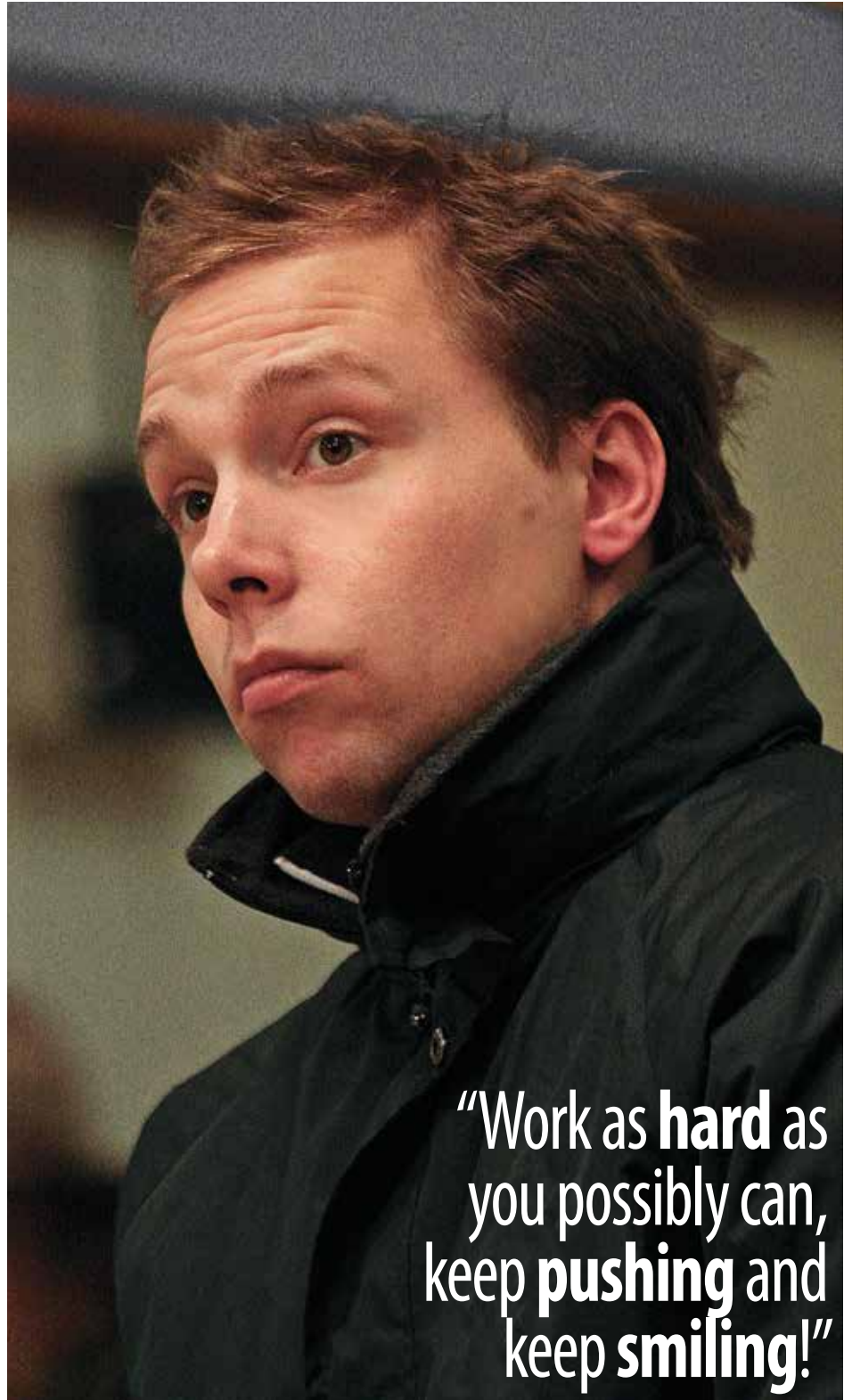


## THE NEXT GENERATION:

Louise Ruffell chats with **Will Douglass** and finds out what it is really like to be a young aspiring bloodstock agent, and that Douglass was just 13 when he sent that first job-seeking letter to his now boss **Charlie Gordon-Watson**



**“Work as hard as you possibly can, keep pushing and keep smiling!”**

**Have you always been focused on a career in racing? What was it that first sparked your interest?**

I had a fantastic head master at prep school who inspired me to get into racing. He bred racehorses and would take me to Newmarket, if I did well in my exams! He also gave me my first ever order when I became an agent.

