



## **TRAINER HUGO PALMER WINS HIS FIRST STEWARDS' CUP**

Gifted Master took his career earnings to just shy £750,000 with his short-head victory in the £250,000 Unibet Stewards' Cup, his winners' prize being £155,625. Always near the front of the field, he was headed two furlongs out, but jockey Jason Watson kept his cool and produced the horse to put his head on the line to win in a fast 1m 9.56s

It was a first win in the famous handicap for Newmarket trainer Hugo Palmer, who has trained this horse since he was bought as a yearling.

"He has won all his handicap outings now!" said Palmer. "He was our first two-year-old winner of the year as a juvenile when he won at the Craven meeting in April, he finished his two year-old season rated 112 and he has been rated that at two, three and four and now at five and now he has just won a Stewards' Cup off top-weight.

"A huge word has to go to the jockey - I wanted a high draw but not perhaps as a high as we got and I told him that and to gravitate across to the middle of the track to where we thought the nicest ground was. Jason [Watson] wasn't remotely flustered when he was headed, he was strong, he was cool, he was calm - easy for a young lad to get going too quick.

"It was lovely - it has been a plan for a long time and I spoke to his agent Tony Hide three weeks ago that I'd like Jason to ride Gifted Master in the Stewards' Cup. The horse needed a career-best even with a claim - I spoke to Pat Smullen at length as we thought about bringing someone over from Ireland. But Andrew Balding didn't need Jason and I have been impressed with his riding this season - I am even more now!

"I have been getting nervous as Jason's winners have gone from 38 to 45 to 48 and I think that is his 50th winner. I was getting nervous about his five pound claim disappearing; I think I would still have used him if it had gone down to three pounds, but as we only won a couple of inches it might have made the difference!

"I wasn't sure that we'd won until I saw the slow-mo. I watched the race with Jono Mills, who bought the horse, and said that we'd still run really well off top-weight as I thought we were second.

"Who knows where next? He is a Group Two and Group Three horse - we'd probably look at the Listed Hopeful Stakes back at Newmarket, he might have lost his penalty by then which is what has cost him his Listed races so far - he's a solid 110 - 112 horse. We've exposed his limitations in the Group One company and it's not fair to ask him that - he is a horse who is so generous. We'll look at races we've won before, but we've no plans beyond today so far.

"Gifted Master is unbeaten in handicaps - I was saying it tongue in cheek before the race because he has only run in one but he has now won a Stewards' Cup off top-weight. He was a Group horse in a handicap and has real class - he's been a real star for us.

"He's been through some tough times and we've given him some pretty tough assignments and he seems to forgive that every time and come back. He's won maidens, two handicaps, Group 2s - his CV reads pretty well.

"He's been a massive part of my stable, it doesn't happen to many Flat trainers. When you get the good ones they perhaps don't last or they are not that sound - he's been there that long. He won the last two runnings of the Tattersalls Millions - he won the two-year-old race and then the three-year-old race. Off the top of my head, he's nearly won three-quarters of a million in prize-money and for a 111-rated sprint handicapper, it's a phenomenal amount of prizemoney. He's a winner over five furlongs to a mile, he's been special for us.

"He is given a phenomenal ride every morning by Ray. He is not an easy horse to ride - he is difficult and he is fizzy, you can't take any chances and some people have ridden him and said, 'Oh God, I am not riding him again!' Ray is incredibly patient with him and just sits on him and lets him get on with it. They have a great relationship. Don't underestimate how important that is - it is the little things every day. Ray led him up today - I am delighted for him.

"Gifted Master did not have a hard race at Royal Ascot, but he was not himself after for three weeks, but he has come back and back and certainly last week and this was getting there. In the morning when I ask Ray how he is and there is a look of fear on his face and he says, 'He has nearly killed me boss', then I know we can go back to the races.

"It is lovely for his owner Dr Ali, who is has been under the weather for the last couple of weeks. He is back in the UK for the first time in a few weeks, it is lovely that he has something to smile about."