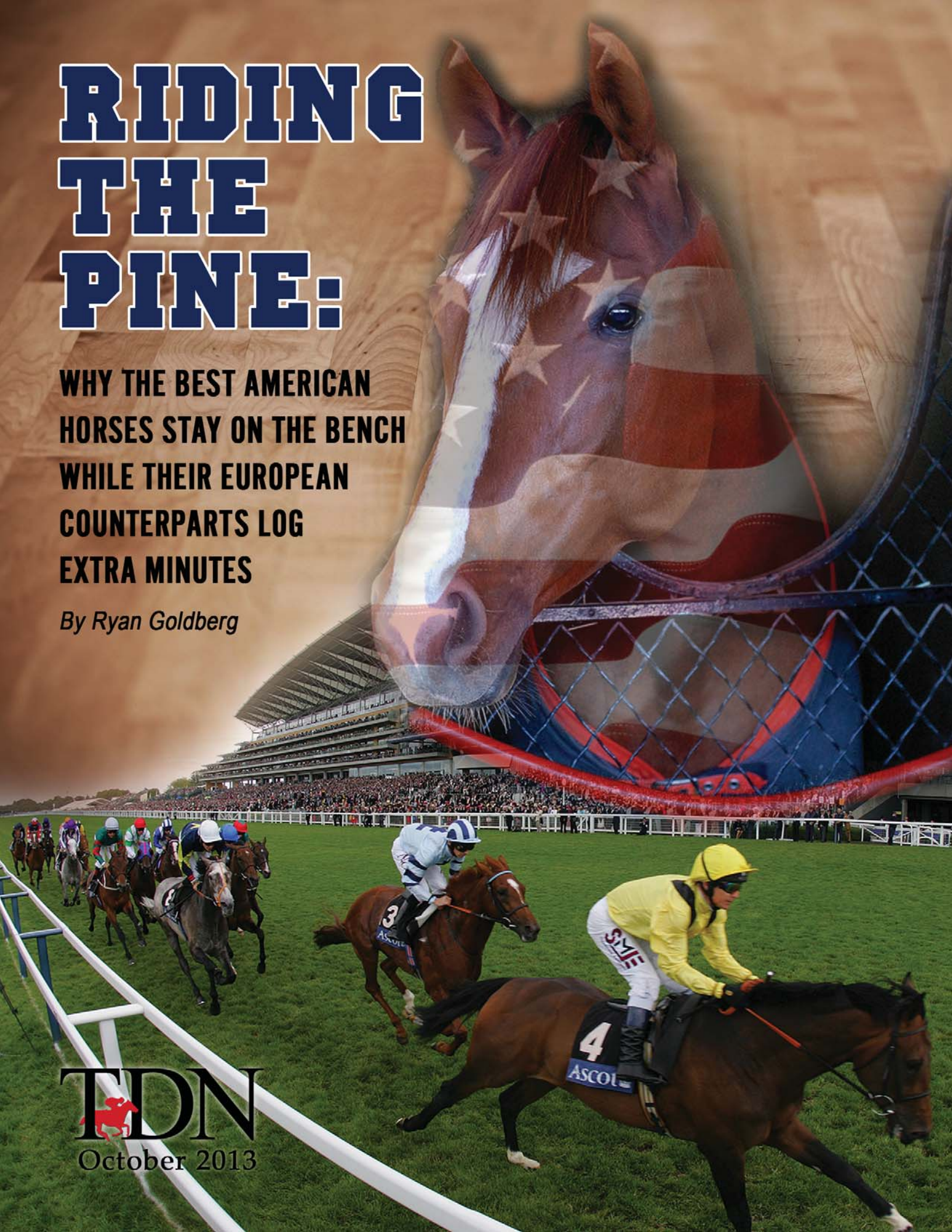


RIDING THE PINE:

**WHY THE BEST AMERICAN
HORSES STAY ON THE BENCH
WHILE THEIR EUROPEAN
COUNTERPARTS LOG
EXTRA MINUTES**

By Ryan Goldberg



TDN
October 2013

By Ryan Goldberg

On Aug. 11, the Prix Jacques le Marois at sun-drenched Deauville Racecourse on the Norman coast was billed as the race of the season in Europe. Six Group 1 winners graced its marquee, and as so often happens in Europe, trainers went out of their way to figure out who had the best – in this case the best miler, regardless of gender or age.

It did not disappoint. Moonlight Cloud, the diminutive five-year-old mare with a truckload of courage,

squeezed between horses a furlong and a half out and, with an acceleration that took your breath away, burst clear for what looked certain to be a comfortable victory. But Olympic Glory left the pack and with a bold charge nearly caught Moonlight Cloud. She held on by a short head.

