

TDN Q&A



TDN's Gary King sits down with Harry Sweeney, owner of Paca Paca Farm. The farm has a strong consignment at the JRA Select Sale, including a Sea The Stars half-brother (yearling) to MG1SW Mastercraftsman, and a full-sister (foal) to recent G1 Japanese Derby

winner, Deep Brillante.

It's a long way from Co. Louth, Ireland to Hokkaido, Japan. Where and when did it all begin?

HS: It began in 1990 by chance really. I was a veterinarian by profession, and got an offer out of the blue. I was newly married [to Anne] at the time, and thought it would be an adventure. A group of Japanese businessmen, staying at the newly opened five-star Westbury Hotel in Dublin, asked me to meet with them. There were very few five-star hotels in Ireland at the time, and I might never have got another chance to stay in one. Really, that was the main impetus for going to the meeting. To cut a long story short, they offered me a salary six-times greater than what I was earning, so it was an easy decision. We expected to stay a year, but 22 years later we're still here.

Your level of Japanese is very impressive. Have you struggled with any other aspects of the culture?

HS: My spoken Japanese is reasonably good, but it should be better. I don't read Japanese terribly well, and don't write it at all. I suppose the biggest thing you need to understand is that it's not possible for a foreigner to ever fully integrate into Japanese society. Foreigners will always be foreigners, and I'm comfortable with that. In many ways, there can be advantages to it. I break the rules sometimes, and proclaim that I didn't fully understand.

You were the first non-national to purchase agricultural land in Japan. Was it a difficult process?

HS: It was a relatively difficult process, as foreigners need government permission at a local municipal level.

Japan is far from self-sufficient, so agricultural land can be at a premium. I did get some advice, and had to organize the company in a way to remain culturally sensitive. We had a few Japanese directors at the time as well.

So is gets easier after the first purchase?

HS: Very easy. It's like everything else in Japan; once you're in the club, you're in it forever. The average farm size in Japan is about 25 acres, and we were lucky enough a few years back to purchase a much larger piece of land. It's about 400 acres in total with beautiful rolling hills, plenty of tree cover, and a fantastic history. As a consequence, we have been able to increase the number of boarding horses from clients in America, Europe, and the UAE.

There has been a tendency to prioritize foals at public auction in Japan. Has this shifted to yearlings over recent times?

HS: There has certainly been a shift towards buying yearlings. By virtue of Shadai [including Northern Farm], who dominate every aspect of business, telling owners and trainers that they should be buying yearlings. It's a relatively unsophisticated market, so people generally accept what Shadai say. While it's definitely easier for buyers to evaluate yearlings, it's important to realize that it's also easier for sellers. Interestingly, since the re-introduction of the yearling market there has only been one Group 1 winner sold, so the percentages are disappointing.

There have been lots of quality broodmares/stallion prospects sold to Japan recently. The industry must be booming over here?

HS: This is probably the one place in the world where the economics of racing/breeding make sense. Average prizemoney is close to \$350,000, which promotes strong foal and yearling prices. If you are unfortunate enough to have a horse that sustains an injury/breakdown at the track or training on JRA facilities, you receive compensation which can extend to \$60,000. Ultimately, it fuels the purchase of quality broodmares and stallion prospects from other jurisdictions. It's very interesting that I'll Have Another is coming to Japan [to stand at Big Red Farm], and is almost a Sunday Silence type story all over again. He was a highly successful racehorse just like Sunday Silence, but didn't really find appeal with American breeders.

Paca Paca Farm has now bred the Japanese Derby winner, Deep Brillante. What's next?

HS: The next thing is to breed another one. We had bred a Group 1 winner previously [Pink Cameo won G1 NHK Mile Cup], reared a Group 1 winner, and have had a champion 2-year-old. Paca Paca is competing against some major brands, who have numbers on their side, so it will be difficult. We are still a relatively small farm, and feel fortunate to have had 3 Group 1 winners so far.

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You refer to these farms as brands. Is this something that's more prominent here than elsewhere?

HS: Absolutely. Brand power is very important in Japan, you will see it here at the sales. The horses from Shadai [including Norther Farm] will sell for twice their worth. Fortunately, Deep Brillante's Derby success has significantly enhanced the Paca Paca brand. We have the first yearling by Sea The Stars to sell anywhere in the world at public auction. He's a lovely big strong horse, with a fantastic pedigree being a half-brother to Mastercraftsman. Interestingly, we also sold the first Fusaichi Pegasus yearling a number of years ago.

What should the rest of the world know about the Japanese industry?

HS: Japan is open for business. It's all been done now, and it's a lot less intimidating than it used to be. Foreigners have bought farms, obtained JRA licenses, and bred Derby winners.

The more, the merrier it seems. Can Paca Paca Farm facilitate inward investment?

HS: We are very keen to do that, and have foreign partners in a number of mares. We are extremely happy to advise and encourage people to visit Japan. While we are breeders, we are also significantly involved with a racing stable. JRA licenses can be a little difficult to obtain, and a little tedious in many ways, especially for foreigners. There are a number of racing clubs in Japan, where non-registered owners can own 50% in any one horse. As you can imagine these are very popular with owners, and can simplify inward investment.



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