



What Do Yearling Buyers Want?

With YEARLING SALES just around the corner, a number of prominent buyers provide their insights into what they want in a prospective purchase.

By Ivan Behrns • Photos by Raceimages.com

Is there a stranger creature than a yearling sales buyer? They may come from different pedigrees, in varying ages, be male or female, have differing budgets, but they all have one thing in common, a strong desire to buy that elusive blue-blood champion with the perfect pedigree and outstanding looks; the catch being.....at a bargain price.

To be able to accomplish the feat is the stuff legends are made of, as many a buyer will tell you. Dreams come cheap but to be willing to put your hand up for a yearling

either close to or over \$100,000 takes some courage and confidence. A dose of luck is also a prerequisite. But there will be some buyers who will be doing this come sale time.

For down under breeders and sellers, this year will be a nervous time, particularly with the downturn in the economy in New Zealand and to a lesser extent Australia. Whether this reflects a drop in yearling prices only time will tell. The key aim for breeders is to try and make a profit on their investment in service fees, subsequent care and the final preparation for sale.



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But what is it that yearling buyers actually want? For the purpose of this exercise we'll talk with several to see what the buying public has on their wish list.

A GREAT COMBINATION

There isn't much that the top training duo of Noel Alexander and Jayne Davies, from Cranbourne in Victoria, Australia, haven't achieved in harness racing. Their ability to spot potential in a yearling has seen them enjoy great success over the years.

Heading their roll of honour is the former 1994 Inter Dominion champion and 1993 Victoria Derby winner Golden Reign, purchased for a mere \$8,500, which earned over \$1.4 million in a stellar racing career.

Another great buy for them was the 1995 Australian Oaks winner Newbold Penny, also purchased for \$8,500 and now the dam of 2008 Inter Dominion heat winner Penny Veejay p,1:54 \$387,000.

"We buy at both the Australian and New Zealand sales and, depending on our budget, are prepared to pay up to \$80,000 for the right yearling," Noel said.

"I like to buy at sales that have big stakes races attached to them such as the APG Sales. This gives you the chance of recouping your money or making a profit in a short time span," he said.

"The only slight drawback I find buying at the New Zealand sales is the additional cost of getting them back home across the Tasman."

The importance of teamwork with Noel and Jayne is very important when it comes to making decisions on which yearlings to bid.

"Jayne and I often will go our separate ways at the sale, casting our eyes over up to 40 yearlings. Jayne has got a pretty good eye for a yearling. We will then get back together and suggest which ones we both like that warrant another inspection.

"We then have another look at the catalogue to see if we like their breeding, looking for strong pedigrees on both sides. We prefer yearlings by stallions that are proven or, in the case of



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buying some Art Majors from his first Australia crop, were influenced by his great first crop in North America.

"We also like buying the first colt from a mare and fillies that come from a family with plenty of black type winners as they have the added bonus of being commercial when you breed from them after they finish racing."

Noel is very strong on the personality of a horse and has a proven check list

he works from when deciding what to buy.

"There is something about a horse that can grab you, the way it walks and carries itself. It has to be athletic, have decent nostrils and good sized ears. I also like them to have a bit of reach when they walk."

However he insists that buyers shouldn't be put off by a slight blemish in a yearling.

"Many horses can have problems with their conformation but you have to make a judgment call whether to go for a yearling with a slight blemish or not."

Jayne showed her skill when she bought All Action Son at the New Zealand sale.

"He was a well bred trotting yearling by champion trotting sire Sundon and cost \$15,000. He later won an Australian Trotting Championship and over \$370,000 in stakes. However he had a different, funny coloured mark down his shoulder and he was also a pretty skinny long barreled fella, which seemed to put many buyers off."

Alexander also has some strong dislikes and is reluctant to bid on yearlings that are short in the barrel, have small ears and lack on the score of breeding. They have to be by sires he has had success with or by those that have good credentials such as race performance and bloodlines.

A word of advice for preparers is not to go overboard on sales day. "I'm not keen on seeing yearlings covered in ribbons, having patterns painted on their rumps and plaiting of their manes. It is just a distraction for me seeing them too dressed up and doesn't interest me at all."

Another suggestion to those preparing the yearlings is to always ensure the sales number sticker is on the yearling's rump whenever it is paraded away from the box, have a good clean mane and tail and parade them in a straight line.

"It gives me a good idea on how the yearling places its feet when they walk and what balance it displays. It's little things like this that can make or break a good sale."

When they search for that elusive champion Noel and Jayne firmly believe that, "Every horse gives you a message and a sign. The trouble is a lot of people don't read that sign," said Noel.

That 'sign' Noel and Jayne can see in a yearling has made them and their clients a lot of money over the years but he is always willing to share his expertise.

"I will help anybody who asks. I know at times I have asked other trainers for their opinion on a yearling. There is nothing better than to get a thank you

for your advice from someone four or five years down the track."

LIKES HIS PEDIGREES

Paul Fitzpatrick, the outstanding New South Wales trainer, has fashioned a great career selecting, nurturing and training high class horses. Heading his list is the brilliant son of Jet Laag, Lombo Pocket Watch, Australia's 2006 two and 2007 three-year-old Pacer of the Year whose 40 wins have included 12 Group One victories and over \$1.4 million in stakes.

