

Year	Horse
2006	Yeats (IRE)
2007	Yeats (IRE)
2008	Yeats (IRE)
2009	Yeats (IRE)

Owning
Mrs John
Mrs John
Mrs John
Mrs John

A Celebration of Yeats and the Gold Cup at Ascot

Written by Lissa Oliver

Photography by Pat Healy

2009 - Gold Cup No.4 for Yeats (J Murtagh)

The Gold Cup



(The following text is a blurred list of names and numbers, likely a race program or starting list, printed on a curved wooden surface.)

Magnier & Mrs David Magnier
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MAGNIEUR
A. P. O'BRIEN
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A Celebration of Yeats and the Gold Cup at Ascot

In 2009 a landmark was reached in European racing when Irish horse Yeats won the Gold Cup at Royal Ascot for the fourth time. That history can still be made in a race as historic as the Gold Cup says much for Yeats, appropriately a champion in the oldest traditions.

A quick glance back through the years will show us that Queen Anne first recognised the potential of Ascot when out riding close to Windsor Castle. She therefore offered Her Majesty's Plate worth 100 guineas to the winner for Ascot's first race meeting, Saturday 11th August 1711. Run in three heats, each of 6400m, it can only be called a race requiring considerable stamina! It wasn't too long before staying races had evolved to more familiar distances and the 4000m Gold Cup was inaugurated in 1807. It is Ascot's oldest surviving race and one of its only three perpetual trophies (in that the winning owner gets to keep the Gold Cup awarded).

Up until the 1940s the Gold Cup was seen as a primary objective for a Derby winner, Ocean Swell (1945) being the last to complete the Derby/Gold Cup double. In the modern age stamina has fallen out of fashion and trainer Richard Marsh's account of successfully preparing his 1896 Derby winner Persimmon for the 2000m Eclipse Stakes, just three weeks after his win in the Gold Cup, makes for nostalgic reading.

Thankfully Yeats has once again brought that long-absent touch of Classic class back to the Gold Cup and it is fitting that he was once a Derby favourite, before injury intervened and sent him on a different path. It is unlikely that future Gold Cup winners will boast a juvenile career equal to Yeats', while his record of four wins looks to be totally unmatched. For a brief period he has made us forget commercialism and has given us a taste of what racing is truly about – a champion, tested over all distances, against all ages, over all seasons.

He was destined to be a champion



By Pat Healy

2006 - Gold Cup No.1 for Yeats (K Fallon)

and selectively bred to be one, at the Barronstown Stud of Diane and David Nagle in County Kildare. Foaled 23rd April (St George's Day) 2001, his dam, Lyndonville, is also the dam of the top Japanese horse Tsukuba Symphony and his sire, Sadler's Wells, needs no introduction. Breeder David Nagle, whose wife Diane, together with Sue Magnier, is a part-owner of Yeats, can now look back with relief on two injuries that were somewhat uncharacteristically suffered by Yeats, yet ultimately proved fortuitous.

"He was a fine big foal, he always had a remarkable presence and was a very healthy foal," David recalls, "we never had to have the vet out to him. He was always a very athletic horse with plenty of class. He hurt himself just before the sales, so luckily we got to keep him." It's a typical illustration of the twists of fate that affect breeders. To be unable to consign such a well-bred and athletic yearling possibly didn't seem like a vast stroke of luck at the time.

Yeats was well-regarded from the start and Aidan O'Brien immediately recognised him as one of his top horses when he went into training at the historic Ballydoyle Stables in County Tipperary for 2003. He was given plenty of time to mature and did not make his first racecourse appearance until 23rd September, tackling a 1600m maiden at the

Curragh in which he faced 14 opponents. He won, under Mick Kinane, by four lengths and such was his prior reputation, coupled with the ease of his win, that he was immediately installed as ante-post favourite for the following year's Derby.

He wintered well and made his three-year-old reappearance in April, in the Gr3 2000m Ballysax Stakes at Leopardstown, winning by ten lengths. The following month he added the Gr2 Derrinstown Stud Derby Trial, same course and distance, to his unbeaten record and was, by now, a hot favourite for The Derby. Fate, again, stepped in.

"Only a few days before The Derby he pulled a muscle in his back," David Nagle recalls, "and he had to be rested for the remainder of the season. As it turned out, that really set him on his path, but at the time, as you can imagine, it was a huge blow to us. He was favourite for The Derby and to lose him for the rest of the season was devastating." Yeats was not seen back on the track again until the following year.

