

THE BEST STORIES OF 2022 – AND A LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT YEAR

RACING POST

ANNUAL **2023**



POWER & GLORY

BAAEED • HONEYSUCKLE • DESERT CROWN • A PLUS TARD • ALPINISTA

PLUS REFLECTIONS ON THE RACING LIFE OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II

RACING POST

ANNUAL 2023

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01933 304858 help@racingpost.com

Published by Pitch Publishing on

behalf of Racing Post, A2 Yeoman

Gate, Yeoman Way, Worthing,

Sussex, BN13 3QZ

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writing from the Publisher.

A CIP catalogue record is available
for this book from the British
Library.

ISBN 978-1-83950-112-8 [UK]

ISBN 978-1-83950-113-5 [Ireland]

Printed in Great Britain

by Buxton Press.

racingpost.com/shop

WELCOME to the Racing Post Annual 2023 and our five cover stars: Baaeed, Honeysuckle, Desert Crown, A Plus Tard and Alpinista. From Flat to jumps, summer to winter, they proved themselves a special bunch.

Going unbeaten through a campaign – whether it is in Britain and Ireland over jumps or across Europe on the Flat – is a colossal feat and collectively our famous five nearly did it, with a mere handful of narrow reverses amid an abundance of wins.

But what characterised them above all was an unflinching appetite for the toughest competition. Together they ran in and won the Cheltenham Gold Cup, the Derby, the Arc, the Champion Hurdles of Britain and Ireland, the Queen Anne and International Stakes, and other top contests besides.

It was a year of tremendous strength in depth. Among the others who would not have looked out of place in our pictured group were Allaho, Energumene, Kyrios, Shishkin, Highfield Princess and Nature Strip, as well as rising stars Galopin Des Champs and Constitution Hill.

All feature prominently in this publication and it has been a pleasure to look back on their incredible stories and bring them to life in these pages.

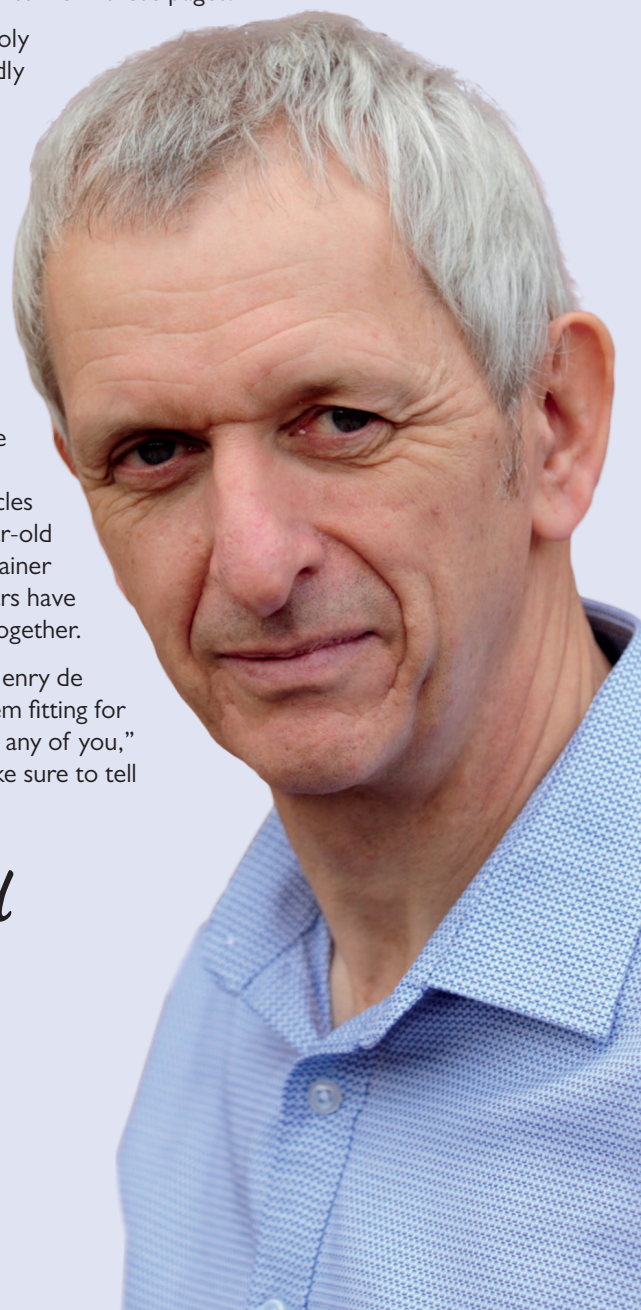
There have been more melancholy events too. Racing was profoundly grieved by the death of its greatest supporter, Queen Elizabeth II, and the sport also lost one of its titans in Lester Piggott. And nor was racing immune from the cost of living crisis and the shockwaves from the war in Ukraine.

