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# RACING POST

ANNUAL **2025**



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GOLIATH • STATE MAN**

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# RACING POST

ANNUAL 2025

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# W

ELCOME to the Racing Post Annual 2025. This is the 14th edition of what has become a well-loved book and once again I can say with confidence that it has been curated with passion, care and craft. Not that it doesn't come without the odd difficulty, of which more shortly.

Turn to page four for our first major feature and you won't be surprised to find Willie Mullins. He seemed to be almost everywhere in 2024. Mostly in first place.

Just in case you have Mullins fatigue, our coverage of his mighty feats is split into two sections. Up front, I Am Maximus and the Grand National win that paved the way to the British title is followed by the story of double Cheltenham Gold Cup winner Galopin Des Champs. Later in the book come State Man's Champion Hurdle and the cluster of young stars already primed by Mullins to be his next big things.

Aidan O'Brien, the other record-breaking colossus of modern Irish racing, is also on the cover and widely spread throughout the pages. First and foremost among the Ballydoyle troupe is City Of Troy, the winter talking horse who fluffed his lines at first but then delivered a summer tour de force.

Unfortunately, what this Annual doesn't cover is the scheduled overseas trips of City Of Troy and other stars to the Breeders' Cup, Melbourne Cup and Japan Cup. More than ever that is a source of regret this year, but it has always been the case with this book; the reason being that major booksellers and distributors insist on annuals being ready by the end of October.

Hence this book has always focused on the European Flat season up to Champions Day at Ascot and on the most recent full British and Irish jumps seasons. Every year we have found more than enough stories to pack 208 pages – and 2024 is no exception.

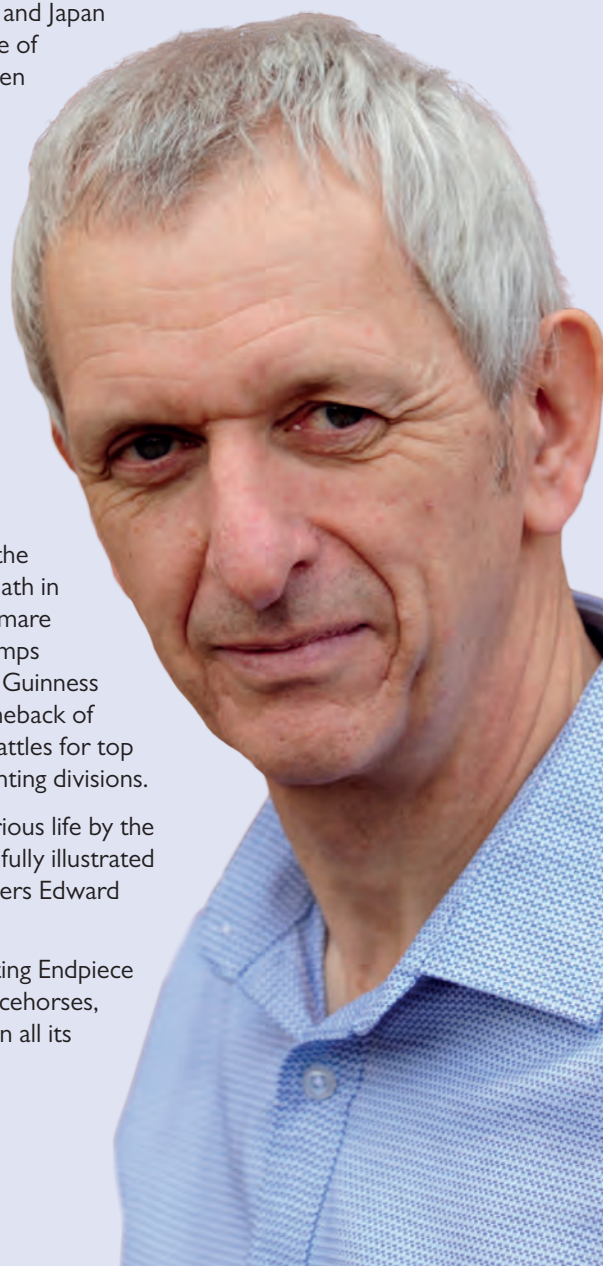
Among the other treats are Bluestocking's victory for Britain in the Arc; France's counter-raid with Goliath in the King George, which denied the mare a famous double; non-Mullins big jumps winners such as Teahupoo, Captain Guinness and Intense Raffles; the roaring comeback of star stayer Kyprios; and the fierce battles for top honours in the Flat's miling and sprinting divisions.