The time went up, and the Deauville habitués rejoiced. Moonlight Cloud had lowered a course record held by Goldikova, another French heroine and her former stablemate in trainer Freddy Head's barn. It was unanimously voiced that here

set a course record for six and a half furlongs. Two course records in a single week.

The horses in her wake, too, were not strangers to such short layoffs. The filly Elusive Kate, who finished seventh, had won Deauville's Group 1 Prix Rothschild two weeks earlier. This was her third race in 30 days. Aidan O'Brien trainee Declaration of War, a respectable fourth, had finished third in the Sussex Stakes at Goodwood 11 days earlier. Godolphin's Dawn Approach, a disappointing fifth as the 2-1 favorite, also came from the Sussex, losing there by a narrow margin.

was a legendary performance, reinforced by this fact: Moonlight Cloud had raced one week before, triumphing in Deauville's Group 1 Prix Maurice de Gheest for the third time as she



Moonlight Cloud (left) won the G1 Prix Jacques le Marois seven days after her win in the G1 Prix Maurice de Gheest, both in course-record time. There were six G1 winners in the field, four of which had raced two weeks or less prior to the Marois

Horses Raced in **EUROPE**

11 Horses in Europe Were Champions and/or SWs

*They won 17 Stakes Races,
11 Group Races, 2 Championships*

including

**Champion Older Staying
Filly or Mare in England**

G1 Prix Vermeille *winner*
SWEET STREAM

Champion Filly at 2 in Ireland
TORGAU

G2 Futurity *winner*
FIRST CORNERSTONE

G2 Prix Eugene Adam *winner*
TRIPLE THREAT

G2 Prix Vicomtesse Vigier *winner*
BRIGANTIN



Barry Irwin

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The Jacques le Marois was his fifth consecutive Group 1 race in 99 days. Both horses had flown from Ireland to England for the Sussex, back to Ireland and later to France.

Declaration of War showed no wear and tear. Ten days later, O'Brien saddled him in the Group 1 Juddmonte International at York. With an added two and a half furlongs in front of him, he triumphed over the best middle-distance horses in Britain – his third race in three weeks. Only soft ground kept him from headlining the Group 1 Irish Champion Stakes at Leopardstown 17 days after that.

This state of affairs seems unthinkable in American racing. Two races in a week? An extended campaign with a start every two and a half weeks? The best American horses routinely race every six weeks, save for the Triple Crown; Game on Dude, for instance, has raced five times since early February, his average layoff 49 days, a figure set to rise once he

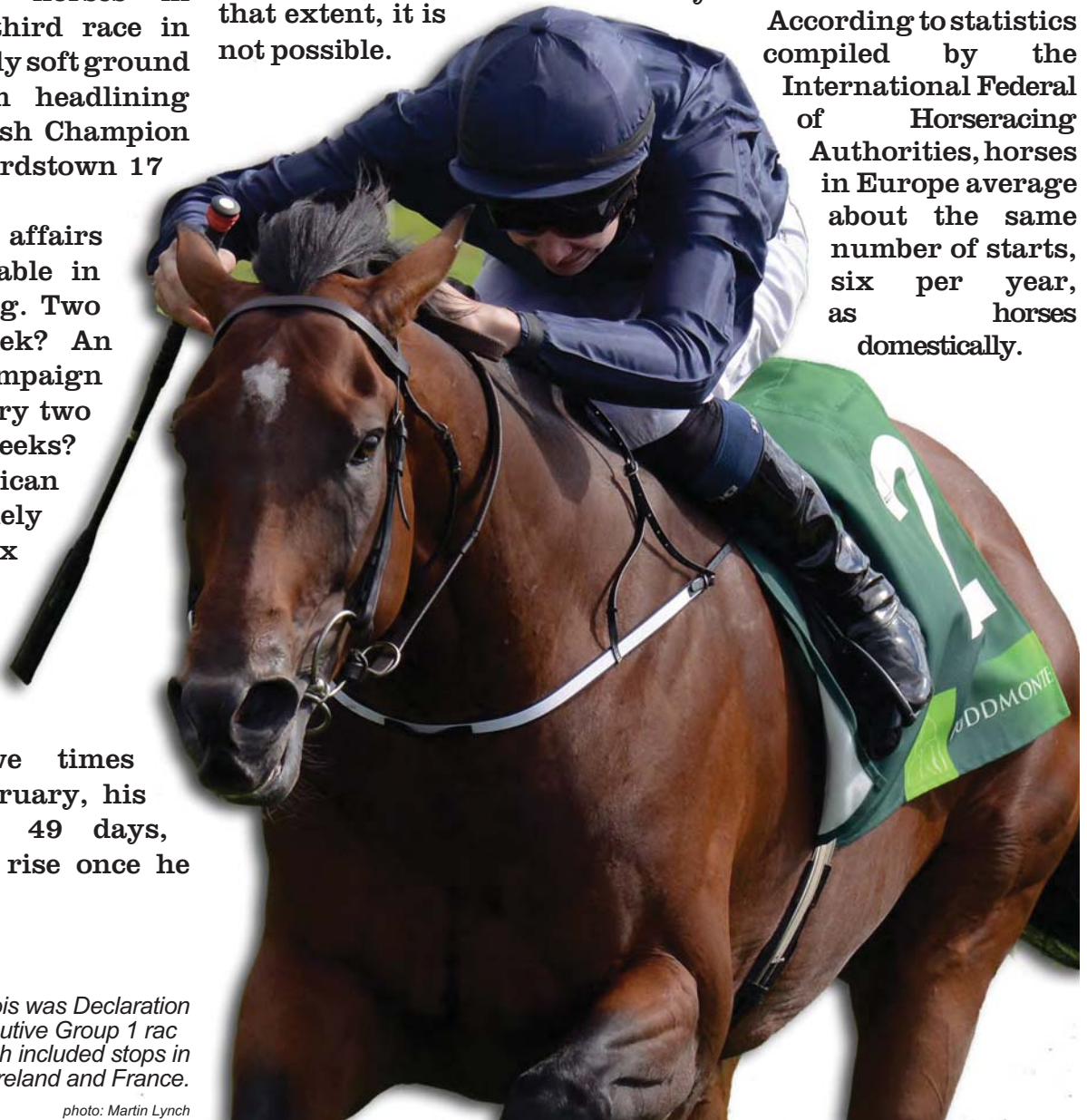
enters the Breeders' Cup Classic after winning the Pacific Classic more than two months ago. What explains this major divergence?

