

# INGLIS EASTER



**Nancy Sexton** speaks to the McKeevers, Johnny and Susie, and Australian agent James Ferguson, who have teamed up for a new venture down under

**T**HE off time between the winter European breeding-stock sales and the start of the Flat turf season is invariably utilised as an opportunity for agents to recharge their batteries.

Not so Johnny and Susie McKeever, who recently confirmed their commitment to the Australian industry by joining forces with young Australian agent James Ferguson.

Within days of the announcement, the new partnership had hit the ground running with the purchase of colts by High Chaparral, Casino Prince and Spirit Of Boom at the Inglis Classic Yearling Sale in the middle of last month. From there they made their presence felt at the Inglis Melbourne Premier Yearling Sale and now it is all systems go for next month's Inglis Easter Yearling Sale.

The McKeevers, the purchasers of 18 Group 1 winners, remain based in Newmarket while Wellington-born Ferguson works out of Sydney. Thus the partnership will have a constant presence in both hemispheres. At the same time, however, each side is well versed in both markets, with the McKeevers having spent ten years doing business in Australia and Ferguson launching his own agency off the back of spells with Newmarket trainer Hugo Palmer and Kentucky agent David Ingordo among others.

"McKeever Bloodstock first started doing business with Australia about ten years ago and it's slowly become an important part of our business," explains Johnny McKeever.

"We started buying mainly stayers for Gai Waterhouse after being introduced by Peter and Frances Stanley. We've had great success for Gai with the likes of Group 1 winners The Offer and Glencadam Gold and plenty of multiple Group winners in the staying ranks."

Australian interests make a regular assault on Tattersalls' Autumn Horses in Training Sale, none more so than Waterhouse, who continues to be one of the sale's heavy hitters with the assistance of the McKeevers.

In 2012, McKeever silenced the Tattersalls ring by throwing in an opening bid of 200,000gns for The Offer (then named Offer). It is a shock tactic that Waterhouse occasionally employs in



Teaming up: Newmarket-based Johnny McKeever (left) and his wife Susie with James Ferguson, who set up his own Sydney-based agency this year

## 'The Australian racing scene is vibrant and healthy with fantastic levels of prize-money'

Australia and on this occasion it ensured the son of Montjeu was on the way to her yard in one fell swoop. In April 2014 the gelding justified the outlay when taking the Group 1 Sydney Cup.

The previous year, meanwhile, the partnership paid 135,000gns for Glencadam Gold out of Sir Henry Cecil's yard. The Refuse To Bend gelding was another to scale Group 1 heights, in his instance in The Metropolitan of 2012.

More recently, the McKeevers have furthered their involvement in Australia through associations with Sam Hayes's Cornerstone Stud, for whom they sourced shuttlers Sir Prancealot and Free Eagle, and the Fung family's burgeoning Queensland operation Aquis Farm, for whom they signed for

570,000gns-worth of mares at last year's Tattersalls July Sale.

Susie McKeever is also part of the 'It's All About The Girls' syndicate that races Global Glamour, who swept the Flight Stakes and Thousand Guineas for Waterhouse and co-trainer Adrian Bott during a golden week last October.

**'People here enjoy giving young people a chance. And our industry is in very good health'**  
**James Ferguson**

"For the last few years we've also started working the yearling sales for internal Australian interests including [trainers] Gai [Waterhouse], Archie Alexander, Robbie Griffiths and individual Hong Kong and Malaysian clients," adds McKeever.

"We love our involvement in the Australasian scene as it complements the quiet months in between the end of the European sales season in December and the start of the European Flat season. Recently we've started spending much of the British winter in Australia and our son Oliver spent periods working with Yarraman Park Stud, Gai and Michael Moroney."

Joining forces with Ferguson was a logical step given that he recently spent ten months assisting the agency, focusing in particular in sourcing horses

out of Europe for Australia and Hong Kong.

**F**ERGUSON also spent six months working with Palmer in Newmarket, has shortlisted at various European auctions for Ingordo of Lane's End Bloodstock and Irish breeder James Hanly, assisted John Warren, and worked for Arrowfield Stud, Haunui Farm and Highclere Stud.

His most influential grounding, however, came through his family's own involvement as the owners of Bell River Thoroughbreds. Operated by his parents Andrew and Georgie, Bell River co-bred current star three-year-old sprinter Extreme Choice, last year's Blue Diamond Stakes winner.

Ferguson took over the

position of assistant manager at the stud aged 18 and oversaw the dispersal of its broodmare band for just over A\$3.2 million at Inglis last May.

"We met James through our purchase of a yearling filly from his parents," recalls McKeever. "Not only was the yearling, Flippant, a great success but the family subsequently bred Extreme Choice."

"James came to Newmarket last year to work for Hugo and McKeever Bloodstock. He'd previously worked for John and Carolyn Warren and I quickly agreed with John's assessment to me that James was an outstanding student."

"When James made the brave decision, along with his family, to set up a Sydney-based agency this year we were delighted to back him with our association. Increasingly, agency work is becoming a



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## The team's tips for young sires to follow

ONE of the team's first purchases was a Spirit Of Boom colt out of Taittinger bought in association with Legends for A\$80,000 (£49,245/€58,125) during last month's Inglis Classic Yearling Sale.