At secondary school I would take the *Racing Post* to lessons instead of my books, hence I got kicked out of a lot of classes!

I loved hunting and started riding in point-to-points as well as riding out for a local trainer, whose head lad would pick me up on his way to the yard in the mornings.

After about two weeks of this, having showed up to very few classes, my housemaster was less than impressed and along with the headmaster sent me packing.

**What made you want to become a bloodstock agent?**

I read *The Thoroughbred Business* by Jocelyn De Moubray when I was young, there was a chapter on bloodstock agents and I thought it sounded fascinating.

There is a quote about agents being the ones who spend the money and travel around the world looking at horses, and from then it was what I wanted to do – to be paid to buy horses. When you think about it you can't really do anything that beats it!

**You were pupil assistant to both Luca Cumani and Ed Dunlop, did you consider a career as a trainer?**

I thought about it, but deep down I had always wanted to be a bloodstock agent.

It's so hard to get going as a trainer and I have huge respect for my friends who are training. People such as Charlie Fellowes, Ed Walker and Hugo Palmer are doing so well, they put their heart and soul into it and deserve all the success they get.

I do miss working with the

horses in the morning, but I am out with trainers a lot in the summer looking at and watching the horses work, which I love.

I do not think I have ever been more scared of someone in my life as when I was working for Mr Cumani, but I have enormous respect for him.

He taught me more about spelling and English than I learnt in seven years at school! He used to say to me: "I am Italian, yet my writing and English are better than yours!"

He was a hard taskmaster, but a fantastic person to learn from and his knowledge of how horses work and should be trained is staggering.

**You have had a lot of hands-on experience at stud farms and racing yards, has this been useful in your current role?**

It is absolutely vital and I really don't think you can get far without solid experience and grounding behind you.

It helps you understand everything from the ground up and see how it all works first hand.

As you get on in this business you are expected to talk to clients about how small things work in a training yard or stud farm and if you have not experienced it yourself you can't talk about it with any authority.

**Your boss Charlie Gordon-Watson recently celebrated purchasing his 300th Group/Listed winner so to get to work alongside him must be a huge break for any aspiring bloodstock agent – how did your job come about?**

I wrote to Charlie when I was about 13 and (embarrassingly) he still has the letter!

I was lucky to be helped by Richard Brown and Ed Sackville and eventually met Charlie through Ed.

I helped him at some sales, and after the yearling sales in 2009, Charlie suggested that I work for him. I am so incredibly

**You might be the best person at spotting future equine stars, but if you are incapable of talking to people you are going to get nowhere**

grateful for the opportunities that he has given me and the start it has enabled me to have.

**So what's the advice for anyone aspiring to become involved in the bloodstock industry?**

Work as hard as you possibly can, keep pushing and keep smiling!

Of course, you have to get a break and be lucky, but I am a firm believer that you will get there if you work hard enough.

You can also never stop learning and asking questions.

One of my first jobs was working for Peter Stanley at New England Stud and he used to say to me: "It is highly unlikely you will be able to become a bloodstock agent so you should probably have a back-up plan!"

**You must need excellent people-skills to deal with the variety of clients – what qualities do you think are most important as a bloodstock agent?**

Essentially, if you have no clients then you cannot buy a horse.

You might be the best person at spotting future equine stars, but if you are incapable of talking to people you are going to get nowhere.

I really think that being able to talk to potential clients without being pushy and start some form of working relationship with them is a big part.

If you have contacts outside racing it enables you to meet

people in the city or from abroad – this is a really very important.

So not only do you need to be good at the horse side of things, but also the research side to find potential clients and meeting them, it's a very hard skill to teach.

You need to be persistent without being over the top and that is hard to master.

**You must spend a lot of time going through sales catalogues – how long before each sale do you have to start preparing?**

About a week on the actual catalogue, if it's a yearling sale we may go and look at some on the farms beforehand.

I actually don't start work on the catalogue too long before the sale as you want the pedigrees and updates to be fresh in your mind.

For the Tattersalls horses-in-training sale I work endlessly on the catalogue for about two weeks – it becomes quite a task, but can all be worthwhile.

And when it comes to the clients you never really stop working on it. You try and think which clients you have for each sale and make plans in your head as to how it will all come together.

It takes a huge amount of work and you want everything to fit into place perfectly – sometimes it doesn't so you just need to sit it out and wait for the next day.

