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St Leger Preview: Like Father, like Monsun?

A mile-and-three-quarters is unknown territory for most of the St Leger contenders, and stamina is usually the kingmaker at Doncaster. The clues are there, often in the parentage, and Jamie Lynch looks at one of the most influential sires of the modern era in his preview...

I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men and German to my horse.

The depreciatory regard of the German language hasn't altered much since the days of Charles V. The main reason to have a command of German is to give a command, so thought Charlie, who described the dialect as 'threatening, rough and vehement' – and nothing has happened since, say in the first half of the twentieth century, to add *fuel* to the fire, has it?

Language being the cultural essence of a nation, Germany itself is still viewed, through modern eyes, as the police car on the motorway, or the stipe on the racecourse; respected rather than loved, seen at worst as belligerent and at best as uncool.

The Goethe Institute, which promotes German culture abroad, used that exact term – uncool – in the findings of its survey into how young Britons see Germany. The reactive campaign by the Institute did more harm than good, the footage of - in their words – 'grooving ravers' in Berlin scoring highly on the naff scale.

It seems that Germany suffers the same problem as racing: firstly of a preoccupation with its image and perception, and secondly with counter-measures that are awkwardly behind the curve.

Two negatives sometimes do make a positive, though, and in the world of racing there is nothing – nothing – more cool right now than Germany. And it's all thanks to one horse: Monsun.

Monsun was the product of Germany's steadfast philosophy of breeding. So while other countries, Britain included, were letting any old horse into the gene pool, seduced by a gamble, also the cool way to play, Germany laid down rigid regulations for stallion qualification including a set ability, a set durability, and a zero-tolerance stance on medication.

No doubt Herr Prudent und freunde were labelled as odiously uncool at the time, but it's a lesson for the Goethe Institute, a lesson for racing, and perhaps a lesson for all of us, in the longer-term benefits of forgoing perception and fashion for conception and passion. Because now every breeding operation in every racing principality wants a bit of Germany, predominantly through the Monsun line.

At the recent bloodstock sales in Baden-Baden, there were buyers from America and Japan, as well as most of the European powerhouses, including

Godolphin, which purchased two of the top three lots, both by Monsun, at €660,000 the pair. The Darley agent, justifying the layout, went through the vapid rigmarole of extolling athleticism, confirmation and bone, but tellingly, very tellingly, concluded with: 'And, of course, they're by Monsun.'

A star rather than superstar on the track, winning three domestic Group 1s, two incidentally under Andrzej Tylicki, sire of Freddie, Monsun went where no German stallion had gone before in terms of success and popularity, to the extent that when he died in 2012, aged 22, his fee was listed as 'private' (for 'private' see 'loads'), having been €150,000 when last publicised in 2008.

What has been your favourite performance of 2013? Novelist running away with the King George? Estimate battling her way to the Gold Cup? Or how about Sprinter Sacre cruising around Cheltenham and Aintree? We have Monsun to thank for all of them, sire of the first two and the paternal sire of Sprinter Sacre, by one of Monsun's earliest sons, Network.

The Americans know of him through Shirocco and Stacelita, and the Australians are suddenly interested in him, too, following Fiorente's second in the Melbourne Cup, Monsun's first exposure Down Under.

The span of Monsun's imprint on racing is his distinguished legacy, though there's a running theme to his stock, all stamped with stamina and soundness. Especially stamina.

Novelist's relentless galloping at Ascot was a carbon copy of Monsun the racer in his pomp, and the Monsun blood was the petrol for Estimate's propulsion across the line first at the end of two-and-a-half miles. As a rule, Monsun's offspring are later-developing sorts who get better over time and distance. Put it like that and he sounds the perfect sire for the St Leger.

The only time so far he was represented in the St Leger doesn't count, as Rumh was in as pacemaker for Blue Bunting in the 2011 renewal, but he has a runner this year, and it's a big runner. The case for fancying Excess Knowledge is fairly simple: the Monsun in him hasn't yet got out.

Of course, this is only applicable if we have a stat to back up the thinking that the St Leger is indeed the domain of the stout sire, but we do. Combining the stallions of the last ten St Leger winners, which includes the

likes of Montjeu and Sulamani, the average winning distance of their 3-y-os is 11.1 furlongs, high on the stamina index. Monsun's is 11.8 furlongs.

Two steadily-run races this season haven't got near the bottom of Excess Knowledge, only ten furlongs as well at Sandown on his belated reappearance when third to Mandour and just a neck behind the transformed Afsare. Then onto Goodwood, which is to Monsun's what Kryptonite is to Superman, as testified by Estimate last year, dulling the very powers that define them, but Excess Knowledge would still have won the Gordon Stakes without the moving bollard that was Spillway.

If he is his father's son, imagine the different proposition Excess Knowledge will prove for another two-and-a-half furlongs, a long, flat straight, and a good gallop set by one or both of Leading Light and Ralston Road.

Another positive is that the three-quarter-strength Excess Knowledge we've seen so far isn't as far behind the 'classic form' as you might think on ratings, Timeform having taken the view that neither the Epsom classics nor the Irish Derby are of a high standard, hence Excess Knowledge is already within 3 lb of Galileo Rock, Libertarian and Talent.

Galileo Rock has the staying blood, from his close relative Saddler's Rock, to raise the bar higher now that he's doing what he's bred for, and Excess Knowledge will need to mutate from the boy we've seen to the man he can be in order to come out on top, but John Gosden is the perfect St Leger schoolmaster and has overseen the graduation of three lesser-talented horses recently in the shape of Lucarno, Arctic Cosmos and Masked Marvel.

I get the impression that John Gosden, British racing's finest ambassador and a man oozing gravitas, speaks Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men and German to horses.

I'd believe anything John Gosden told me. Anything. In that respect-commanding regard he's a bit like the archetypal German, with the presence of having some excess knowledge. Through Monsun, Germany does have a part of Excess Knowledge, and it's the part that can win him the Leger.