The colt is from the first crop of his sire, a hardy son of Sequalo who won nine of 59 starts over five seasons on the track. As talented as he was tough, Spirit Of Boom's victories included the Group 1 Doomben Ten Thousand and Group 1 William Reid Stakes, and he stands for A\$11,000 (£6,771/€7,992) at Eureka Farm in Queensland.

"I've been very impressed with the Spirit Of Booms," says James Ferguson. "I've seen some really athletic colts by him. He's really stamped them as a sire and there's a lot of quality about them."

"I think the McAlpines [of Eureka Farm] have



**Epaulette: his progeny have impressed James Ferguson**

marketed him really well. They've made a lot of his yearlings BOBS and Super VOBIS eligible [incentive scheme designed to reward owners and breeders who invest in Victorian bloodstock] in the sales ring, which makes them very attractive to buyers. And they've also sent several to New Zealand.

"I've also liked the Dundeels I've seen too. It

seems breeders have used him wisely in sending him the right type of mare. And I've liked the Epaulettes."

Ferguson is also impressed with what he has seen on the track from the Fastnet Rock stallion Hinchinbrook, who stands alongside I Am Invincible for A\$38,500 (£23,700/€28,000) at Yarraman Park Stud.

"He's doing a great job at stud and is ticking along nicely with his foot right in the door," says Ferguson of the stallion, who was represented by his eighth stakes winner recently when Diamond Tathagata won the Group 2 Skyline Stakes at Randwick.

"His horses are continually performing at the top Saturday meetings and it will be only a matter of time before his breakthrough. I thought he was great value last year at stud and I'm hoping to purchase one or two sometime this year."

younger generation's concern and I know we've backed a passionate, knowledgeable and extremely hard-working young man in James."

Ferguson expects to commit to the international sales cycle and plans to attend the Tattersalls July Sale before returning for the yearling sales and again to source breeding stock. However, the idea was always to set up base in Australia in light of its vibrant industry.

"I was born and bred into the industry and from a young age I knew I wanted to be involved," he says. "When I finished school I thought the best way to broaden my horizons was to work internationally and I came to realise that bloodstock was an avenue I wanted to commit to."

"I was always going to set up in Australia. People here enjoy giving young people a chance. And our industry is in very good health. It's flying due to the backing of our government and the schemes we have in place not only for the public but for the breeders and vendors as well."

"One in 310 Australians have a share in a racehorse, which is unheard of anywhere else in the world. Also, with the government continually supporting our racing not only from the top but right through to the bottom, it allows us to have a base that has benefited breeder, vendor and owner. It's resulted in a drive right through the top."

"You can now race for a minimum of A\$20,000 in Australia, which is unheard of in Europe. And with this it's driven the market in the sales ring as all of a sudden horses who were worth A\$5,000 three years ago are now worth more than double that."

McKeever also cannot speak

highly enough of the Australian industry.

"The Australian racing scene is vibrant and healthy with fantastic levels of prize-money – weekend racing in Sydney and Melbourne typically carries A\$100,000 in added purses," says McKeever. "The syndication culture means that even a minor shareholder gets fully involved in ownership."

"Shareholder-owners are treated with full respect by trainers who report weekly on the progress of the horse whether it's in full training or just spelling. The communication levels are in a different league to anything most owners would experience in Europe."

**M**CKEEVER further explains: "No major entity is overly dominant in the ownership ranks, which makes racing so much more varied and interesting to the punter and general enthusiast. The frequency of 'rags-to-riches' success stories such as this year's top two-year-old She Will Reign, who cost just A\$20,000, means syndication grows ever more popular."

"Everything else about the Australian industry follows on

**'Syndication culture means even a minor shareholder gets fully involved in ownership'**

**Johnny McKeever**

from this healthy purse-money reward-to-risk ratio. Yearling sales are majorly competitive at all levels of the market and there's a demand for new broodmares."

Demand from Australian owners for broodmares has significantly buoyed the market in Europe and North America in recent years. There are several various outfits in particular, such as Newgate Farm, Rosemont Stud and Aquis Farm, which make an annual habit of purchasing stock in the northern hemisphere, for which rewards have been forthcoming.

"The interest in the European thoroughbred is probably the strongest it's ever been in Australia," says Ferguson. "With stayers, people have that Melbourne Cup dream. And I think a lot of people enjoy buying breeding stock out of Europe for the outcrosses on offer."

"A lot of European mares have worked really well with the different stallions here."

With two sales already under their belt and the Inglis Australian Easter Yearling Sale on the horizon, the McKeever/Ferguson partnership has needed to be quick to find its feet. However, that is not to say the team has not taken the time to enjoy the delights of Australia.

"We've had an extremely busy time attending sales and touring farms and training stables," says McKeever. "But the joy of Australia and Australians is that they also know how to relax and have fun outside the industry."

"The weather is excellent, the food is outstanding and the wines are getting more and more delicious each year. What's not to love about Australia?"

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