George Strawbridge Jr., who bred and owns Moonlight Cloud, races in Europe and America and keenly observes both landscapes. He immediately points to Lasix as the main offender. "The recovery time would not allow it," he says. "Whenever you dehydrate a horse to that extent, it is not possible.

Look at the human athletes. They don't dehydrate themselves before the race."

Lasix is one explanation to that question, and there are several. The particular nature of horse racing makes anecdote and logic a clear frontrunner to the normally scant scientific evidence. So for this article, the opinions of some of the most successful trainers in Europe were solicited, plus American trainers and owners. What follows is what they had to say.

According to statistics compiled by the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities, horses in Europe average about the same number of starts, six per year, as horses domestically.



The Jacques le Marois was Declaration of War's fifth consecutive Group 1 race in 99 days, which included stops in England, Ireland and France.

photo: Martin Lynch



photo: Patrick McCann

It is well known that American horses used to race almost twice as frequently before the introduction of Lasix in the 1970s. In group or graded races, however, horses in Europe appear to compete with greater frequency than their American counterparts, even though the latter – or perhaps because of this – encounter year-round racing, as compared to the spring-to-fall European calendar.

This season, trainers Aidan O'Brien and Jim Bolger have become models for running their hardier horses time and again. With Dawn Approach

“I’d have to say that many of the best horses we’ve had here, like Giant’s Causeway, Galileo, Rock of Gibraltar were able to show up for the big races time after time.”

—Aidan O’Brien

a regular participant in the best mile races, Bolger’s three-year-old homebred Trading Leather has kept longer distances; he began his season on May 16 at York and raced three times in 23 days. Then he won the Irish Derby at the Curragh on June 29, received a four-week rest, and has finished second or third against older horses in three Group 1 races since then.

By comparison, reigning American champion Wise Dan made his seasonal bow a month before Trading Leather, in the Maker’s Mile at Keeneland, and has raced

four times – on turf, like his European peers – since then.

“When you handle a horse that can run like this the temptation is to run him every couple of weeks,” Morton Fink, Wise Dan’s owner, said after the six-year-old gelding’s record-setting Woodbine Mile performance on Sept. 15. “He is a money machine. It will never happen as long as Charlie [Lopresti, his trainer] and I have anything to do with him.”

Fink however signaled that Wise Dan would likely race in the Shadwell Mile at Keeneland three weeks later, his same setup for the Breeders’ Cup Mile as last year.

Declaration of War, a four-year-old son of War Front bred in Kentucky by Joe Allen, raced seven times in 129 days, all but one of them Group 1 races. O’Brien said he does not make any hard and fast rules on the spacing of races; with some horses, the next day he would hardly know they’d had a race, while others can take longer to recover. In other words, the individual horse tells you.