Jonathan Harding's superb yet harrowing account of his trip to the Poland-Ukraine border is the closing article in this book and it is a difficult read. So are the articles about the tragic death of 13-year-old Jack de Bromhead, the son of trainer Henry and his wife Heather. Tears have been shed putting those pages together.

In his eulogy to his young son, Henry de Bromhead found words that seem fitting for all of us in dark times. "I just ask any of you," he said, "whoever you love, make sure to tell them."

Nick Pulford

Nick Pulford
Editor



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Racing's aid mission to help Ukraine

Baaeed joined the pantheon of Flat racing superstars with an astounding victory at York but lost his unbeaten record at the very end



ALL-TIME GREAT

By Lee Mottershead

IT WAS a race whose result appears in no form books but, like the horse who won, it almost immediately attained fabled status.

Aside from those connected to the three runners, nobody was there to spectate, except for a few fortunate employees going about their daily business on

a typically windy morning at Chelmsford.

What happened in the race was anything but typical, for on that first Tuesday in May, Baaeed made it obvious to those present that he was even better than they had dared to dream. He would prove this again and again over the course of the year, but Chelmsford came first, just as Baaeed would do until an

unbeaten record cherished by connections was lost in a farewell appearance that left Ascot deflated.

Much lay ahead for him that May morning but plenty had already been achieved. It had been only the previous June when the Shadwell homebred made his belated racecourse debut. He won as a raw three-year-old that afternoon at Leicester and then

continually enhanced his reputation through five further races, ending his opening campaign with two workmanlike Group 1 victories in the Prix du Moulin and Queen Elizabeth II Stakes.

Among the class of 2021 he was officially bracketed as one of four horses sharing sixth position, his excellent 125 rating leaving him

► *Continues page 6*

BAAEED

4lb shy of America's world champion Knicks Go. The son of Sea The Stars entered the spring as one of the sport's most exciting and yet in some ways unexposed talents. We knew he was good, but just how good could he become? The first answer to that question came at Chelmsford.

Trainer William Haggas had managed to keep it all quiet, which meant the exercise was a partial success even before the three stable companions began galloping at the seven-furlong pole. Cieren Fallon set a proper gallop on Montatham, closely followed by the Michael Hills-ridden Aldaary, a decisive winner of the Balmoral Handicap on his final run the previous year. In third was Baaeed, with Jim Crowley on his back for the first time since Champions Day. Crowley watched and waited. From the Chelmsford clock tower so did Haggas, wife Maureen and Shadwell duo Angus Gold and Richard Hills.

Not long after turning for home, Baaeed was steered wide, shown daylight and asked a question. The answer was incredible. He moved through the gears in a way his jockey had never previously experienced. It was only when crossing the line that Baaeed truly hit top gear, yet when his rider looked over his shoulder he saw a margin of at least ten lengths had been created over runner-up Aldaary. Crowley could hardly believe it.

