

INTERVIEW WILLIAM BUICK

# AN OLD HEAD ON YOUNG SHOULDERS



**Alastair Down finds that Britain's youngest premier league Flat jockey is mature beyond his years**

IT IS unlikely that John Gosden will do many better days' work than when he made the bold call last year to grab himself a young stable jockey who had never even ridden for his yard.

But Gosden is a thinker who sets great stock on temperament – in man and horse – and in William Buick he went for someone who, for all his precocious talent in the saddle, had impressed everybody as a youngster with his head well and truly screwed on the right way.

The new pairing landed the St Leger with Arctic Cosmos and, 12 months on, they bid to win it again with Masked Marvel, Buick having in the meantime registered big successes on Nathaniel and Dream Ahead.

Gosden and his jockey made a spectacular start to their partnership at Dubai's 2010 Carnival. Buick says: "Dar Re Mi winning the Sheema Classic could hardly have come at a more fitting time – it almost told people why I had got the job. She dug really deep that day and I like it when one shows how tough it is by getting right down there into the basement.

"Last season I lived in a bungalow at the yard and John and Rachel made me feel welcome from day one. They looked after me very well, I was comfortable and they gave me confidence. It is a fantastic job and what every young jockey aspires to – it was a privilege to be asked to do it. That's why winning a Classic for them on Arctic Cosmos was very special.

"And the way Dream Ahead won a couple of his races gave me a real buzz – for a few seconds on a horse like that you feel invincible."

But there is never any chance of Buick getting carried away with himself as his dad Walter, eight times champion jockey in Norway, has guided his son's career with an impressive and unerringly steady hand.

Buick says: "He is great both as a dad and as an adviser, because he is very calm and collected and never gets carried away with anything. Obviously he is on my side but he is very objective when looking at things and doesn't let his bias cloud his judgement.

"He always drummed into me 'Don't think you are a jockey before you really are one'. He insists that I read the form inside out and if I'm going through a dry spell he will say 'are you sure you are doing your form properly?' He is not a man for playing at things – either do it right with no short cuts or don't do it at all.

"And all jockeys have bad days when things go wrong, it's part of the job. But I don't let myself get miserable about giving a horse a lousy ride for long. I will watch it through a couple of times, swear a lot, and then make a couple of calls to talk about it.

"I can ring my dad, my agent Michael Haggas or John Gosden and none of them is going to tell me things just to make me feel good about myself. And I have a lot of good mates in the weighing room and among the older ones Frankie has been a big help and source of good advice since I first came to Newmarket. My great rule is to try to never make the same mistake twice."

Buick now lives on the outskirts of Newmarket about 100 yards from Dream Ahead's box at David and Jenny Simcock's yard. It is a young man's flat – none of the accumulated clutter of the years and a television just a shade bigger than a full-sized snooker table. He says: "I didn't know Newmarket well before coming here

**'In Britain we have the best racing, the nicest tracks, the highest-quality weighing room and the finest trainers. Everything about our racing is top-class except the prize-money'**

but I quickly twigged what a great place it is. Everything is virtually in one place and I can ride out for two or three trainers in one morning. But it's hectic and you have got to be on the ball as you are always being watched here – there was no Racing Post reporter down at Kingsclere!"

At 23, Buick is the youngest man with a premier league riding job in Britain and it is easy to see him developing into becoming the jockey of first resort when, through injury or suspension, one of the major players is looking for a cool head in a household-name race.

He inched the brilliant but far from straightforward Dream Ahead home at Haydock last Saturday but the most important triumph of his year came on this season's springer among the three-year-old colts, the Gosden-trained Nathaniel.

He says: "John kept saying about Nathaniel 'he is going to be very good one day', but it has surprised me that it has come so soon.

"It has been a terrific training performance to get him where he is now because mentally he is still a bit fragile and not quite the finished article. He jig-jogs and sweats and you have to try to keep the lid on him, but John knows the family well and that has been very important.

"Nathaniel is one of those horses who, if he sees something for the first time, he worries. But if it proves a good experience then he is absolutely fine the next time.

"I don't think I have ever given a race so much thought beforehand as I did the King George. When I got to Ascot that day I was in a bubble all my own, right in the zone. In the paddock Rachel told me I looked nervous but I wasn't – it was just that I was completely focused on the job in hand. John just told me not to be too far away and to go out there with an open mind.

"Of course it turned out to be a tragic race because of what happened

to Rewilding, which was sad for everyone and hard on Godolphin. I know we hung left late on, but not nearly as much as Workforce did, and I would be very happy to take him on again.

"The Arc is next for Nathaniel and I can tell you he looks stronger than he did back in July and I think he has improved."

There was a moment earlier in the season when Buick was lying about 15 off the pace in the jockeys' championship and he and his agent gave half a thought to a title bid, but that will come in the years ahead.

HE SAYS: "You need to make a good start and get some momentum going and you need to avoid suspensions and I have picked up a few of those this year.

"Chasing a title is something that will happen one day and I will give it everything when it does. I don't envy Paul Hanagan, Kieren and Silvestre the next few weeks because it is going to be a very tough scrap with a lot of long, cold evenings at Kempton and Wolverhampton.

"The weighing room is an amazing place – a bit like a family really. There are plenty of arguments and one moment you might think

**William Buick is taking big-race success in his stride**