

# Taking on a challenge

## Clive Webb-Carter meets sales consignor Ted Voute at Eydon Hall Farm

Photography by Trevor Jones

IT TAKES a brave man to expand his business and take on new responsibilities through a time of economic contraction, but that is just what sales consignor Ted Voute is undertaking having recently signed the lease to rent the 300-acre legendary Eydon Hall Estate. It is an important development to his strategic plan and the addition of a top-quality stud farm adds a further dimension to his business.

Voute, who admits that he might be slightly "mad" making such a bold move this year – and with the disaster that was last month's Budget, the 'green shoots of

recovery' look further away than ever – but taking a lease on the jewel that is Eydon Hall is definitely a punt worth taking.

The stud, which lies just outside Eydon village north-east of Banbury, was originally bought by breeder Gerald Leigh in 1982.

When Gerald Leigh died in 2002, the estate and bloodstock were put up for sale. Sheikh Mohammed's Darley Stud empire purchased most of the bloodstock, but the estate itself was purchased by an internet games entrepreneur, Tim Stamper and his wife Sarah. The Stammers, however, had little interest in the 300-acre

stud meaning that Robin and Sarah Leigh, Gerald's son and daughter, were able to lease back the farm in order to run a reduced breeding operation for the last six years.

This year, Robin and Sarah Leigh decided to relinquish their lease so, ever the one to grasp an opportunity, Voute wrote directly to the Stammers requesting the possibility of taking the farm. At the beginning of March, Voute signed the documents taking the lease on the historic bloodstock property.



An aerial view of Eydon Hall Farm



Gaynor and Ted Voute with Dan West

### Put together by nature and a horseman

It is not the first time Voute has been associated with the stud as in 1994 he consigned a draft of four Eydon Hall yearlings to the Tattersalls Houghton sale.

That first union was to prove lucky as the draft included a Woodman filly out of the Riverman mare Korveya, dam of two French Classic winners, Hector Protector and Shanghai.

Sold to Wafic Said for 530,000gns, making her the most expensive filly of that year, she was named Bosra Sham and she went on to win six Graded and Group races, including the 1,000 Guineas at Newmarket.

Voute explains: "It was a real break for my career to consign yearlings of that calibre and when I was viewing the yearlings at Eydon Hall, I realised what an amazing farm this is."

The Leigh family has retained, like their brown silks, the breeding name of Eydon Hall Farm, but the stud under the new lease will be incorporated into Voute Sales.

Voute and his wife Gaynor still own the 100-acre Voute Farm at Stratford-upon-Avon, where they will continue to live.

"We were just starting to out-grow our Stratford base, and were looking at possible

options until we heard about here. I couldn't believe my luck," smiles Voute. "Eydon Hall is only 25 minutes away from our Stratford farm and with Blackberrys and mobile telephones managing two farms is incredibly easy."

The 22 boxes at Eydon add to the 30 stables at Stratford giving Voute that much-needed extra room for his consignment operation, and the large indoor school at Eydon will certainly prove a vital asset during all times of the year.

"When Leigh bought this farm in 1982, it was designed ahead of its time," explains Voute. "Everything was built to perfection – it must be said that this is the ultimate stud farm and it is still in immaculate order."

"The stables in the American barn are bright, spacious and well-ventilated with an

individual spot lamp over each one for the barren mares during the breeding season.

"And outside you really do notice the small things that prove that the stud was designed by a real horseman – even the latches on the gates are concealed so young stock can't cut themselves should they rush out."

"The nursery paddocks are south-facing, so they get the early sun, and also circular so mares and foals can't get caught in the paddock corners."

Through the 20 years under Leigh's stewardship, the farm produced an incredible 14 Graded stakes winners, two Classic winners – Bosra Sham and Gossamer – as well as three other Group 1 winners in Baraatha, Bequest and Markofdistinction.

"There can't be another stud farm in the

### Q and A with Ted Voute

**What are your business aims now that you have taken on Eydon Hall Farm?**  
We would like to breed and raise stakes-winning horses for our existing clients as well as new clients, who appreciate the land quality and proven track record.

We also want to extend the success on the racecourse we have had from our sales' side of the business, to the raising of quality stock at both farms. Voute Sales's success at selling stakes winners is second to none; we received confirmation that we have sold more stakes-winning horses than any other vendor at Tattersalls in the past 100 years.

Success on the track boosts our reputation for selling racehorses, which brings in repeat business and, with the economy the way it is, it's as well as get this information to the potential buyer.

We want the farms to give our clients plenty of exposure in the winning circle, while also giving our clients the full package: quality boarding facilities and high standard consignment when required.

**What are your thoughts on the state of the racing industry?**

We still have a Levy mechanism in the process of reform, and it is this reform which is our best chance for the future.

We now have a strong Horseman's Group and an outstanding chairman of the British Horseracing Authority and together they can devise a solution agreed upon with

the bookmakers. I can see that as being the platform to sell racing for what it is worth on a world stage, and be competitive with sports such as Football and Formula 1.

In the short term, we have to devise some self-help incentives to fill the potential gap left by the down-turn in sponsorship.

**Views on the changing sales race scene?**

I have long been a fan of the sales races having had a Voute Sales graduate in Mozart win one, but they have tended to have a limited life as they have been put into place as a stimulus package to attract syndicates and owners with the chance of winning a jackpot prize.