He was by now a fine physical example of a four-year-old, a strong and classy colt who certainly matched the high regard Aidan O'Brien had long held him in. He looked a little in need of the race when making his 2005 seasonal debut in the Gr3 Mooresbridge Stakes at the Curragh, again over

2000m, and met the first defeat of his career, running second to the very good horse Cairdeas. He bounced back in stunning style, however, next time out in the Gr1 Coronation Cup, over The Derby course and distance, defeating such top class horses as Alkaased, Bandari, Reefscape, Warrsan and Pride. Leading throughout, he showed two things – North Light should be eternally grateful that Yeats missed The Derby; and Yeats could seemingly gallop forever. Few middle-distance horses had ever shown such a rich combination of speed and relentless power.

Three weeks later he went to France for the 2400m Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud, where he looked to be travelling well but dropped away like a tired horse as the mighty Elvstroem challenged on his inside at the 400m mark. While the Australian hero stayed on well for fourth, Yeats was nearer last, Alkaased the runaway winner from Policy Maker and future champion Bago. Another interesting also-ran was Yeats' future rival, Geordieland. Given the unrealistic reversal of form with Alkaased it was a race best ignored and not Yeats' true running at all. There was to be no bouncing back, either. His next start was the Gr1 Irish Field St Leger 2800m at the Curragh where he was very unlucky in running and finished a close fourth to Collier Hill, The Whistling Teal and Vinnie Roe, just half a length separating each horse. Jockey Kieran Fallon was adamant he would have won, had he been able to get a run, and the race certainly fired future dreams of a Cup campaign. His season, which had looked so promising at Epsom, ended with a run in the Gr1 2400m Canadian International at Woodbine, where he managed only sixth.

Quite incredibly, he was not seen out again until June 2006, a break from the track of 242 days; and more incredible still, he made his five-year-old debut in no less a race than the Gr1 Gold Cup. He had never run beyond 2800m and had never won beyond 2400m, yet here he was being



2007 - Gold Cup No.2 for Yeats (M Kinane)

asked to make his seasonal reappearance in Europe's premier long distance showpiece. Much has been written about the genius of Aidan O'Brien, but such was Yeats' performance and subsequent stardom that one feels O'Brien never quite got the credit he fully deserved for this particular training feat. Not only was Yeats produced spot-on physically for his first Gold Cup, but what a brave move it was to opt for a Cup attempt in an era when stamina was almost frowned upon by commercial breeders. Yeats, a champion juvenile, unbeaten at two and three over 1600m and 2000m, and a Gr1 winner over 2400m, arrived at Ascot to show us all that class, speed and stamina really do mix.

It was an imperious victory. Once again he faced Reefscape, not only a top 2400m performer, but already a winner over the tough 4000m distance. There was also the 2005 Horse Of The Year Sergeant Cecil, a tough and consistent stayer. Distinction had finished second in the 2005 Gold Cup to Westerner, a colt who had gone on to run second to the mighty Hurricane Run in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, with the 2004 'Arc' hero, Bago, in third. And then there was Media Puzzle, who had won his prep' race and was on-course for another Melbourne Cup tilt. These were no also-rans, yet Yeats simply cruised throughout and sauntered past them

in a few strides, coasting to an effortless four length victory over Reefscape. Sadly, Media Puzzle broke down near the line and was later humanely destroyed.

Jockey Kieran Fallon reported, "he is a tough and genuine horse with a lot of class and it was class that won it for him. He should have won the Irish 'Leger, but he couldn't get out. It's a great training performance as he's not run for a long time. To bring him back over this distance is great. I switched him off so he used no energy and when I asked him a question his turn of foot was electric. I knew he was the best horse in the race and if he stayed he would win. I knew he'd have a turn of foot, he's a horse with a lot of class."

Aidan O'Brien was equally full of praise for the horse. "We always thought he was a Derby horse and when he missed that we trained him for the Coronation Cup. He then had niggly problems, but there was no pressure from the owners and to get him back and for him to win like this is great. We had to be patient with him, but credit to everybody at the yard, they did a great job in getting him back. Kieran said he would probably stay two miles, but obviously you are never sure they will stay this far. It's great to have a horse that we can aim at the Cup races and we just hope he stays sound, he's something to look forward to."

