



1946 Melbourne Cup winner Russia

STATISTICS DEBUNK THE UN SOUNDNESS

MYTH



RENEE GEELLEN finds commercial imperatives lie behind the false perception that modern horses are lacking soundness.

When it comes to buying a yearling, the selection process includes the elimination of risks and one of those risks is soundness. With many buyers representing syndicates or city-based investors, the use of x-rays and other risk eliminators has increased. But has all this extra pondering increased the soundness of our racehorses?

As with anything in racing, an example can be found to illustrate any point and in December 2009, a 12-year-old gelding by the name of Mustard celebrated his 100th start with a city class win. A dual Gr3 winner by Vettori, Mustard has won 16 times (4 stakes wins) and over \$700,000. His trainer John McNair said after

his win, "He is a very smart, very clever horse. He's one of those animals who never says die. I don't know if any other 12-year-olds have won a Saturday race at Randwick but if they have, there wouldn't be many of them."

But finding one example of a tough sound competitor doesn't mean that the trend towards additional analysis of yearlings has led to tougher, sounder horses all round. To examine this, B&R asked Arion Pedigrees to provide data for all horses born in Australia in four different years: 1940, 1960, 1980 and 2000. A few of the horses born in 2000 are still racing, including Listed winner Happy Strike (109 starts for 9 wins in Australia and Macau), but in general this crop has finished racing so the final figures shouldn't change with more time.

Aside from the 1960 crop, the average number of race starts has stayed fairly static with time. This is encouraging for owners, as it appears that horses are still as sound now as they were in 1940. However, there are so many factors at play that affect these figures that further investigation is required.

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