I have been disappointed that, due to race-planning, the races have not been awarded black-type status, which would have been especially helpful for the fillies' races at Goffs and Tattersalls – the entries would be far stronger if they had black-type status.

Tattersalls have changed the format to include a three-year-old race a sprint, and possibly more races with lower jackpots would produce more beneficiaries, who might return to the sales ring to spend their prize-money.

Doncaster's sales race proved to be sustainable both for the sales company and the owner, while Tattersalls action in halving the commitment required from owners –

from £12,000 to £6,000 – has made it a far more attractive proposition for owners to remain qualified.

**You have been involved in planning the yearling bonus?**

It was really the brainchild of the breeze-up boys for the two-year-old sales, but Charlie Vigors, Paul Thorman and David Redvers have been the main driving-force behind its possible inception as a yearling scheme.

I am in the initial contact group that has grown over the last month to include many influential and well-positioned members, all of whom have contributed a wealth of ideas. David has continuously updated endless templates and means-tested to see if the plan could work.

To launch a bonus in such dire economic times is a brave but essential part of a stimulus package for the yearling sales initially.

The benefit to the industry to raise as many as 150 £10,000 race-bonuses would be fantastic – first, getting the whole industry to pull in the same direction would be an achievement, and second it would be hugely beneficial to give owners a feel-good factor!

The devil is in the detail, but it seems that the group have used many industry resources to help launch this on the correct platform. From there, if it is a success, it can grow.



The Voutes with yearlings by Mr. Greeley, Dubawi and Holy Roman Emperor

country that achieved such a remarkable record from a small broodmare band in so short a period of time," says an admiring Voute.

Leigh's original decision to purchase Eydon Hall was taken after a soil test which proved that someone had created the ideal farm for the breeding of racehorses. The rock-base is ironstone; a fine-grained, heavy and compact sedimentary rock which allows for good drainage.

The soil, like that found in Kentucky, is

jewel in the crown – 80 acres of unused grassland that would not look out of place on a Kentucky stud. In fact, the stretch of grassland was planted with Kentucky bluegrass as part of a setaside programme in 1994. The land will be brought into use shortly as Voute has plans to utilise the fields to raise his young stock. But Voute freely admits he has already fallen in love with the place.

"When I come over to feed at the weekends, I spend hours here," he admits.

Time Charter clan.

Since then, Voute has further added to his cv – his sales operation is the only yearling consignment which has sold five Classic winners at Tattersalls in the last 100 years. They include, in addition to Bosra Sham, the multiple Group 1 winners Russian Rhythm and Shamardal.

In fact, Voute has sold 32 black-type winners in the last five years, more than any other breeder or consignor.

Although he and Gaynor are very much hands-on managers, they can't run two farms alone. Leading the support team is the stud groom Dan West, who, like all involved with Voute Farms, has a strong pedigree having previously worked at Whitsbury Manor Stud and Stanley House Stud in Newmarket, before coming to the stud where he has worked up the ladder.

"Dan is very much part of the growing operation," says Voute. "He may be young but he works hard and we work well together."

An undertaking of this magnitude is not without risk, something which Voute acknowledges.

"I must be mad taking on this farm during these challenging times but then again it is just the sort of thing Gerald Leigh would have done," he smiles.

Luck is needed, but with Voute's vast knowledge, expertise and now this incredible farm, the amazing legacy created by Leigh has every chance of continuing.

Since the spring, the Voute telephone has been busy with enquiries from interested parties and, even before the lease was confirmed, Voute had two orders from new clients to buy mares, specifically so they could board at Eydon.

But one thing is for sure, Voute Sales will not have to do much to sell the benefits of Eydon Hall – the farm speaks for itself. ■

## *I must be mad taking on this farm during these challenging times but then again it is just the sort of thing Gerald Leigh would have done*

high in phosphate, so crucial for breeding a strong racehorse, while the lower paddocks at Eydon Hall are on clay-capped limestone soil, rich in calcium, and again ideal for raising top-class thoroughbreds.

Voute is more than familiar with breeding and raising racehorses on calcium-rich land as his Stratford farm also holds the same qualities; and was where the 2007 Epsom Derby winner, Authorized, was raised.

"With this type of land you can't help but give horses good bone," he says pointing to a strong Mr Greeley yearling at grass at Eydon Hall. "But we have also enlisted the help of Kentucky-based agronomist, Roger Allaman, and formulated a feed to compliment the minerals in the soil.

"Fresh spring water runs into a system which supplies the surrounding paddock drinking troughs," he continues. "This is another aspect of the stud which only Leigh would have thought of."

At the bottom of the farm, you find the

"I look around and see exactly why this place is so wonderful – you can't hear or see any traffic, notice a pylon, or spot any buildings, it's so untouched."

### **Quality and not quantity**

So what for the future? Voute now has 400 acres under his management and even with a traditional stocking rate of one mare and followers per 10 acres, he is unlikely to fill this farm. The main strategic plan for Eydon Hall Farm is as a base for clients' mares; Voute Sales will then consign resulting offspring.

The aim is quality and not quantity and you only have to look at the promotional card which only invites mares with a 'dress code' of good pedigrees. But mares with proper pedigrees are something that is more than familiar to Voute, who managed farms such as Adstock Manor Stud, Littleton Stud and Fair Winter Farm and who has been involved with some of the strongest families in Europe, including the illustrious