“As I’ve said many times before Declaration of War has an unbelievable constitution, so I don’t think it’s entirely fair on the American-trained horses to use him as a basis for comparison,” O’Brien says. “But I’d have to say that many of the best horses we’ve had here, like Giant’s Causeway, Galileo, Rock of Gibraltar were able to show up for the big races time after time.”

GRADE 1 EXACTA

LAUGHING (IRE) and TANNERY (IRE)

Both formerly trained in Ireland, they gave owner Richard Santulli a 1-2 in last Saturday's Grade 1 Flower Bowl Invitational Stakes at Belmont Park. This was **LAUGHING's** fourth straight Graded Stakes success while **TANNERY** also scored in a Grade 2 since moving stateside.



G1SW & FIVE-TIME GSW

OBVIOUSLY (IRE)

Another graduate of the Irish racecourse, he won the Grade 1 Shoemaker Mile at Hollywood Park, his fourth of five Graded Stakes wins. He also holds the track record for a mile on the turf at Del Mar.



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photo: Edward Whitaker

**“Obviously a lot of the horses are pretty tough here...
But it’s a strange thing. It’s slightly like saying the
foot is being fitted to the shoe.”**

—Trainer John Gosden

The season, too, is shorter. O’Brien pointed out that there are no Group 1 races in Britain and Ireland until the month of May. The fixture list, as they call it, shoe-horns the big races from April to mid-fall, and they often lay close to one another, as in the 13 days separating the Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe at Longchamp and Champions Day at Ascot.

John Gosden, one of Europe’s most successful trainers, cites the fixture

list as the principal reason for these short layoffs. “Obviously a lot of the horses are pretty tough here,” he says. “But it’s a strange thing. It’s slightly like saying the foot is being fitted to the shoe.” He continues: “The program is becoming increasingly crowded with major festival races. And we have the highest quality of turf racing here....People want to compete.”

The aforementioned Elusive Kate and The Fugue,

two of Gosden’s stars, are proper examples. The Fugue, a four-year-old daughter of Dansili, easily defeated her own sex in the Group 1 Yorkshire Oaks on Aug. 22, as part of the British Champion Series, and so returned quickly against the boys in the Irish Champion Stakes on Sept. 7, where she outstayed Al Kazeem, a winner of three Group 1 races this season who was making his sixth start since late April.

Gosden suggested however that short layoffs generally demand a longer one thereafter. Moonlight Cloud, for instance, will return to the races about seven weeks after her course-record double, in the Prix de la Foret at Longchamp on Arc day.

But for the Cambridge graduate, who trained in California for a decade until returning to England in 1989, Gosden remembers a much harder horse then. "In the old condition books everything used to turn around every two weeks," he says. "If you were going for the Santa Anita Handicap, you'd have the San Antonio two weeks ahead of the Big Cap. But two to three weeks was very much the norm."

The San Antonio now sits four weeks before the Big Cap. Game on Dude won both this year.

But, Gosden adds, "We would say that you run your Triple Crown in a little bit of a hurry. It's all over in five weeks, isn't it?"

Indeed, the Triple Crown reveals a lesson that when their hands are forced, American trainers – and their exceptional charges – are occasionally still up to the challenge. The old-school barns of Shug McGaughey and D. Wayne Lukas, for example, made every dance this year with Orb, Oxbow and Will Take Charge. Will Take Charge then ran second in the Jim Dandy and won the Travers and Pennsylvania Derby, starts separated by four weeks; the Breeders' Cup Classic will be his 10th start of the year. The best older horses are seen far less.

So much purse money is concentrated in races for two and three-year-olds, which offers disincentives for hanging around, but this still defies belief since the older horses should better handle the rigors of frequent racing. Take Cross Traffic, the highly regarded Whitney winner. The four-year-old son of Unbridled's Song didn't make the races until this year, so you might assume he had a lot in the tank. His average layoff has been almost 50 days. Following a heartbreaking loss in the Met Mile on May 27 – his fourth race since breaking his maiden on Jan. 24 – he returned 68 days later in the Whitney. His win that day offered a glimpse of a breakout star.

It looked like he'd wheel back in the Woodward, but trainer Todd Pletcher decided to pass the race and wait for the Jockey Club Gold Cup.

He finished second-to-last after stumbling badly at the start.

Pletcher said at the time:

"Getting a race at a mile and a quarter five weeks out puts us in a better position for the Classic than a mile-and-an-eighth race nine weeks out." The takeaway being that Cross Traffic either couldn't handle both races, or his trainer saw no reason to try.