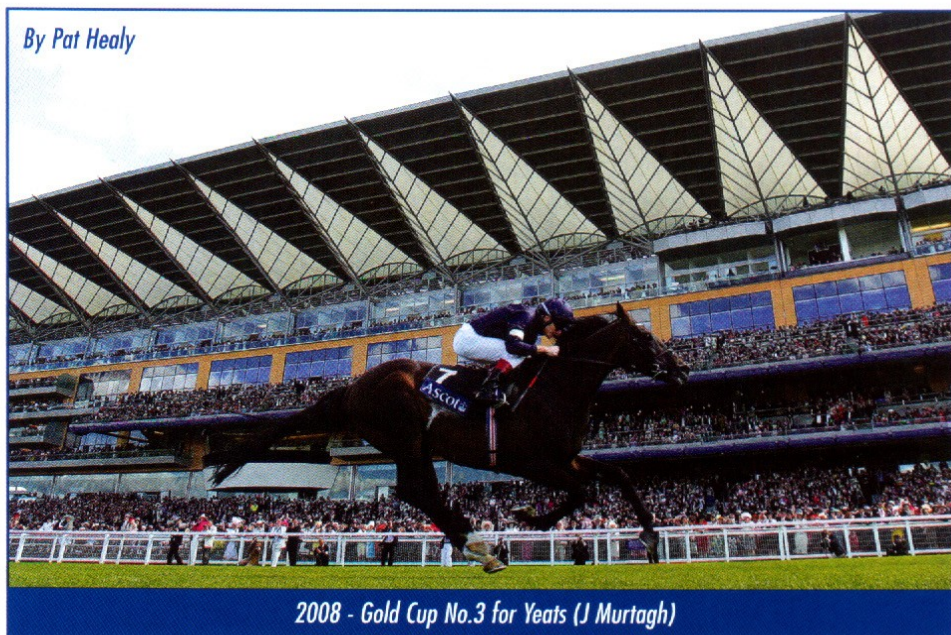
A Celebration of Yeats and the Gold Cup at Ascot

Next time out Yeats set a new track record, taking the 3200m Gr2 Goodwood Cup by five lengths to establish himself as a true champion. He was regarded as unbeatable in the Irish Field St Leger, his final European start before a crack at the Melbourne Cup, but couldn't quite peg back the filly Kastoria in a battling finish at the line, going down by just half a length. The pair pulled ten lengths clear of the third horse, The Whistling Teal, vindicating Fallon's assessment of the previous year's running.

The scene was set for the Melbourne Cup, looking for a new champion now that the mighty Makybe Diva had finally stepped aside to allow another hopeful to have a go! On the day some criticised Kieran Fallon's ride, but it was what we in Europe had come to expect and know, Yeats always demanding a fast pace throughout and capable of that blinding extra burst at the finish that not even the best 2000m specialists can find. It was a fine ride, but sadly for Australian spectators Yeats simply failed to fire and quicken when asked to do so. "He just lacked his usual finishing kick and wasn't suited by the stop-start pace of the race," Kieran reported, "I had to make a big move a mile out to get to the front, ensuring that he maintained his speed for the finishing straight." A hard battle in the Irish Field St Leger, travel and climate change probably proved too much for him in the end, but he was far from disgraced, staying on for seventh behind the historic Japanese one-two, Delta Blues and Pop Rock, despite an uncharacteristic lack-lustre performance. Beating five home that day was Geordieland, who would prove a formidable rival in the seasons to come!

While those that don't know the horse might say Fallon asked too much of him at Flemington, veterinary evidence will prove them wrong. No champion is ordinary and Yeats is no normal champion. In death it was revealed that Phar Lap had a mighty heart, but fortunately

By Pat Healy



2008 - Gold Cup No.3 for Yeats (J Murtagh)

for Yeats medical science has progressed enough to allow tests to reveal such quirks in life, too. Yeats, quite simply, has an extra gear. His heartbeat remains unchanged at normal racing pace, as though he is simply at rest, and doesn't 'click in' until he has been fully stretched. He is a horse who needs to race, who needs speed and distance. A scientific, as well as racing, phenomenon.

In another break against modern tradition, Yeats was kept in training as a six-year-old. He was by now a huge muscular stallion and again full praise must go to connections for a brave move and the ability to keep him both fit and keen. That he was both became immediately evident as he tore apart the opposition in both the 2600m Listed Vintage Crop Stakes at the Curragh and the 2600m Listed Saval Beg Stakes at Leopardstown, prior to his attempt for a second Gold Cup win. Starting at long odds-on and ridden by Mick Kinane, Yeats once again cruised along, challenging the leaders 800m out and leading over 400m out, never being extended as he swept aside the luckless Geordieland, who battled hard to stay within a length and a half of him.

Reunited with Kieran Fallon once again he continued his winning sequence to finally land the Irish Field St Leger, beating his high class stable-mate Scorpion by a half

length, with race stalwart The Whistling Teal this time a long way behind in sixth. His final start of the season was at Longchamp for the 4000m Gr1 Prix du Cadran, but this time he threw in another inexplicably tired performance, reminiscent of his Melbourne Cup run, when failing to pick up when asked, and finished third to Le Miracle and Varevees.

