

ROYAL ASCOT

WHAT A JOLLY GOOD SHOW!

By Lulu Kyriacou & Rhodri Andrews, *England*



▲ *Frankel leads the way in the St James Palace Stakes*

Royal Ascot, which celebrated its 300th anniversary this year, has a rich heritage, much of it connected to royalty and it has ranked highly amongst British culture since Queen Anne thought the heathland near Windsor Palace would be a perfect place for racing three centuries ago. The event has gone from strength to strength, with 300,000 people making the trip to Berkshire this year.

One of the show pieces of international horse racing, Royal Ascot remains a quintessentially British event, one of the première occasions of the social calendar each summer. While the fashion, the food, the racing and even the odd bet make perfect ingredients for a traditionally British occasion, it is the attendance of the Royal family that runs through the veins of Ascot week. Some racegoers only attend

so they can rub shoulders with the likes of Prince Harry and Prince Charles, the royal connection epitomising British charm and aristocracy. This year saw the new Duchess of Cambridge, formerly Miss Kate Middleton, making her first appearance as part of the Royal Procession, which of course meant that another British institution, the paparazzi, were also out in full force.



▲ *The gates with their royal insignia*

focus at all, with the attention on the attendees, the Queen and of course, what everyone is wearing!

The dress code is strict at Ascot and people have a huge appetite for wearing head-turning outfits, with a sea of elaborate fascinators and top hats on show every day of the week. It's almost as if the fashions are a contest in their own right, and with the Royal wedding still fresh in the memory, Kate Middleton has ensured that dresses and traditional fashion at Ascot has become all the rage, making sure that the competition is a healthy one. However posh frocks and smart suits can sometimes only be a disguise for a spot of good old British hooliganism after a few drinks, with one fight in the public enclosure making the headlines of many national newspapers.

But there is racing. Millions upon

▼ *Ascot is famous for ladies wearing their best hats*

The British social calendar is jam-packed with sporting events all summer that both wealthy and working class people lick their lips at the thought of. The Wimbledon Tennis Championships, Henley-on-Thames Regatta, the sailing week at Cowes on the Isle Of Wight are annual events and of course, next year, London makes the Summer Olympic Games its own. All these occasions seem to roll off the tongue when mentioned as one tries to plan one's summer programme.

So what makes Royal Ascot special? Why has it continued to be a name that fits seamlessly into that list of classic British summer events? Perhaps because everything about it just oozes British-ness: the fashion, the fine dining and the fact that the Royal family turn up year upon year. Sometimes the racing does not seem to carry the main





▲ *The Royal Procession enters a packed Winners Enclosure*

millions of pounds of horse flesh, straining every muscle and sinew to get first past the post in a series of championship level events. In any year, for aficionados, the racing at Royal Ascot is a mouthwatering week of the best that the sport can offer but 2011 was special even by Ascot's high standards. Champions of France, USA, Ireland, Hungary and Australia amongst others were lining up for glory. There were runners trained in the UAE and others owned by the Chinese. And the British were hoping that the newly knighted Sir Henry Cecil would celebrate his freshly awarded honour by getting the week off to a flying start when the so far unbeaten and amazing three year old Frankel ran for him in the colours of Prince Khaled Abdullah. The horse who galloped away with the 2000 Guineas let no-one down

as he powered to victory in the St. James Palace Stakes. But this was just a warm up for one of the two most anticipated races of the season so far.

The French mare Goldikova needs little introduction to racing fans. Now six, she is the winner of three Breeders Cup Miles and more Group One races than any other mare since the grading scheme was introduced in 1973. She is a living legend. Already victorious this year on her first start, she was a hot favourite to win her 14th race at the highest level. But opposing her was the two years younger British Champion, Canford Cliffs. This horse was aiming to win at the Royal meeting for the third year in a row and had not been beaten in over a year. In glorious sunshine the race was everything that could have been expected. Goldikova took up


the lead two furlongs from home and then fought to keep that lead for the remainder of the race as her younger rival produced a finishing burst that closed the gap with every single stride. The post did not come soon enough for the mare and Canford Cliffs was a length in front as they pair flashed past after an epic duel, the like of which had not been for many years.

But Royal Ascot was not done with great racing yet. The Budapest Bullet, Overdose, was an honourable fourth after setting the pace in the Kings Stand Stakes won by Prohibit, showing that Hungary's superstar was coming back to his best after a year off through injury. Fame and Glory, unlucky enough to come up against Sea the Stars in the Derby a couple of years ago, galloped easily past his rivals to win the Ascot Gold

Cup for Irish trainer Aidan O'Brien and Immortal Verse took revenge for France after Goldikova's defeat, by winning the fillies only Coronation Stakes. But there was still one other race that was going to attract worldwide attention; Australia has produced its share of good horses but they rarely travel to Europe to race. When they do, it is usually with some success. But So You Think is a class above most of those that have come before. Winner of two Cox Plates (the Australian all aged middle distance classic) his transfer to Aidan O'Brien's stable for a European campaign has

been the subject of heated debate and discussion since the horse arrived. Running in the Prince of Wales Stakes, his victory was a foregone conclusion, the banker of the meeting surely? But there is an Italian jockey called Frankie Dettori who makes a habit of not reading the script at Ascot. On one occasion he won every race on the card, last year he sent Poets Voice flying past hot favourite Rip Van Winkle to win the autumn mile championship, The Queen Elizabeth II Stakes. And this time in the presence of the Queen herself, Frankie set about catching the Australian with Rewilding. The

horse who was a well beaten second to Workforce in last year's Derby has spent the winter winning in Dubai but So You Think is not used to being passed and, like Goldikova, he fought back like a tiger but there was no stopping Rewilding's late rush who won by a neck. "I always knew he was better than the Derby" said Frankie afterwards. The horse is trained for Godolphin Racing by Mahmood al Zarooni.

Royal Ascot 2011 had indeed been a feast of racing fit for a Queen, her loyal subjects and all the international visitors. Don't miss it in 2012! 

▼ Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II accompanied by Prince Phillip, looking happy & relaxed as she arrives