**What are your other responsibilities when not at the sales?**

I do some work for Simon Marsh and Watership Down Stud, which is very interesting. The farm breeds and sells fantastic horses, but also has a very good sales record as seen this year by its third place in the leading consignors' list at Book 1.

At the moment we are working on getting more fillies and mares for the December Sale, a project we have been working on for the last few years.

I do a lot of work researching horses-in-training to buy horses



# TALE OF VERVE OF EKATI



## A LEADING 2ND CROP SIRE

in North America in 2015



TALE OF VERVE

37 winners and 6 stakes horses,  
led by top colt **TALE OF VERVE**, runner-up  
in the Preakness (G1); leading filly **EKATI'S PHAETON**,  
a multiple Graded stakes winner at Gulfstream; and  
**FOREST BLUE**, runner-up in a Grade 3 at Santa Anita.

Second-crop 2-year-olds already include Tremont S.  
runner-up **PAYNES PRAIRIE** and TDN Rising Star &  
impressive Saratoga debut winner **TALE OF S'AVALL**.



EKATI'S PHAETON



Tale of the Cat - Silence Beauty (Jpn), by Sunday Silence  
Contact Ryan Norton: (859) 254-0424

privately for Qatar, Dubai, Hong Kong, Australia and America, which takes a lot of time.

We also try to purchase mares privately on behalf of clients.

We manage a number of horses-in-training and the clients need regular updates on them to keep them well informed as to what is going on and what they should be doing with the horses.

We put a lot into looking for new clients. We also do huge amounts of research when it comes to looking at sales results to see what horses have ended up where, etc.

**Do you have a number of your own clients? Was it a big step to make?**

It was a big step and it's not easy – realistically who is going to let a 22 or 23-year-old buy an expensive horse on their behalf?

And getting clients to buy at auction is much harder than people will think, I'm lucky to have slowly built up some very good clients over the last two years or so.

You need one good client to put a lot of faith in you and that will get the ball rolling.

A number of my friends have now started training and I do work with them, which helps.



**Must have been very nerve-racking the first time you bid on a horse for clients?**

I was almost shaking and it was only about 10,000gns when I purchased my first horse!

Last year I started to bid a lot more at auction and when I was bidding on one horse at 300,000gns the line went very crackly and I could barely hear the client. When the hammer came down in my favour the client asked: "Was that with you?" and after I replied "Yes", he sounded shocked at which point the line went dead.

I then had a minor panic until he called me back and to my relief said: "Very good as I wanted to go higher if it was not our bid!"

**It has been a bit of a mixed bag at this year's yearling sales...**

This year's yearling sales were incredibly strong in places, but there was some very good value to be had if you worked hard enough, which is probably the case with any sale and whatever the market is doing. Horses will always slip through the net.

The top of the market is generally always safe as essentially it is recession proof much like the top of the market in property, art or wine. It was generally on a par with 2014.

One of the strongest sales at its level I went to this year was Tattersalls Ireland where there was the most fantastic vibe to the sale.

Lower down the levels it was more difficult for consignors and did become more patchy.

**I don't really look upon what I do as work or a job, it's more just being allowed to do something I love doing**

**This is your fifth year with Charlie – would you like to go it alone in the future?**

I am very happy doing a job I love. I never stop learning from Charlie, it is a huge advantage to have someone so hugely respected on your side to talk to and bounce ideas off.

I have been building up my own clients over the last few years alongside Charlie and I don't think going it alone is something I want to do at the moment.

I don't really look upon what I do as work or a job, it's more just being allowed to do something I love doing.

**You must follow the careers of the horses you purchase – are there some that you are especially pleased with?**

We follow the career of each horse very closely – it's important to keep trying to improve the horses you purchase, as well as it being a huge amount of fun.

Peniaphobia won a Group 1 in Hong Kong at the start of the year and I purchased him privately as a horse-in-training.

Itorio has been one of the top horses in Qatar; he was one of the first horses I purchased for what has now become a very important client to me.

Kasseopia is a horse I bought with Charlie Fellowes at the breeze-up sales this year and after winning his maiden impressively by 8l, was sold to Team Valor privately. He has since finished second in a Grade 3 at Woodbine and will join Team Valor in America.

**Charlie Gordon-Watson: Douglass reckons his boss has a photographic pedigree memory**

**CGW Bloodstock has had some great results this year: Postponed, Cannock Chase, Shalaa...**

We have been lucky enough to have enjoyed the most fantastic year.

Racing is a great leveller so it is best to enjoy the good times when you can.

