



Stateside

by JAMIE LLOYD

Aron Wellman looking to Eclipse Europe next

On my recent trip to Goffs for the Orby Sale I ran into an old friend who had ventured over from California to see what was on offer this side of the pond.

I first met Aron Wellman while I was assistant trainer to Paddy Gallagher in 2005. We both got to share an unbelievable run of luck with his partnership at the time named LGL Racing LLC.

The "LGL" stood for "Let's Get Lucky" and indeed the investors did. Amongst their small stable were such Stakes-winning turf superstars as **Three Degrees (Singspiel)** and **Valbenny (Val Royal)**, as well as Classic contender **Sam's Ace (In Excess)**. In November 2007, as LGL Racing was hitting its highest points, Valbenny was sold to Lael Stables for \$1.2m. This sale, along with the recent purchase of a filly for LGL by myself and Gordian Troeller named **Miss Singhsix (Singspiel)**, who went on to become a Graded Stakes winner, brought the world of LGL and Team Valor together.

Wellman joined Team Valor as Vice President and recalled: "During my stint at Team Valor, we bought numerous Europeans, one of the best being **Gitano Hernando [Hernando]**, who captured the Gr.1 Goodwood at Santa Anita as a three-year-old for Marco Botti."

Amazingly, it was that very event that brought me together with the aforementioned trainer, a relationship that lasts to this day. Wellman went on to add: "Since leaving Team Valor and launching Eclipse in late 2011, we have been fortunate to experience significant success with European imports, most of whom had minimal accomplishments at the time of modest purchases, starting with **Byrama [Byron]**, whose crowning achievement was the Gr.1 Vanity Handicap at Hollywood Park."

With the formation of Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners in 2011, Wellman has enjoyed Stakes success with European horses such as **Judy In Disguise (Elusive City)**, **Amira's Prince (Teofilo)**, **Charlie Em (Kheleyf)**, **War Correspondent (War Front)**, **Lady Valeur (Multiplex)**, **Mittersill (Acclamation)**, **Consolida (Sir Percy)**, **Shahroze (Holy Roman Emperor)**, **The Tulip (Lawman)** and **Pivottina (Vision D'Etat)**.

On the domestic front, Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners has been something of a phenomenon; top-level success has seen the stable earn over \$17m in prize money. The Classic-winning team have captured the Gr.1 Belmont Stakes and Gr.1 Kentucky Oaks and finish third in the Gr.1 Kentucky Derby, to go along with over 40 black-type victories, ten of which were at Gr.1 level.



Jamie and Roz Lloyd with Aron Wellman and Ben McElroy at last week's Goffs Orby drinks reception. © Sarah Farnsworth

With so much homegrown success with horses like **Danza (Street Boss)**, **Curalina (Curlin)** and **Capo Bastone (Street Boss)**, I was keen to ask Aron why he had decided to enter into the European yearling market.

"The market for acquiring proven stock from Europe has become increasingly fierce and intensified. Every year we seem to be paying a premium for horses with form who were bought for reasonable prices as yearlings, so, while we will continue to compete for those prospects, we have decided to dip our toe into the shallow end of the yearling auction market, try to go straight to the source and try to develop our own youngsters in Europe, with the ultimate goal of exporting them to the United States," he said

"We have established a solid track record of being able to identify high-quality runners as yearlings in America and from a very small sample in Australia, so we felt as though the time had arrived to execute a similar programme in Europe."

With such a large and diverse range of auctions available across Europe, Wellman went on to add: "Attending European sales is something I have long desired to do, but as Eclipse has grown Stateside, it has been difficult to carve out enough time to devote the necessary focus and resources on the European sales. When we

commit to something, we want to make sure we do it the right way so that our partners receive the quality of horse they desire at the value they deserve, and we haven't felt as though we could do that until now.

"We don't rely on outside agents for our selection process, so when we sign a ticket, the onus falls on our shoulders and, good or bad, our partners know who is responsible.

"In that vein, we have every intention of becoming more involved in the European yearling auction market in Ireland, England and France. and possibly other European countries in due time. Diversifying opportunities for our partners is of paramount importance as we try to continue to improve the service we provide on a global scale."

Eclipse already have one of last year's Keeneland purchases in training with Jim Bolger in Ireland who should shortly make his debut. They also own a horse in partnership with China Horse Club that is hoping to debut soon. Wellman stressed that his two recent purchases from Goffs were also destined to begin their careers in Europe, this marking the first phase of a domestic European endeavour.

With Eclipse now established as a major importer of European horses, I asked Wellman what is it that makes the prospect of sourcing quality stock here so appealing?

"There are some terrific stallions in Europe and it seems like the quality of the mares improves on an annual basis as well. Horses are raised the right way in large paddocks on good grass and soil, and the depth of superior horsemen overseeing the horses from the early stages all the way to and through race training is phenomenal. So, the foundation on the breeding side and raising horses in Europe is as good as it gets, in my opinion.

"Then, when it comes to the resources capable of being tapped into, in terms of training facilities and being able to develop a horse the right way in a healthy, nurturing and safe environment, you have something to work with for the long term. In America, our options and resources are limited, especially when a horse is sent to a trainer at the racetrack, so to be able to get our hands on a horse who has been bred, raised and developed in Europe often translates into a

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Aron Wellman leads in **Danza (Street Boss)** after victory in the Gr.1 Arkansas Derby at Oaklawn Park in 2014.

reasonable chance of high level of success, because we have a horse who is healthy, strong and has been taught the right way to compete."

Wellman, fresh from the victory of **Current** in last night's Gr.3 Bourbon Stakes at Keeneland, will soon be travelling on to Louisville as Current, a two-year-old son of **Curlin**, won a 'Win and You're in' race for the Breeders Cup.

It's both refreshing and exciting to see Americans returning to the source of so many of their own bloodlines. With production levels increasing it's so important to the industry as a whole to play to our strengths and encourage as much foreign involvement as ever.

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