Nevertheless, it was onwards and upwards for 2008, as if his career could soar any higher, and he was commendably kept in training for a third Gold Cup attempt, which would ultimately match the seemingly unrepeatable record held by Sagaro since 1977. His campaign, in which he was ridden throughout by Johnny Murtagh, opened with a repeat win in the Vintage Crop Stakes, then it was off to Royal Ascot for the annual reunion with Geordieland, Le Miracle and new challenger to the crown, Coastal Path. It was nice of them to turn up to see him, but in truth they may as well have not bothered. He was long gone before they had even thought about quickening, their only view of him being those powerful quarters as he glided home by five lengths. Geordieland, who could so have been a dual Gold Cup hero had he been foaled just a couple of years later, finished four and a half lengths clear of Coastal Path.

There is little point now in repeating the many quotes and accolades.

by Lissa Oliver

To match Sagaro's record was unique. To even consider an attempt to surpass it, never mind keeping such a horse in training as an eight-year-old stallion, was beyond expectation. The tributes and accolades flowed – making it all the harder to top them a year later!

But 2008 was still not yet over and Yeats' record kept on growing. This time he returned to the scene of past glories for a second Goodwood Cup victory, before another attempt to add the Prix du Cadran to his CV. Many were already saying he disliked Longchamp and wasn't a late-season horse, and although he had Le Miracle behind him on this occasion, he could manage only fifth behind Bannaby. There was, however, still time to prove his detractors wrong. Back he came to Longchamp, three weeks later, to land the 3000m Gr1 Prix Royal-Oak, this time benefiting from a fast run race, which had the field strung out long before the finish. The front-runner couldn't keep up such a burst and Yeats himself took up the baton 600m out, upping the tempo still further. Allegretto, Veracity and Bannaby followed him home. Autumns in Paris were not such a bad thing after all.

That might well have marked a triumphant and fitting end to an illustrious career; yet there was still more to come. Team Ballydoyle announced their intention of trying for an unprecedented fourth Gold Cup. And what a team. How else could an eight-year-old stallion, his mind often on other things, remain injury-free and retain his passion for racing? "The fitter he gets, the more aggressive he gets," David Hickey pointed out and none knew that better than he – David has looked after Yeats for seven years now, a length of time usually unheard of in Flat racing. The public probably owes more of a debt to David than anyone else for the pleasure of seeing Yeats race successfully for six seasons. "It's all down to a wonderful team," acknowledges breeder David Nagle, "particularly David, who looks after him, and

Gosuke Motoki, who has ridden him out every morning for seven years."

And so on to the current season, which isn't over yet! 2009 did not begin auspiciously. Yeats certainly looked way below

par on a public gallop after racing in March and he trailed in a poor sixth behind Alandi and Hindu Kush, in the Vintage Crop Stakes in April. Time looked to be running out and as Ascot approached Yeats was not a well horse. At the end of May he began to pick up and with three weeks left before the Gold Cup he was back – the big glossy bull of a horse that we had come to love. "He knows when Ascot's coming round," Aidan O'Brien said at the time, "he seems to know and look forward to it." At that point the Gold Cup really looked to be a foregone conclusion, realistically there was nothing going to beat Yeats. But this is horseracing and we all know that fairytales just don't happen.

In the hours leading into the Gold Cup the nerves increased and confidence vanished. Surely something would go wrong? There was no point asking connections; hearts were in oh-so-dry mouths. Look instead to Yeats himself, looking absolutely magnificent and utterly unbeatable. The presence of Geordieland, Veracity, Patkai and Eastern Anthem just wasn't enough to dispel his invincibility. This was definitely going to be his day. He allayed the nerves about 600m out, still in third but moving up in that familiar indomitable style... and the race was over. As he strung his field out behind him, grown men of the press



2009 - Gold Cup No.4 for Yeats (J Murtagh)

room, who had recorded more of the 202 Gold Cups than they cared to admit, were in tears. For those of you present at Flemington on 1st November 2005 you know what it's like to see history made.

"Unbelievable – that's all I can say," Aidan O'Brien said in admiration. "I was so sick this morning as I really believed this couldn't happen. History is very hard to change, we knew we had a wonderful horse, but usually fairytales don't come true. You dream and dream and dream, we were in this position and we never would be again – great things can happen. I want to say a big thanks to everyone involved." One of those involved was, of course, jockey Johnny Murtagh. "I think today Johnny had a lot of pressure on his shoulders and the way he handled it, and the way he rode it, it was something else. I couldn't believe it," Aidan said in praise, "how Johnny could ride him with such pressure on him. I've never felt pressure for any race before, this was the only time. He's an unbelievable horse and we knew there would never be another one of him."

There never will be another one like Yeats. But leave the record books open for a little while longer – there might just be a second Irish Field St Leger and Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe to add. As Aidan O'Brien said, great things can happen. **R**