These stories are all brought to glorious life by the Racing Post's top writers and beautifully illustrated again by award-winning photographers Edward Whitaker and Patrick McCann.

From Mullins at the start to an uplifting Endpiece on the valuable work done by ex-racehorses, we hope these pages reflect racing in all its multifaceted richness.

## Nick Pulford

**Nick Pulford**  
Editor





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# MAX POWER

Willie Mullins dominated the 2023-24 jumps season like never before and I Am Maximus's Grand National was a pivotal success, paving the way to a first British title for the multiple Irish champion

By Richard Forristal  
Ireland editor

**S**TOP for a moment and consider the background context to Willie Mullins securing a historic triumph in the 2023-24 British jumps trainers' championship. Not the 70-year prism through which you will see the yawning multi-generational gap back to Vincent O'Brien, the last and only other Irish-based handler to steal the title away from under the noses of the locals; nor the 37 years since Mullins first took out his own training licence.

No, the eight-year history from which this seminal landmark was mined is sufficient to inform an understanding of the irrepressible man responsible for transforming our ideas of what's possible in the realm of National Hunt racing.

In April 2016, Mullins didn't even have a horse placed in the Grand National, the race we have often spoken of as being pivotal to his prospects of getting that hitherto elusive British championship win. He nonetheless gave it a rattle and when the dust settled on the season at Sandown, he fell short of Paul Nicholls by a mere £100,000.

Roll the clock back to the Friday of Aintree that season, when the screws were being turned, and Vautour's inexplicable fall in the Melling Chase at odds of 1-5 cost Closutton £113,000.

It's all ifs, buts and maybes but to go that close without a National suggested fairly unequivocally that it could be done. Then, though, within six months of all that, Michael O'Leary's Gigginstown House Stud – champion owners in both Britain and Ireland at the time – withdrew 60 of Mullins' best horses, and Vautour, the single most exciting chasing prospect in training, was killed in a freak paddock incident.

Mullins' defiant response defines his legacy. Consolidate?

► *Continues page 6*



► Aintree coup: I Am Maximus wins the Grand National and its £500,000 first prize for Willie Mullins, who lifted the British jumps trainers' championship trophy a fortnight later at Sandown









Not likely. He had got a glimpse of the promised land and knew it was there for the taking. At 60 years of age, he built a new barn and pursued new owners and better horses. Come April 2017, he led the Irish championship for the first time in the season on the penultimate day and prevailed over Gordon Elliott in an epic battle with a then record €4.5 million in prize-money.

The British championship might have eluded him but that was a fairly definitive statement of intent just 12 months later. Mullins wouldn't be looking back in anger. He would proceed to break all manner of records and claim previously unconquered outposts like the Cheltenham Gold Cup.

★★★★

COME March 2024, Mullins went into the Cheltenham Festival sitting 36th in the British trainers' championship on £297,688, lagging almost £2m behind. Hiding in plain sight, lurking menacingly in the long grass.

By the time Galopin Des Champs emulated Al Boum Photo as Closutton's second dual winner of the sport's premier event – taking Mullins'

haul for the week to nine – talk of a British championship began in earnest for the first time since that fateful 2016 finale. Mullins had leapfrogged 33 places to third on £1,882,988. Game on.

Aintree was going to be pivotal again, and from the moment the ball was thrown in on the Thursday decisions went his way. Nicholls had led by just over £25,000 from Dan Skelton when they landed in Liverpool, with Mullins a further £679,753 in arrears.