The Fugue winning the Group 1 Darley Yorkshire Oaks at York on August 22. She returned for a win against the boys two weeks later in the Sept. 7 Irish Champion S.

photo: Mark Cranham



Horses Raced in
**NORTH
AMERICA**

**23 Imports
From Europe
Have Won 45 Stakes,
22 Graded Stakes**

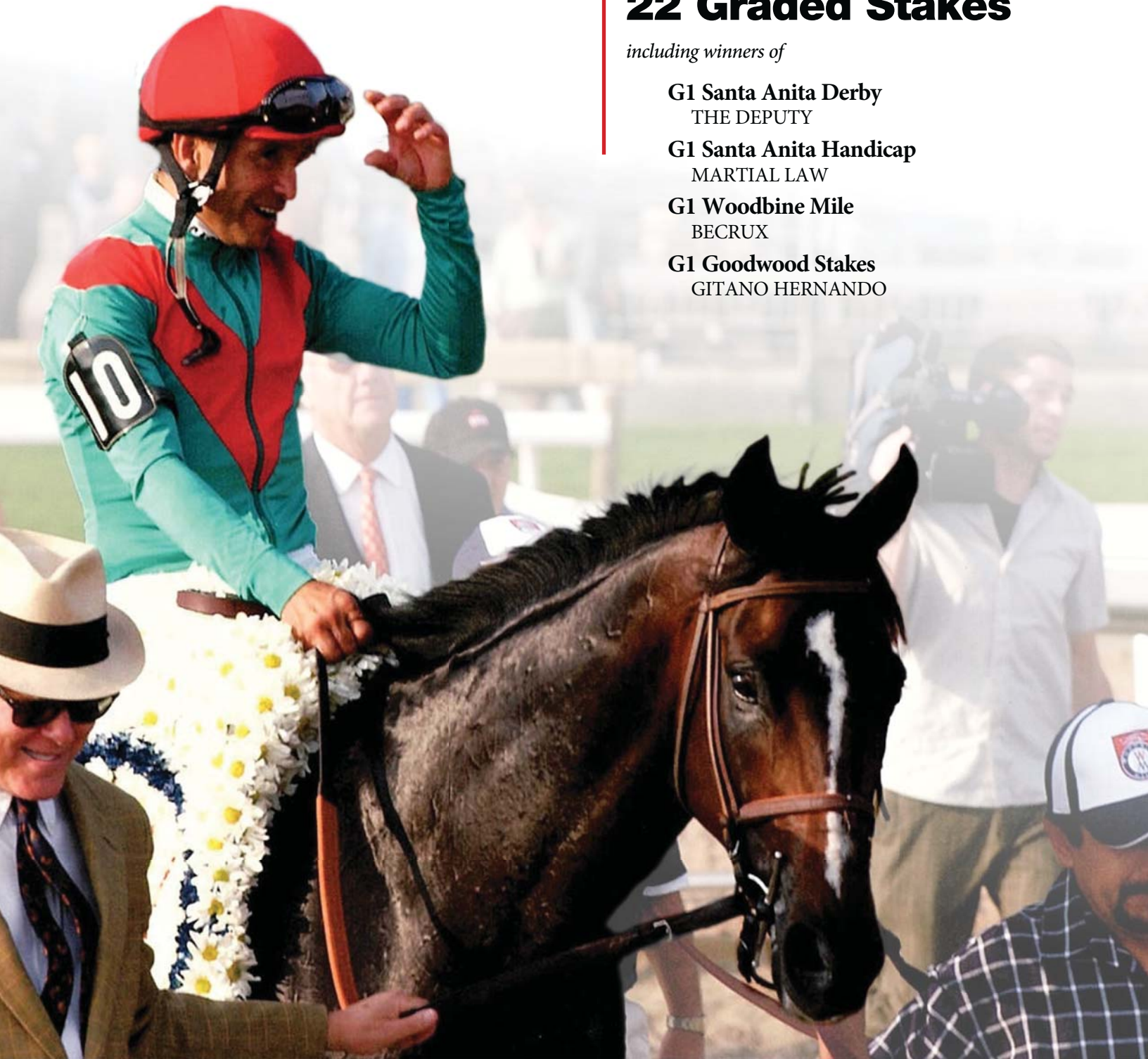
including winners of

G1 Santa Anita Derby
THE DEPUTY

G1 Santa Anita Handicap
MARTIAL LAW

G1 Woodbine Mile
BECRUX

G1 Goodwood Stakes
GITANO HERNANDO



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Trainer Shug McGaughey with Derby winner Orb

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“There are so many opportunities around that you can afford to wait to race and train in between...We have 12 months of top racing in different places and different jurisdictions. We can miss a good race here or there.” —Trainer Shug McGaughey

There are other similar examples. Last year, Wise Dan went five for six, from late April to early November, with an average of 41 days between starts. He had no trouble winning the Shadwell Mile 20 days after the Woodbine Mile, and the Breeders' Cup Mile 28 days after the Shadwell. Havre de Grace, in 2011, made seven trips to post in seven-and-a-half months. During her 2010 championship season, Zenyatta raced six times, for an average layoff of 48

days. Blame raced five times that year. In 2009, Rachel Alexandra never tasted defeat in eight starts, and of course won the Preakness two weeks after the Kentucky Oaks.