It took him an age to pull up Baaeed. When groom Ricky Hall was reunited with the horse, he and Crowley looked at each other. Neither could stop smiling. They knew the importance of what had just happened. They knew what it meant. They knew that for this fabulous four-year-old, anything was now possible.

★★★★

THEY were happy that Tuesday and even happier the following Saturday.

Aldaary had not been given a hard time on his excursion to Chelmsford but nor could he have got much closer to Baaeed had he received a smack. It was therefore more than a little encouraging to see him win Haydock's Listed Spring Trophy by three and a half lengths, earning a Racing Post Rating of 119. It suggested he was almost certainly good enough to win

► *Continues page 8*



'I was really proud of him and the horse loved it too'

Ricky Hall, Baaeed's groom, on life with a superstar

"Horses like him are what make you want to get up in the mornings. It's been a pleasure to ride him. He likes his work; he likes to gallop. I don't think I will ever look after a more straightforward horse.

"It's funny how things turn out: Baaeed wouldn't have come my way if I hadn't stopped travelling with the horses, which I used to do. Then my partner got pregnant, so I thought I'd better spend a bit more time at home.

"Taking him to York was fantastic. There were so many people cheering when he came into the winner's enclosure. I was really proud of him and the horse loved it too."

► Special times: Baaeed canters under Ricky Hall; below, trainer William Haggas and wife Maureen with their stable star



'All of us are very unlikely to come across another like him'

William Haggas on Baaeed

"We'll look back and say how bloody lucky we were to have him. It's been a great experience for all of us and I know I'll get letters in ten years' time from people who were here, saying they didn't really appreciate what they were experiencing at the time, because very few horses are like him and all of us are very unlikely to come across another.

"It's his mind as much as anything – he's amazing, he just doesn't care, he's not fazed by anything. A horse has to have ability, but his mind and his heart are big pieces of the jigsaw. A lot of them don't have the mind and they don't have the guts, which means the ability is no good to them.

"The exceptional ones are hard to find."



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Best bar Frankel

Baaeed took his form to a new level with his sensational victory in the Juddmonte International, the step up in trip proving the key to unlocking the sort of performance he had hinted at over a mile, writes Paul Curtis.

A mighty Racing Post Rating of 138 ranks him alongside the best behind Frankel (143) on the list of the top turf horses in RPR history. His sire Sea The Stars and Daylami are also on 138.

In the context of the Juddmonte International, his figure also rates as the best bar Frankel (143), ahead of previous top winners Sakhee (135, 2001) and Royal Anthem (134, 1999).

TOP TURF HORSES BY RPR

143 Frankel
138 Baaeed
138 Daylami
138 Sea The Stars
137 Generous
137 Peintre Celebre
137 Zilzal
136 Dayjur
136 Mark Of Esteem
136 Montjeu

Since Racing Post Ratings were introduced in 1988

▼ Brilliant best: Baaeed and Jim Crowley land York's International in stunning style



'A spectacular performance'

Reflections on Baaeed's six-and-a-half-length win in the International at York

William Haggas, trainer "It's rarely you see in a high-class race a horse appear on the bridge with two to run looking like he could go at any time. He's just good, isn't he? It was a spectacular performance and I'm glad now that everyone will believe in him.

"We think he's fantastic and we have thought so for some time. Sure, I've been slow to get him up in trip but he's been so dominant at a mile. This was the perfect opportunity and he clearly stays it well. He's just got a fabulous engine and a fabulous temperament."

Jim Crowley, jockey "It was unbelievable, everything went perfectly. I suppose you could say there was a lot of pressure coming here to get the job done but I never really felt it. I knew how good he was. I was never worried about the trip.

"He's special and I've known from day one. The first time I rode him William said, 'How good do you think he is?' and I said, 'He's the best you've got, he might be the best you've ever had'. He's the perfect racehorse."

or go close in a Group 1. Baaeed had made him look ordinary.

