



HH Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum with Pat Buckley.

Bringing out the BEST

From his perspective of years of Middle East equestrian industry experience, Pat Buckley sees nothing but blue skies on the horizon for the Emirates. Report by Matt Howard.

The future looks very bright indeed for UAE racing, and with Abu Dhabi coming back on line next season, growth should be considerable, observes Pat Buckley, who as racing manager and technical advisor to the UAE Racing and Equestrian Federation has been one of the leading lights in the industry.

"I think the sky is the limit and racing is definitely here to stay. It is firmly established and as long as the enthusiasm remains it is hard to see it failing," commented Buckley. Abu Dhabi had applied for 20 meetings

and work was to start on the new grandstand and stables in the summer.

With the amount of experience that Buckley has in the world of racing, his opinions are well respected.

"I started riding before I could walk," he recalled. "My father was a private trainer in Ireland so I always had horses around me.

"I then moved on to serve my apprenticeship with Capt Neville Crump when I was 14."

Buckley started race riding in 1960 and it was one year later that he had his first winner at Manchester. This was the first of many wins for Buckley, his most famous undoubtedly in 1963 when he partnered the Keith Piggott-trained Ayala to Grand National success.

"This was only my second attempt at the National and I will always remember that day like it was yesterday," he said.

In all, the Grand National hero took part in the great race nine times, completing the daunting track on four occasions. Along with the National triumph, Buckley's name appears on the roll of honour for winning the Whitbread Gold Cup on two occasions and the Scottish National in 1968.

Injury ended his riding career. "It was on February 4, 1975 that I had to retire from race riding," said Buckley. "I then spent the next nine months having my shattered arm plated back together."

Following the operations, Buckley moved into a yard breaking in horses and preparing them to go into training.

"I decided to take out a trainer's licence for one year and entering the winner's enclosure seven times."

Following his training successes, he moved to Devon where he was assistant trainer to C J Hill, sending out 25 winners in one year.

It was then that the call from the Middle East came. Buckley and his wife, Joyce, moved to the Sultanate of Oman where he was employed for eight years to

set up the equestrian complex.

"We had about 500 horses there by the time I left, competing in all sports from racing to polo. We sent a few horses to Bahrain to race and even had horses come down from Dubai to compete.

"After Oman I retired and went down to Australia and New Zealand where I spent the winter months. It was then back to Britain."

Buckley moved back to his home base on the Isle of Man where he set up a stud, raising and selling youngstock for four years.

"It was after that time that I was asked to come out of retirement and back to the Middle East, based in Abu Dhabi.

"When I arrived in Abu Dhabi, my job was to set up racing in the Emirates." He trained a few horses for the first year but soon the administration and management needed his attention full-time so he had to give up the training.

"Living here for so long, you can become accustomed to the amazing growth which goes on, but taking a step back I am astounded at what has been achieved. Even more than that are the plans for the future which will make Abu Dhabi and the UAE as a whole one of the major players on the world scene.

"The beauty also is that time and investment has been made in attracting an infrastructure of people who are among the finest in their particular fields. In all areas of equestrianism here, there is a belief that the best is yet to come."

The retired jockey still keeps up his direct contact with horses, riding out every morning for trainers Michael Kettle and Lee Warr. Although not race riding anymore, Buckley rode around Aintree again this year in the Bob Champion Cancer Trust race and is hoping to ride in the race again next year.

He added: "That is all down to time. There is so much happening here you never know what the next week will bring."