There is a thinking among American trainers that the opportunities of year-round racing and purse largess across the country allow them to pick their spots. There is also a desire among the new generation of trainers to keep their win percentages high. Prize money in Britain is famously low, which

might generate more starts, but then again the largest stables there, like Godolphin or Coolmore, are driven by prestige, not dollars.

“There are so many opportunities around that you can afford to wait to race and train in between,” says trainer Shug McGaughey. “We have 12 months of top racing in different places and different jurisdictions. We can miss a good race here or there.”

The Breeders' Cup, McGaughey added, dictates

the late summer and fall schedule; wanting to keep the powder dry, no trainer will race close to that weekend. Moreover, he pointed out Belmont recently carded a \$125,000 overnight stakes whereas Churchill had a similar \$150,000 stakes the following week. A trainer can enter and scratch if he chooses. "We're not forced to run back on short rest," he says.

You'd expect sprinters would take less time to recover, and to some degree that seems true. For example, Trinniberg raced eight times last year during his championship season, about once a month between March and September, when he was afforded a six-week layoff before the Breeders' Cup. Probably the only trainer to embrace short layoffs in recent years was Rick Dutrow, like when Willy Beamin upset last year's King's Bishop Stakes three days after winning the state-bred Albany Stakes; such

is the incongruity of that decision in American racing circles that it was met with shock.

Back in England, trainer Mark Johnston attempts to answer this question by delineating between American and European training methods. He is often singled out for running his horses back quickly.

"I think nothing of it at all frankly," he says. "But at the same time, I wouldn't be breezing - what you call breezing, what we call galloping - at home. I'm a big believer in letting them do their fast work on the racecourse. It fascinates me that there are trainers - particularly when you look to the United States - but there are trainers at home,

who won't run their horses back quickly and there are owners who won't let us run them back in a fortnight."

Two-time Group 2 winner Universal, who Johnston trains for Abdullah al Mansoori, was one of the hard knockers of the European season. He raced four times in under two months this winter in Dubai, including two races in a week, and then came to England, where he earned his way out of handicaps and into group races. His layoffs looked like this: six days, 14, 14. Following a short break, this pattern was mostly repeated with a pair of Group 2 fixtures and the Group 1 King George VI at Ascot.

Sadly, the tough horse broke his pastern in early September, an injury which occurred during his longest period away from the races. He would have tried for Group 1 glory thrice more, in Ireland, Canada, and Japan.

Besides the style of training, there is the setting.

Most horses in Europe are graded with

Universal winning the Group 2 The Princess of Wales's boylesports.com Stakes at Newmarket 7/11/2013

photo: Mark Cranham



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photo: Edward Whitaker

“My experience in America, training on American ovals in cities and such, it is without question a much harder environment to train a racehorse than a European environment.”

—Trainer Jeremy Nosedá

opportunities to train over stamina-building terrain in pastoral settings.

“It’s much easier to get a horse fit, hard, hard fit, under European training conditions than it is training on a flat dirt oval,” says English trainer Jeremy Nosedá. “My experience in America, training on American ovals in cities and such, it is without question a much harder environment to train a racehorse than a European environment.”

There is a refrain that

says a dirt horse must run through dirt and a turf horse runs over turf, and Nosedá returns time and again to the contrasting tempo and style between races on these surfaces.

“The demands on a horse in a dirt race are acutely more than in a turf race,” he says. “Our turf races would not bear resemblance to a dirt race where a horse is decelerating in the last quarter mile and running slower than the first quarter. In our races, the quickest

furlongs are normally the penultimate two furlongs – maybe not the last furlong, but the second-last and third-last furlongs are normally the quickest part of the race. So our horses aren’t being taken to that same level of... exhaustion at the end of a race, like American horses.”