Yes, a £1m Grand National was going to have a big say, but it would be won and lost in the trenches, same as it was in 2016.

On the Thursday, Il Etait Temps hammered Ginny's Destiny and Grey Dawning in the opening Manifesto Novices' Chase, ensuring Mullins pointedly outscored title rivals Nicholls and Skelton.

The Manifesto result seemed to set a tone, one that implied Mullins would be dictating terms. In the Anniversary Hurdle that followed, Sir Gino won for Nicky Henderson, by then out of championship contention. Mullins seized second with Kargese, and with

▲ Roaring success: I Am Maximus (white cap, right) negotiates The Chair in the Grand National and, below, passes the post a circuit later under jubilant rider Paul Townend; top left, the following day's Racing Post front page



it twice as much prize-money as Nicholls, who was third with Kalif Du Berlais. An hour later came the Aintree Hurdle, a race that epitomised how Closutton seemed to be getting the rub of the green this time.

Coming to two out, Paul Townend first rolled to the right across Bob Olinger as he sought to go about winning the race on Impaire Et Passe, and then drifted back left after the last, in the process impeding Langer Dan. Rachael Blackmore and Harry Skelton galvanised their respective partners for one further lunge down the outside of Impaire Et Passe, but Townend got his mount home grimly by a nose and a short head.

To the chagrin of many, they kept the race in the stewards' room. Townend executed a textbook interpretation of riding right on the edge of the law, demonstrating just enough of the dark arts to get the job done and then convincing the stewards of his integrity. The upshot was that Mullins emerged from the Grade 1 £114,000 better off than Skelton.

Nicholls and Skelton edged the later exchanges on the card, but Mullins won the day. And the day after that (two Grade 1s with Mystical Power





and Dancing City to Skelton's handicap hurdle win with Kateira) and the day after that. That would be the Saturday, headlined as ever by the £1m Randox Grand National.

☆☆☆☆

IF SHADING those skirmishes was a bit like the old maxim that turns on defences winning championships, the National, more than ever, is one match that favours a clinical attack.

The changing nature of the race is a debate for another day, but the reality is that it's a very different race now, one that favours a high-class, unexposed type who can travel at a high cruising speed and stay. Jumping alacrity or seasons under the belt aren't prerequisites for the modern incarnation of the race, and in I Am Maximus Mullins possessed something pretty close to the model prototype.

Successful in the Irish Grand National on just his fifth chasing start the previous spring, the JP McManus-owned eight-year-old, acquired out of Henderson's yard as part of Mike Grech's dispersal, was still eligible for novice chases halfway through the following season.

▶ *Continues page 8*

## Records galore

"He has done it with so few runners," observed leading owner JP McManus on the day Willie Mullins was crowned British champion jumps trainer.

The figures were remarkable. Mullins had 160 runners in Britain in the 2023-24 season, compared with title rivals Dan Skelton on 783 and Paul Nicholls on 564. He had only 28 wins (121 for Skelton and 132 for Nicholls) but his prize-money returns in the big races were phenomenal.

Mullins' top eight earners in Britain (ranging from £500,000 for I Am Maximus to £98,473 for Gaelic Warrior) all won a Grade 1 race or a Grand National.

As well as becoming the first trainer based in Ireland to become champion over jumps in Britain for 70 years (since Vincent O'Brien in 1953-54), Mullins reached a number of other milestones in the latest season.

When Ballyburn scored at Punchestown on May 3, it was win 4,378 for Mullins (*below*), who therefore replaced Dermot Weld as holder of the record for the most wins in a career by a trainer based in Ireland.

Mullins beat his own world record for the most Grade/Group 1 wins by a trainer in a season with 39 in 2023-24 and became the first trainer to score a 100th career victory at the Cheltenham Festival when Jasmin De Vaux landed the Champion Bumper. He ended the meeting on 103.

Seven days after lifting the British trophy, Mullins won his 18th Irish championship. The last 17 have come in an unbroken sequence going back to the 2007-08 season.

