to Covid-19 all operations ceased, and I did the deal directly with the trainer and owners to buy him to stand in India. I hope his progeny can compete internationally."

Mirra is a filly who was named prophetically after one of her great influences, Mirra Alfassa, a celebrated guru from an ashram in Pondicherry. Her namesake was carrying Mehra's colours when leading home that famous four in last year's Indian Derby.

When asked how it ranked among her racing achievements, she replies: "It was definitely one of the proudest, second only to creating a national record by breeding the winners of the highest number of 15 Indian Derby, 18 Indian Oaks and 16 Indian 1,000 Guineas winners."

"I'm humbled and grateful that the efforts my team and I have put in over the years have borne fruit. I have learned at the feet of a master, Major PK Mehra, my father, who was acknowledged in India as the greatest horseman."

It is a book that will, naturally, have the clearest interest to those with a knowledge of Indian racing but provides much for the general bloodstock enthusiast



to pore over, including diligently researched and authoritative essays on foundation mares and stallions, profiles of its Derby winners and tributes by the likes of Teddy Grimthorpe, Kirsten Rausing and journalist Rolf Johnson.

Pradeep Mehra is depicted as a charismatic, innovative figure and within the pages his daughter tries to summarise the reason for the stud's pre-eminence.

"Every place, every farm has a culture," Ameeta Mehra writes in the pages. "The Usha culture was put in place by my father and has been developed and further honed by me. The first is attention to detail in every aspect of animal husbandry."

"The second is a quest for excellence and refusal to accept mediocrity. The third is 'tender loving care' ensured through the creation of an environment where horses grow up naturally."

With those principles maintained and his daughter proving a formidable driving force for Indian racing and breeding in her own right, there is hope that Usha Stud will be celebrating many more milestones in the coming years.

"I'm a born optimist," says Mehra. "As I have said in the book, there's no substitute for hard work and the Divine Grace. I have written one essay in the book titled, 'The Hand of Grace' - it says it all."

Details on how to purchase the book can be found at ushastud.com.

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Rumble Inthejungle	Distant Rumble.....	Bath 2.50
Sergei Prokofiev	Arizona Blaze.....	Curragh 1.50
Shaman	Sheamus Seimhiu.....	Curragh 1.15
Verbal Dexterity	Monotone.....	Curragh 1.50

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