This observation begs the question if American grass horses are racing with greater frequency than their dirt counterparts. This seems only intermittently the case. Wise Dan had an easy summer

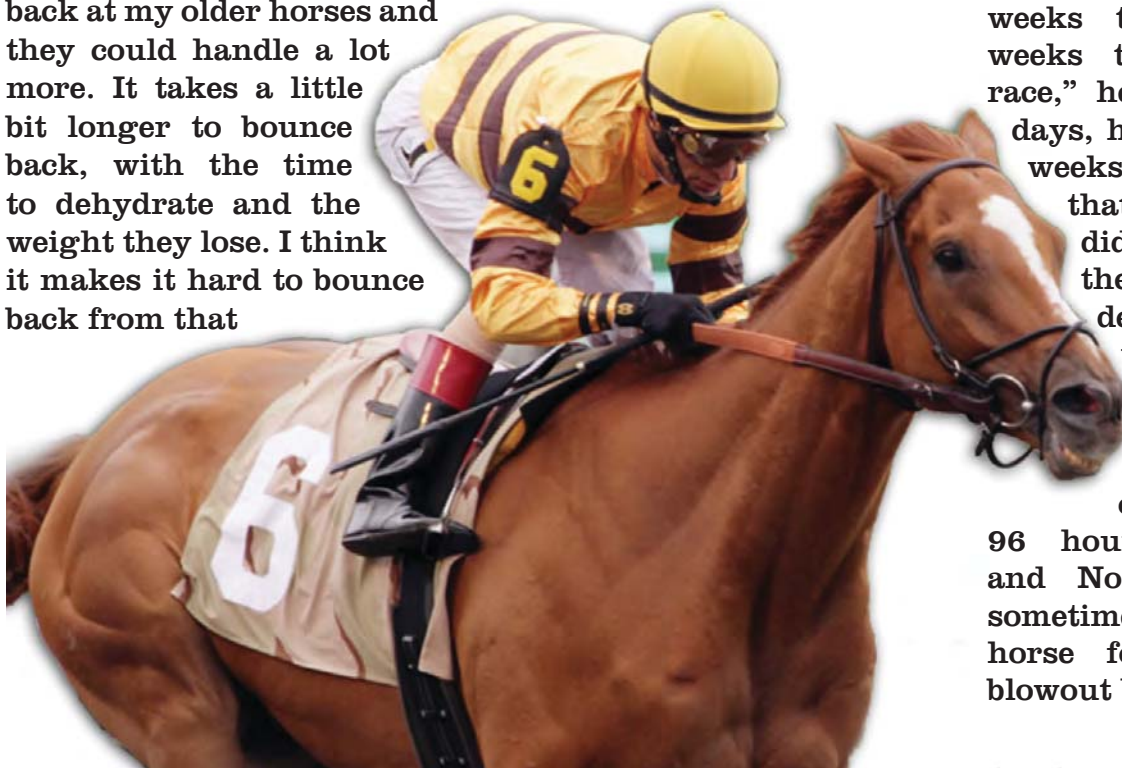
before a likely three-race fall campaign. Big Blue Kitten won the United Nations 27 days after the Monmouth Stakes; otherwise, his layoffs averaged almost 44 days. Last year, Little Mike ably traveled from east to west and in between, for a start every 46 days in a seven-race campaign from January to November. The Phipps bay Point of Entry won the 2012 Elkhorn Stakes at Keeneland 15 days after snagging an allowance there; after two and a half months off, he won three Grade 1 turf routes in New York before losing to Little Mike in the Breeders' Cup turf. His average layoff between those races was 37 days. This is at the mercy of the NYRA stakes calendar.

When this subject was first broached with McGaughey, he immediately suggested Lasix. "I've looked back at my older horses and they could handle a lot more. It takes a little bit longer to bounce back, with the time to dehydrate and the weight they lose. I think it makes it hard to bounce back from that

"I've looked back at my older horses and they could handle a lot more. It takes a little bit longer to bounce back, with the time to dehydrate and the weight they lose. I think it makes it hard to bounce back from that on short rest....I think some of the horses today, you have to space them out a little bit."

—Shug McGaughey

Last year's Horse of the Year Wise Dan made just 6 starts in 2012.



on short rest....I think some of the horses today, you have to space them out a little bit." This squares with physiological sense. Owner Bill Casner, who took his horses off the popular diuretic, observed extreme weight loss in some of his horses.

"We weigh them the morning after they've hydrated all night long, and horses will lose anywhere from 35 pounds on up," he told the Thoroughbred Daily News last year. "A bucket of water weighs 40 pounds and these horses will usually drink a couple of buckets of water from the time they're cooled out until the next morning. They've consumed 80 pounds of water, yet they've still lost 35 pounds on up."

"Trainers in this day and age understand that it takes anywhere from four weeks to seven or eight weeks to recover from a race," he added. "In earlier days, horses ran every two weeks. That was ideal and that was because they didn't have to deal with the metabolic stress of dehydration combined with the stress of a race."

Horses in England are allowed to train on Lasix up to 96 hours before a race, and Nosedá said he will sometimes give Lasix to a horse for a three-eighths blowout beforehand.