The latest title race was over long before the final day of the season at Punchestown. Even with several of his best horses diverted to Britain for the final push, Mullins finished on €7,033,605 – more than €2.25m clear of Gordon Elliott.

That was not Mullins' highest total at home but his prize-money haul across Britain and Ireland was a shade over €10.9 million. It was the first time he had crashed through the €10m barrier.

He also set an Irish record of 257 wins in a jumps season. That haul included an unprecedented clean sweep of the eight Grade 1s at the Dublin Racing Festival, featuring the Irish Gold Cup, Irish Champion Hurdle and Dublin Chase.

Both in quality and quantity, Mullins was in a league of his own again.





## I AM MAXIMUS

Connections capitalised on that prospect pretty spectacularly, snaring a Grade 1 at the last possible opportunity when he ran out a decisive winner of the Drinmore at Fairyhouse. He duly confirmed his progressive status with a couple of respectable efforts in defeat behind none other than Galopin Des Champs in the Savills Chase and Irish Gold Cup at Leopardstown, before trouncing fellow Aintree contender Vanillier by 14 lengths when conceding 12lb in the Bobbyjo back at Fairyhouse.

The handicapper reacted by putting him up to a mark of 164, but, as ever, by then the National weights had been published. Suddenly I Am Maximus was 5lb well in off 159 in the National and few argued with the bookmakers' move to promote him to 10-1 joint-favouritism for Aintree.

With 11st 6lb on his back, the son of Authorized – also sire of dual National hero Tiger Roll – would have to carry more weight than anything else had to victory since Many Clouds in 2015. Backed to as low as 13-2 on the day, his price eventually settled at 7-1 and a share of favouritism with the similarly well-backed seven-year-old Limerick Lace.

☆☆☆☆

IT MIGHT be a stretch to say Townend never had a moment's worry as fluent jumping isn't something you would associate with I Am Maximus, and his scope was certainly stretched at The Chair and both times at Becher's Brook. Nonetheless, they duly stamped their authority all over a Grand National distinctly lacking in drama.

With the maximum field reduced to 34 by the authorities in the latest suite of changes designed to placate the noisy minority who pop up once a year to condemn the race, I Am Maximus ultimately faced just 31 rivals after two were withdrawn.

For a horse with a distinct winding action, the drying ground was arguably the most pressing concern for connections, but conditions had been heavy earlier in the week and there was plenty of juice left, despite the official going changing to soft, good to soft in places.

With the graded landing-side drops



▲ I Am Maximus (green and gold) is poised for victory at the Elbow

gone, Townend secured an inside berth behind the leaders and maintained it practically every step of the way. Corach Rambler, the previous year's winner, unseated Derek Fox at the first fence, but for the most part this was a Grand National devoid of incident.

All bar two were still there as they approached The Chair to complete a circuit, and by the time they reached the Anchor Bridge crossing on Melling Road on the approach to the second-last fence, there were still 17 or 18 in there pitching.

It was like no National we'd ever seen before, one that claimed not a single faller. For Townend, the trickiest part was negotiating a passage through the wall of horses when the jumping was done. As they took the last, he still had Minella Indo, Delta Work, Galvin and Kitty's Light in front of him, and his positioning down the inside was suddenly a negative. With the Elbow looming, he wasn't going to get a run down there.

Just as they began to round the Elbow, he switched outside Minella Indo and Delta Work, unleashing the slingshot. I Am Maximus accelerated past Minella Indo to thwart Rachael Blackmore's bid for a second National victory and from there he accelerated seven and a half lengths clear in emphatic fashion.

Minella Indo wilted close home to cough up second to Delta Work, but

▶ *Continues page 10*

### 'That's one photograph I'll be taking home with me'

Macdermott by a nose. Scottish Grand National success kept the title ball rolling for Mullins – seven days after I Am Maximus's vital Aintree triumph – but it was close. Mighty close.

Danny Mullins took the lead on Macdermott after the fourth-last but was pushed all the way up the long Ayr straight by Kevin Brogan on Surrey Quest, who was closing with every stride as they fought tooth and nail to the line. A long look at the photo would be needed to separate them.