Others have been the top Grinfromeartoe pacer Make Me Smile, the winner of two-year-old Australian Pacers Gold and Bathurst Gold Crown and New South Wales Derby for earnings of over \$516,000 (which was bought at the sales for \$20,000), Rohan Home, by Riverboat King, purchased for \$20,000 and now the winner of over \$350,000 in stakes including an Australian Pacers Gold Crown at two and an Australian Breeders Crown at three, and the very good Aces N Sevens filly and mare Lady Lexus p, 1:56, a \$16,000 purchase, whose stakes earnings now exceed \$230,000.

Paul concentrates on the Melbourne and Sydney sales which both have the added attraction of \$1.6 million in prize money and bonuses attached to them. He finds the yearlings at the New Zealand sales are often too expensive plus there is the added expense of getting them back to Australia.

The price bracket Paul aims for is \$20,000 to \$60,000. He finds yearlings in this price range are usually either well bred or very good individuals which he thinks improves your chances of success.

"Pedigree and breeding gets me first when I plan which yearlings I would like to bid on. Then I go for the individual. I like to find yearlings from successful mares which were good racehorses themselves and who have preferably left winners from their first few foals.

"Then I study the stallions to see if their bloodlines match up. My favourite young stallions are American Ideal and Art Major."

He has a good sprinkling of these two sires among his 20 two-year-olds currently in work and has found over the

years he has had more success by buying from already proven or up-and-coming young stallions.

Although Paul admires the top down under stallion Christian Cullen and the top horses he can produce, he believes you often have to pay high prices for his yearlings, plus he finds his progeny too hit-and-miss in Australia for the number of well-bred horses he produces.

Paul has strong preferences when it comes to conformation. He likes to see a good head and eye in a young horse and ones that show both a good attitude prior to and at the sales and are relaxed.

"They should be a fair size but well grown, not too big. They also have to be good walkers and not look a bit iffy in this department with their walking and leg action. I like to see them stand correctly in front. I don't want them to hit a knee," he said.

Another thing he avoids when buying yearlings is seeing them looking 'over-prepared' and too fat from being locked up and pandered too much. He has had the experience of having yearlings like this 'deflate' when he has got them home and started to break them in. "It is not as common now as it once was."

A NEW ZEALAND LEGEND

Graeme Rogerson is one of New Zealand's most well known and successful Thoroughbred identities. His outstanding accomplishments include winning 11 New Zealand premierships, training over 2,000 winners and also being a leading trainer at Randwick in Australia for a number of years.

He has also trained in Dubai and raced horses in the United States, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong, Singapore and Britain.

He ventured into Standardbreds in 2007 and had an immediate impact on the yearling sales, paying top money for a number of the star lots. Since then he has bought as many as 20 yearlings each year, including many of the top-priced lots at both the Auckland and Christchurch PGG Wrightson sales.

"It's just a hobby for me," said Graeme, who has a plush training estab-

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lishment near Hamilton in the North Island. "I am starting to get too many around me and haven't decided on what I will do at this year's sales."

Some of his stable stars bought from the sales have included the three New Zealand Harness Jewels horses Sixpence, Flying Pocketlands and the talented Muscles Yankee open class trotter Snos Big Boy, whose earnings are now over \$170,000.

He has found it quite a challenge choosing Standardbred yearlings.

"I have no set idea when buying a yearling. Standardbreds come in all shapes and sizes, not like Thoroughbreds, which makes it that much more difficult. You need that bit of luck.

"I try and buy yearlings by the top sires and from top families but in saying that I have paid good money for a number of Christian Cullens and while he turns out some top horses, many of his yearlings are overpriced. Bettors Delight seems to be the one (stallion) to go for at the moment."

He also tries to buy on type as well as pedigree. "However the horse must be an athlete and have a presence to back

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up his breeding," he said.

On the positive side for breeders and preparers for the sales, he is quite bullish about the standard of yearling being offered for sale.

"The yearlings are getting better every year. Both breeders and preparers for the Auckland and Christchurch sales have come a long way and more better types are being offered now."

His advice for breeders is simple. "Do your homework and try to choose sires that have something going for them. Only breed from families that you think buyers will want in three years time."

"I feel for many breeders right now and see a desperate need for the government and racing's governing body in

New Zealand to do a lot more in raising stakes for lower class horses, which will in turn flow on through the yearling sales. Breeders will feel more confident spending on that extra service fee if they can see a profit at yearling sales time."

New Zealand yearling sellers with their top bred lots will be hoping Graeme Rogerson again supports the New Zealand sales next year and buys the next champion.

MICHAEL HOUSE READY TO RUN

Michael House, from Roydon Lodge near Christchurch in Canterbury, has established himself as one of New Zealand's most flamboyant and successful yearling buyers.

His focus is on buying yearlings that

he can aim at the Ready To Run sales the following spring, and he fills an important place for those vendors with yearlings in the middle range of prices at the sales. His buying methods have largely been aimed at yearlings priced in the \$10,000 to \$30,000 range.