Breeding Fillies & Mares
WORLDWIDE

**Mares Bought
in Europe When
Mated by Barry Irwin
Have Produced**

Eclipse Champion,
G1 Kentucky Derby, G1 World Cup,
\$8.4 Million in Earnings
ANIMAL KINGDOM

Champion, G1 Japanese Derby,
Leading Sire in Japan
KING KAMEHAMEHA

G2 Prix Eugene Adam
TRIPLE THREAT

G2 Prix Vicomtesse Vigier
BRIGANTIN

G1 Goodwood Stakes
GITANO HERNANDO

**Mares Bought
in Europe Produced**

Champion in Japan,
G1 American Oaks, Japanese Oaks
CESARIO



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“I never found a problem with a horse performing below par 96 hours later,” he says. “So without knowing, I’m not sure if Lasix is a good enough reason.”

There is certainly a desire in the States, for commercial breeding purposes, to remain spotless on the track. Breeders everywhere define what happens on the track. In Germany, all the big races are run at 12 furlongs, so breeders produce sturdy horses. Australian trainers seem to delight in racing their horses on short rest – making Europe look mild by comparison – and the best ones often contest a 10-furlong Group 1 on Saturday before tackling the two-mile Melbourne Cup on Tuesday. Hence Australian horses are bred for durability. It’s no secret that the majority of American breeders prioritize speed and precocity over durability and resilience.

Gosden says you have to assume the breed is getting softer, and American horses more delicate and fragile, if they require a large amount of recovery time between major races.

“We can talk about medication as long as you like, but medication obviously allows a less durable individual to race,” he says. “But I think the other major factor is that, from 1980 onwards, people started breeding for the sales and not so much breeding to race. And that meant that if a filly was related to something decent, even if she was unsound, had a wind



Barry Irwin with 2011 Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom

photo: Horsephotos

problem, anything of that nature, she could still be bred because she had the pedigree and then the foal would go to the sales.”

“It is very noticeable to me as a trainer,” he continues, “and you can discuss this with any trainer in Europe, but the breed has got a lot softer and weaker. And that is largely due to the fact that people bred a lot to the sales, and the old traditional breeders would’ve culled that stock. They wouldn’t have dreamt of breeding to it. Nor would they dream of breeding to a stallion that required various medications.”

He believes that European horses are not as tough as he remembers from 30 years ago, perhaps in part because of imported American stock. Of course, American horses were once heralded the world over for the very thing they now lack. Gosden recalls watching Charlie Whittingham during his time in California.

“Whittingham would train them long. They would be doing three-eighths, two half-miles, two five-eighths, two three-quarters, two seven-eighths, two mile works. Then, if they’d done that and done it to his liking – and we’re talking proper works now, on the clock, miles in 37 and change, 38 – once they’d done that they could run.”

Gosden says nobody trains that way any more because the horses cannot handle it. So the horses changed, not the trainers?

“There was a lot of that adapting to the horse and also there was a lot of...” he sighed, “I don’t know, there was a lot of protecting the horse more. For the old purist trainers, if the horse could not stand its preparation, then it doesn’t really deserve the right to run. They didn’t try to fiddle them along to the races, they trained them.”

Barry Irwin, the globe-trotting president of Team Valor International, concurred with Gosden.



George Strawbridge (left) with MGWr Fantasia after the Group 3 Nell Gwyn S. at Newmarket 4/15/2009

photo: Edward Whitaker

“In Europe you see the beauty and nobility of this animal. It’s a different feeling running there because it’s the horse’s ability against the other horse’s ability.”

—George Strawbridge

“I can’t begin to tell you how much fitter the horses over there are,” he says. “They’re training on a forgiving surface, so they can go all out on turf. Here we’re training around soundness.” Horses racing on dirt “give everything they’ve got and they can’t run back in a week.”

That said, Irwin says he sees a follow-the-herd mentality and lack of confidence among trainers here. “There are so few guys in this country who put a foundation in a horse,” he says, singling out Bill

Mott as one of the few.

In his early years on the track, Irwin says, a horse would jog a minimum of 30 days and gallop 60 days before a recorded breeze, often up to 45 and 90 days. “Now, a guy jogs two weeks and gallops a month before he starts breezing,” he says. “Sometimes less.”

What’s left is a horse that cannot race with any regularity even if the trainer wants to. Given all the explanations, the effects seem clear-cut: the rarity of seeing the best American horses on

the track makes it harder to market the sport, harder to sell the stars. Rarer still to find the American Moonlight Cloud.

As a result, George Strawbridge finds himself breeding and racing more often in Europe. He likes to see his horses race.

“In Europe you see the beauty and nobility of this animal,” he says, “It’s a different feeling running there because it’s the horse’s ability against the other horse’s ability.”