Macdermott's trainer wasn't hopeful at first. "I thought he had it won, then in the last stride I thought we were done," said Mullins, before adding: "Then one of my owners in the box put up the betting on the photo and our fellow was 13-1 on."

The freeze-frame showed Macdermott's nostrils just in front. "That's one photograph I'll be taking home with me!" the trainer said.

In yet another milestone moment for the Closutton master, Macdermott was only the second Irish-trained winner of the Scottish National – the first was Huntsman way back in the race's formative years at Bogside in 1869.

It was another big prize in the kitty for Mullins, but it had been so close to going to Brogan and Toby Lawes's small Surrey stable with Surrey Quest. "I thought we had it," said Clive Hadingham of owners Surrey Racing. "I'd wanted to come in the first seven, but then you see a finish like that. He's run a brilliant race and Kevin has ridden a brilliant race as well. Toby had him spot on for this and we got beaten only by Willie Mullins."

Beaten by Mullins. A feeling widely shared in the 2023-24 season.



▲ Macdermott at the last in the Scottish National ahead of Surrey Quest



# 2025 MAJOR RACING FESTIVALS

## LEOPARDSTOWN

Dublin Racing Festival  
1 - 2 February

## CORK

Easter Festival  
19 - 21 April

## FAIRYHOUSE

Easter Festival  
19 - 21 April

## PUNCHESTOWN

Festival of Racing  
29 April - 3 May

## KILLARNEY

Spring Festival  
11 - 13 May

## CURRAGH

Irish Guineas Festival  
23 - 25 May

## LISTOWEL

Whit Weekend  
31 May - 2 June

## DOWN ROYAL

Ulster Derby  
20 - 21 June

## CURRAGH

Irish Derby Festival  
27 - 29 June

## BELLEWSTOWN

Summer Festival  
3 - 5 July

## KILLARNEY

July Festival  
14 - 18 July

## CURRAGH

Irish Oaks Festival  
19 - 20 July

## GALWAY

Summer Festival  
28 July - 3 August

## TRAMORE

August Festival  
14 - 17 August

## KILLARNEY

August Festival  
21 - 23 August

## LEOPARDSTOWN & CURRAGH

Irish Champions Festival  
13 - 14 September

## LISTOWEL

Harvest Festival  
21 - 27 September

## DOWN ROYAL

National Hunt Festival  
31 October - 1 November

## NAVAN

Racing Festival  
15 - 16 November

## PUNCHESTOWN

Winter Festival  
22 - 23 November

## FAIRYHOUSE

Winter Festival  
29 - 30 November

## LEOPARDSTOWN

Christmas Festival  
26 - 29 December

## LIMERICK

Christmas Festival  
26 - 29 December



# EVERY RACING MOMENT



HORSE RACING IRELAND  
RÁSAÍOCHT CAPALL ÉIREANN



this was a National all about the quality of the winner. It was also a landmark first in the race for Townend, who was completing the full set of marquee jump races having already ticked off the Champion Hurdle, Champion Chase and Gold Cup at Cheltenham.

“I ended up being first to the first fence, but when he started backing off, it wasn't a great start,” he reflected of I Am Maximus's cagey jumping technique. “He got a little careful on the second circuit, so I was trying to conserve as much energy as I could, but I didn't get a clear run. When I got him out, he was motoring.”

Of such a momentous addition to his already glittering CV, he added: “It's an unbelievable race. Gold Cups are Gold Cups and Grade 1s are hard to win, but Grand Nationals are a bit different. I can't believe it. It's a bit surreal.”

☆☆☆☆

HAVING become JP McManus's third winner of the race after Don't Push It (2010) and Minella Times (2021), I Am Maximus was promptly introduced at 16-1 for the 2025 Gold Cup, a move that seemed to epitomise the dramatically changed nature of the modern Grand National.

A talented young chaser on an upward curve not exactly renowned for his jumping prowess, he could be targeted at the Aintree showpiece on his way up the ladder because the heightened risk factor of old was no more. He was also the third market leader or joint-favourite to oblige in five years.