For Charlie to have had 300 Group/Listed winners is some achievement, while we have also managed to have seven Group 1 winners in the last 13 months, a record that speaks for itself.

Cannock Chase looked good the other day so hopefully he will start to fill some of the potential he has always had.

Postponed was brilliant in the King George, so tough and gutsy.

Shalaa has been fantastic this year for Charlie and a real highlight. He is one of those horses who can take your breath away and clocking 41 mph means that he is probably one of the fastest Charlie has bought!

It was also very special when Kingston Hill won the St Leger last year.

**Do you have equine ownership interests of your own?**

Apart from hunters at home, no I don't. In time I would like to, but I am very picky and would have to see a real angle with something. I would like to own bloodstock, but all in good time.

**How important are your first-glance instincts when it comes to assessing horses?**

Vital, but you must always forgive a bad show or give a horse a second chance if you can see something. You must realise that the horse may be exhausted from



all the shows so you must be open minded and give them a chance.

**What do you and Charlie love to see in a horse? And faults you can't forgive?**

A horse with substance, a good walk and a general good type.

With regards to faults I think you can forgive a number of things depending on the overall type of the horse.

You have to take the horse as a whole into account and think if you can really see him standing in the winners' enclosure after a Group 1?

People often overlook attitude – a horse can have all the ability in the world but if it has a bad attitude it will never win a race or may never even run.

**What's more important – pedigree and page, or physique?**

When looking at a horse the first thing I do is look at the date of birth and dam sire, then you will have a picture in your mind of

what the horse should look like.

Pedigree is very important: a mare who has produced no winners, having had a good chance with foals by reasonable stallions, is not something you are going to entertain.

Even if you like the stallion, you may think the dam sire won't suit – I think that's quite important.

Physique is one of the most important aspects and you have to balance everything out in the end.

When it comes to horses in training, the pedigree becomes less important and physique is vital, especially if buying for a country such as Hong Kong where the demands of the racing and training programme are so different.

**Shalaa has had an incredible year, were you there for his purchase? What were your thoughts when you first saw him?**

He was a very good walker, he had a swagger and he just got on

“When it comes to horses in training, the pedigree becomes less important and physique is vital especially if buying for a country such as Hong Kong

with it, which I love to see.

He looked a real two-year-old but he wasn't small – he was all in proportion and neat but a very good type.

He was so straight-forward, which is a great asset to him.

We hope that they will all be champions so we obviously

had high hopes for him, but Liam Norris came straight around to say thank you to Charlie and said: “I think he's one of the best I have ever had!”.

**Buyers often quote after purchase that a horse has a “come from a good hotel”. How important is that, especially when it comes to buying foals and yearlings?**

The good farms produce good horses year in year out, not just at the sales but also on the racecourse.

Farms such as Watership Down, Meon Valley, Newsells Park and Normandie Stud always have good results from a small broodmare band.

There are endless farms in Ireland that produce top horses and where they are raised is vitally important, one of the biggest factors. If buying yearlings who have been bought as foals, it is always worth noting which farm sold them initially.

**Two purchased at Tattersalls October Book 1 2015 by Charlie Gordon-Watson Bloodstock.**

**Below, a Street Cry filly who cost 800,000gns from Newsells Park Stud, and, right, a Dubawi filly out of Brigitta. She came from Highclere Stud and cost 425,000gns**



# 2016 AUSTRALIAN YEARLING SALE DATES

Sale	Date *	Company	Location
Gold Coast Yearling Sale	6 - 12 January	Magic Millions	Gold Coast, QLD
Sydney Classic Yearling Sale	6 - 8 February	Inglis	Newmarket, NSW
Perth Yearling Sale	15 - 16 February	Magic Millions	Perth, WA
Tasmanian Yearling Sale	18 February	Magic Millions	Launceston, TAS
Melbourne Premier Yearling Sale	28 - 29 Feb & 1 - 2 March	Inglis	Oaklands, VIC
Adelaide Yearling Sale	14 - 16 March	Magic Millions	Adelaide, SA
Gold Coast March Yearling Sale	21 - 22 March	Magic Millions	Gold Coast, QLD
Australian Easter Yearling Sale	5 - 7 April	Inglis	Newmarket, NSW

\* Dates subject to change

# All your pedigree needs...

Mating analysis, with Listed and Group  
successes including Grade/Grade 1 winners

Specialising in consultancy and research for  
the breeder, consigner and bloodstock agent

---



Clive Webb-Carter Bloodstock Services

Tel: ++44 (0)7860 158645

[www.wcbloodstock.co.uk](http://www.wcbloodstock.co.uk)



**What are your thoughts on buying yearlings and foals by first-crop sires for your clients? Which young sires that are standing out for you?**

If you are buying a yearling for someone who only buys one or two a year you might possibly stay away from a first-season sire.