One Saturday later, it was Baaeed's turn to go public. The Lockinge Stakes was the obvious spot for his return. It was also the contest used by Sir Henry Cecil to launch Frankel's final campaign. Baaeed, who had also emulated Frankel when claiming the Queen Elizabeth II as a three-year-old, had been handed a provisional map that would see him trace the steps taken a decade earlier by a legend.

That meant starting out at Newbury, where anything but a win would have been a shock.

Baaeed duly delivered, leading over a furlong out before quickening clear. The winning distance was not as large as it had been at Chelmsford but, in all other regards, it was more of the same, a straightforward stroll, albeit this time with an audience.

Haggas confirmed his pleasure but he was otherwise keen not to dish out superlatives. He refused to hail Baaeed as the world's number one. He even declined to name him the finest to have run in his name, bringing his 2018 Arc runner-up into the equation.

"I don't know if he's the best I've trained," he said. "Sea Of Class

was a star and I loved her dearly. Most horses with a good turn of foot are good and he's got a nice turn of foot, which she had too. I was impressed, though."

He was similarly pleased at Royal Ascot, although he admitted to having endured more nerves prior to a Queen Anne Stakes that was watched on course by Sheikh Hissa, the daughter of Baaeed's late breeder Sheikh Hamdan.

Godolphin's Real Class, who had finished second in the Lockinge, once again filled the same spot. In stretching his winning spree to eight, the 1-6 favourite was

brilliant and ruthlessly efficient. The flamboyance and fireworks of Frankel's Queen Anne were missing but Baaeed nonetheless appeared untouchable at a mile. This made it all the more exciting to hear Haggas and Sheikh Hissa make clear York's Juddmonte International was the big aim.

"I was always in control," Crowley reflected. "It's a long season and there was no need to go and do it by ten lengths. Sterner tests await and we'll keep testing him, but I'm sure he'll be fine."

Willie Carson, for so long Sheikh Hamdan's man in the blue and white, was equally certain

Gold was wrong to suggest his own greatest Shadwell star, Nashwan, might not have possessed the same electric speed as Baaeed.

"Oh, f*** off! Nashwan could have won over six furlongs," replied Nashwan's jockey, before releasing one of his famous cackles. He would have more to say on the subject after York, but first there was Goodwood, where Baaeed made it nine out of nine in the Sussex Stakes. By now he had become the highest-rated horse on the planet. There was nothing in his latest tour de force to suggest that was unwarranted.

"This horse has got gears that

other horses do not possess," declared racecourse commentator Simon Holt, who was smitten. So was Crowley.

"It does feel a little unfair sometimes, but I'm not complaining," said the beaming rider. He stressed that the winner had been "much better" than the bare result and responded with a hopeful affirmative when asked if his magnificent mount could be even better once he was upped in distance on the Knavesmire.

"Quite possibly, if he can show that turn of foot over ten furlongs," Crowley said. "Mile-and-a-quarter horses can't quicken like that. He

quickens like a sprinter."

Remarkably, given the pressure of partnering such a valuable thoroughbred, Crowley appeared to be taking the journey without a worry. You sensed it was rather more stressful for Haggas.

"William and I keep reminding ourselves to just enjoy it but we're both very nervous," said Sheikh Hissa at Goodwood. Yet when asked if her anxiety might be so strong that she would hide away during Baaeed's races, the answer was unequivocal.

"Never," she said. "I don't want to miss a thing."

Racing fans felt the same.

★★★★

WHAT they saw at Chelmsford, we saw at York.

In winning the International, Baaeed elevated himself from being a great horse to one of the sport's all-time greats. In God's own county here was God's own horse, not the very first to be worthy of such billing but undoubtedly one whose fledgling mile-and-a-quarter mission yielded an exhibition of such outrageous brilliance that it immediately defined him for us and future generations.

It might not quite have earned the stratospheric figure given to

► *Continues page 10*