"Ideally I want to turn \$250,000 to \$300,000 into \$600,000 or in a good year, a half million into one million," said Michael.

"Yearlings at the Auckland Sale can be a bit dearer due to a combination of things. Often they look just that much better in the skin and general condition due to the warmer climate up north. Some years they are six weeks ahead of the yearlings in the South Island. Also the top class selling venue at Karaka helps boost their prices."

To choose a profit-turning yearling takes an enormous amount of time and hard work.

His motto, "The harder you work and the more open your mind is, the greater will be your success" has certainly paid dividends since the Ready To Run Sales concept has been established. Included in his resume of astute yearling sales purchases he has pinhooked at later Ready To Run sales have been Born Again Christian p, 1:51.4 and winner of the \$50,000 New Zealand Yearling Sales two-year-old Final, which House bought for around \$10,000 and then re-sold at the Ready To Run sale for \$80,000, and Fiery Falcon, the ill-fated son of Mach Three that he bought for the bargain basement price of \$5,000 and then sold for close to \$200,000.

Fiery Falcon went on to become one of New Zealand's best young pacers, winning \$588,671 in stakes including the 2008 two-year-old Sires Stakes Final and 2008 Great Northern Derby. And to prove this wasn't a fluke, House next spotted the stocky Bettors Delight colt Highview Tommy at the sale.

"I had been to see his sire Bettors Delight the previous week at the stud and I couldn't believe the similarity. He was an extremely masculine (something he likes to see in a colt) and precocious colt. I valued him at \$30,000 and went to \$40,000 to buy him."

The now New Zealand Cup class

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pacer has earned a whopping \$512,000 to date including winning the 2008 New Zealand Welcome Stakes and later going on to be named New Zealand Two Year Old Pacer of the Year.

He added that there is always the risk of missing out on the odd one you have marked in the catalogue to buy. "I was the underbidder for the outstanding McArdle pacer Tintin In America."

Tintin In America has gone on to become one of Australasia's glamour pacers with stake earnings to date of \$934,304 including the 2009 New Zealand Derby, 2009 Australasian Breeders Crown and Harness Jewels titles. House also was frustrated to miss buying the brilliant Christian Cullen open class pacer Stunin Cullin, a former New Zealand Three Year Old Pacer of the Year, at the same sale.

For breeders and vendors hoping to have their yearling purchased by Michael House this season, the message is quite clear, "Aim for presenting quality and mature looking types, ones that will be early going prospects and then I will be interested," Michael said. "They have to show me they are ready to take the next step and become an early going racehorse."

While he has quite strict guidelines to follow at each sale he attends, he has found that it also pays to be flexible.

"I will forgive a horse one fault such as either a conformation fault or pedigree fault, or even if it looks slightly underdone, feeding and worming will soon fix it, but I am a stickler for a year-

ling to have a good head and pass the conformation test. They have to walk and stand correctly."

He also likes the yearling to show a good attitude and, if a colt, have both masculinity and come with a presence.

"In summary, they should show me they are ready to take the next step and become early going racehorses."

When it comes to pedigrees, House spends up to six weeks before the two New Zealand sales pouring over the pedigrees, selecting 50 to 80 yearlings that he would be happy to bid on if they fit in his price range. He then hits the road, inspecting as many of the chosen yearlings as he can.

"I like a strong pedigree and am not put off by a new season sire. I generally buy one or two by young sires but the other sires I choose must show me that their siring careers are moving forward, such as Bettors Delight."

He has found the trick is not to buy the well-bred relative but focus entirely on the individual in front of you.

"Geoff Small (trainer of Tintin In America) is a classic example of this and often buys yearlings at reasonable prices."

With yearling sales time fast approaching in New Zealand and Australia, and catalogues stacked full of a wide choice of top bred yearlings, the excitement and pressure is starting to build for vendors, preparers and buyers alike. One thing is guaranteed, some lucky buyer will be taking home a future champion. Here's hoping it is you. 🐾



Photo by Stuart McCormick

are aluminum plates which are a little
outer rim. The back shoes are also alu-
n a two degree wedge to bring his heels

Harmer Advantage sulky from North
a believer in it. When you get rolling
easier. If you have to start and stop it
backward but it's very comfortable and I
was using it.

Trainer Lance Justice's comments:

"Despite being a heavy set horse who always
looks overweight he does not take a lot of work
between races. He'd stand 16.2 hands and easily
weigh 500 kilos. He will eat anything in sight so
he's always on a diet.

"He's a horse that continues to improve with age.
Most people would say he is the fastest horse in
Australasia. Once he reaches his top speed he can
carry it a long distance.

"In a lot of his races he has either been on the

lead or sitting outside which is what he thrives
on. When I've tried to be nice to him we've got-
ten into trouble like the Victoria Cup.

"Smoken Up is a great traveler. He has a good
natured character and likes human company.
Going to New Zealand for the Inter Dom will not
be a problem but the old format would have suit-
ed him better. The tougher the better, he seems
to appreciate the Aussie way of racing over the
Kiwi way.

"If he is ever going to win the Inter Dominion it
will be this year."