Generally, I do not have a problem with buying a first-season sire, but I do feel pedigree is important when it comes to stallions.

I have been very impressed with Nathaniel, the Born To Seas look lovely horses, as do the Bated Breaths, while there were some very nice Excelebrations.

Elzaam is a horse that has perhaps gone a little under the radar as he was a very good horse – he nearly won a Coventry Stakes and then a Group 1 as a three-year-old. He is by a top stallion in Redoute's Choice and out of a Kingmambo mare.

**Two out of three Charlie Gordon-Watson Bloodstock foal purchases at the 2014 Tattersalls December Sale were by Nathaniel, and CGW Bloodstock purchased five yearlings by the sire this autumn. You both must be impressed with his progeny so far?**

Yes, very impressed with them, I think they are lovely horses with real quality to them.

Of the foals, the filly we bought out of Our Queen Of Kings, who cost 300,000gns, was resold to Juddmonte in Book 1 for 600,000gns.

Charlie purchased a yearling by Nathaniel at Arqana and the two colts in Book 1 were out of Kinnaird and Splashdown. We also bought a filly by him in Book 2 out of Heavenly Whisper, as well as in Book 3 the filly out of Factice from Newsells.

Nathaniel has one of the best pedigrees going by one of the best stallions there has ever been. He was a top racehorse and is now standing at a top farm, so he has every chance.



**De Treville: this is Darara's first foal, bought by Gordon-Watson Bloodstock at Tattersalls as a yearling in 2013 for 850,000gns. By Oasis Dream, he has gone to achieve Group 3-placed form in France**

**Charlie is noted for his success in buying future broodmares, including Darara, a world-class foundation mare for Watership Down Stud, and Wandering Star. What do you think gives him the edge when buying mares?**

His mare purchase record is almost better than his yearling purchase record – last year Cursory Glance and Charming Thought won Group 1s, both out of mares purchased by Charlie.

Charlie has very strict criteria when it comes to buying mares and it will be the same whether the budget is 10,000gns or 5 million guineas; it doesn't change and has been proven to work, time and time again.

His knowledge of pedigrees is astounding and he knows families inside out.

Work for the mare sales never stops, but the yearling sales are a particularly important time.

You can see how a number of families are producing – he will note all of that and expect me to do the same.

Charlie can walk around Tattersalls remembering what he has bought in the past according to where it was stabled!

**There is even more to take into account when buying broodmares – covering sires, breeding records, possible future pedigree improvements... how do you narrow it down?**

You must always look through the covering sire – if you are not a fan, it might make the mare cheaper if that stallion is quiet.

Breeding record is vital, but sometimes an incredibly good farm can help a mare with a bad breeding record so you must factor that in – this could also make her cheaper.

You should take future pedigree improvements with a pinch of salt, even if they are potentially there you must do your utmost to find out everything you can about the horse in front of you.

Broodmare stallions are

incredibly important and this has been proven time and time again by sires such as Darshaan, Sadlers' Wells and Rainbow Quest, who is the broodmare sire of Kingston Hill, Kris Kin and Quest For More who runs in the Melbourne Cup this year whom Charlie purchased as a yearling.

Galileo mares are now doing incredibly well, which is no surprise at all.

**Do you and Charlie disagree on horses?**

Rarely, I might occasionally make a case to him about one I really, really like and he is only lukewarm – he will take my views on board.

But essentially we seem to have similar taste, probably due to the fact he has taught me the majority of what I know!

**What's Charlie like to work with? What are his qualities as a bloodstock agent?**

We get on well and have never really had any arguments. You have to remember that you are working with the best agent in the business so you will always be learning and moving forward.

He is incredibly picky, when it comes to anything he pays so much attention to detail about absolutely everything, it is no surprise he has been so successful. It has even made me become a little OCD with everything in my life!

As a bloodstock agent his knowledge of families and horses is quite staggering, he never takes himself too seriously which is a pretty key point to life really and, at the end of the day, it is all about enjoying yourself.

If a sale has gone badly you have to move on and make sure the next sale goes better and put more work into it.

He is able to sum up horses and make decisions quickly.

His memory is almost photographic, he remembers horses so well – I am getting there with that asset. ■