

Whiteley a Yearling Seller and Booklet Author

Commercial breeder Rob Whiteley was both exhausted and somewhat on edge even before the beginning of the Keeneland September yearling sale.

In addition to preparing for the world's largest market of young horses, Whiteley found himself in the role of "worn out" author awaiting judgment from peers and clients on the new 12,000-word booklet he had just completed, "Buying Sales Yearlings, Plain and Simple."

"I'll be curious to see what the response is. Whenever you write something, you have that existential period where you're wondering how it's going to be received," he reflected.

As co-founder of the Consignors and Commercial Breeders Association in 2005, Whiteley was determined to try to fortify the American Thoroughbred sales system after several years of controversy over a variety of ethical issues. So, he suggested that the CBA produce a series of informational booklets.

"I thought we should build our credibility and usefulness and strength on educational initiatives. We've taken on these three books as a way to do that," he said.

Whiteley oversaw production of the first two booklets, both written by Frank Mitchell, entitled "Vet Work—Plain and Simple: Scoping," which was released in 2005, and "Vet Work—Plain and Simple: OCDs (osteochondritis dissecans) in Sale Horses," published last year.

He decided to write about the complex subject of buying yearlings himself, with a goal of providing material useful to both market newcomers and veterans. His devotion to the project perhaps is best indicated by the fact he spent more than 100 hours researching just one section dealing with what he calls sale myths.

"I took every graded stakes winner from the beginning of 2002 to the present and analyzed all those horses in terms of what month they were born, how old the dam was, and what part of the Keeneland sale they came out of," explained Whiteley, who earned a doctorate in counseling psychology before he got involved in breeding more than two decades ago. In a distinguished career, he has co-bred such outstanding runners as El Corredor, Henny Hughes, Strong Hope, Roman Ruler, and Badge of Silver under the banner of his Liberation Farm (some with partners).

Following are the six sale myths Whiteley identified and conclusions he counsels buyers to reach:

- The perfect yearling. "The myth is the perfect yearling is the best yearling, and the fact is that perfect conformation does not make a racehorse."
- May foals are not worth as much as earlier foals. "The fact is that May foals race as well or better than earlier foals. There is some

interesting data in there. May foals have won nine Breeders' Cup Mile (gr. I) races and they've won five of the last nine runnings of the Breeders' Cup Distaff (gr. I). Even more amazingly, they've won six of the last 15 Belmont Stakes (gr. I)."

- Foals out of older mares have reduced potential. "There is a huge body of major stakes won by foals out of older mares. It's great to start a story like that being able to drop a name like Secretariat. Like with the May foals, it didn't hurt to drop Northern Dancer's name."

• Less-than-perfect throats compromise performance. "The fact is that more than 98% of sale yearlings" have no throat problems that hamper their racing or earning ability.

• OCDs are usually a problem. "The fact is that OCDs are developmental. Most disappear and don't affect racing performance."

• Select sales produce all the top racehorses. "The fact is that many graded stakes winners come from the back end of the Keeneland September and Fasig-Tipton October sales. During the

research period, I discovered that 131 graded stakes winners came from sessions 7-14 at Keeneland and 25 graded stakes winners were accounted for by Fasig-Tipton October."

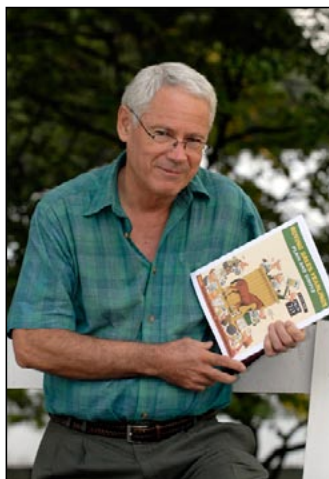
Another key section of the booklet focuses on buyer responsibility.

"Some of these guys are so competent and successful in business, and they come in and they shoot their own selves in the foot and then whine about it," Whiteley declared. "There's no excuse for the way some are treated, but on the other hand, there's no excuse for the way they set themselves up for it. So, I try to address that."

He also has included a question-and-answer section with 13 accomplished trainers on topics such as what they look at when evaluating a yearling, which faults don't concern them, which faults do raise suspicion, and which faults are unacceptable. Trainers who participated include three-time Eclipse Award winner Todd Pletcher and Kiaran McLaughlin, who conditioned 2006 Horse of the Year Invador.

Other booklet sections delve into devising a sound business plan, utilizing advisors, and developing productive professional relationships with veterinarians. Filled with cartoons and pull-out quotes, the booklet also contains an illustrated guide to conformation and a list of suggested additional reading.

"In its entirety, it might be useful. I hope it makes a difference," said Whiteley. "These are things I've thought about for a long time, of course. After 25 years of selling horses, I've had enough time to put things in perspective." — *Michele MacDonald*



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