“I Am Maximus is definitely a Gold Cup horse and I couldn't see much point in going back to Aintree again,” said Mullins of his second National winner, 19 years after Hedgehunter's famous victory under Ruby Walsh. “I'll be training him for the Gold Cup anyway.”

Of the National's evolution to its current state, Mullins, whose 4,378th career win courtesy of Ballyburn at Punchestown saw him leapfrog Dermot Weld as the most prolific Irish-based trainer, added: “We live in different times and nothing stays the same, everything changes. When you go back many years ago, the National was dead on its feet and Aintree was

going to be sold and it was saved. You have to change and go with the present day. Today, we have a £1m National and there was a huge amount of people going to Aintree over the three days.”

Mullins knew precisely how important a £1m National was. His £500,000 coup saw him depart Aintree on £2,874,693, £50,000 clear of Skelton and almost £140,000 better off than Nicholls.

“Sandown, Ayr, Perth, wherever we can see a prize, I think we have to go for it now,” said the man who would be crowned champion on his own turf for an 18th time. “We needed to have a really good National and we got it.”

☆☆☆☆

THE battleground quickly moved on to Ayr. In 2016, Nicholls sealed his title defence with Scottish National success, and it was similar for Mullins this time. Skelton clawed into the lead on the Friday, but Mullins, who had never had a winner at the track before, farmed the Saturday with a 4,462-1 four-timer.

Sharjah, Chosen Witness and Quai De Bourbon all obliged and Bialystok was second in the Scottish Champion Hurdle, but most importantly Danny Mullins got Macdermott home by a nose in a thrilling climax to the National. He was one of six Mullins runners in the race and, again, he got the bounce of the ball he needed.

The Carlow-based maestro departed Ayr with a £180,000 lead over Skelton, with Nicholls suddenly languishing £270,000 behind. It was all over bar some genteel doffing of the cap.

On the final day of the British season at Sandown, El Fabiolo's second to Jonbon in the Celebration Chase sealed the title mathematically, and Minella Cocooner and Impaire Et Passe crowned the celebratory atmosphere by snaring the bet365 Gold Cup and Select Hurdle for Danny Mullins and Townend.

They say you have to lose one to win one and, eight years after that galling near-miss, Mullins stuck his flag in the ground at Sandown having done what no-one else had come close to managing since O'Brien 70 years earlier. He also finished the campaign with a world record 39 Grade 1s,

## 'Special' Corach Rambler retired

Corach Rambler's departure at the first fence in the Grand National was his last racecourse appearance in Britain. In May he was pulled up at Punchestown and a couple of weeks later trainer Lucinda Russell announced the 2023 National winner's retirement at the age of ten.

While unseating early at Aintree was a low-key exit in his bid for back-to-back wins, Corach Rambler will be remembered for scaling the heights in tenacious and thrilling style.

He landed consecutive runnings of the Ultima Handicap Chase at the Cheltenham Festival in 2022 and 2023 before going on to Aintree glory for seven-member syndicate The Ramblers, who each paid a lump sum of £3,400 followed by £300 a month in training fees. Corach Rambler's final prize-money total was £776,459.

Announcing his retirement, Russell said: “Corach has been a horse of a lifetime for his owners, who won the greatest steeplechase in the world. He will always be a special horse for us, we owe him so much. More than anything we want him to go out at the top, in excellent physical condition and able to hopefully enjoy a long and happy retirement.”

She explained that Corach Rambler had been knocked over at the second fence at Aintree when running loose and “maybe that frightened him a bit”. After he never looked happy at Punchestown, retirement was the best option.

“To some, our decision will be a surprise,” Russell said. “Corach is only ten years old, he could have raced on. But we feel we have a great responsibility with a horse with his public following to do the best thing for him. Quite simply, we could not forgive ourselves if something happened to him.”

▼ Three of Mullins' four Saturday winners at Ayr's Scottish Grand National meeting: from top, Sharjah, Chosen Witness and Quai De Bourbon



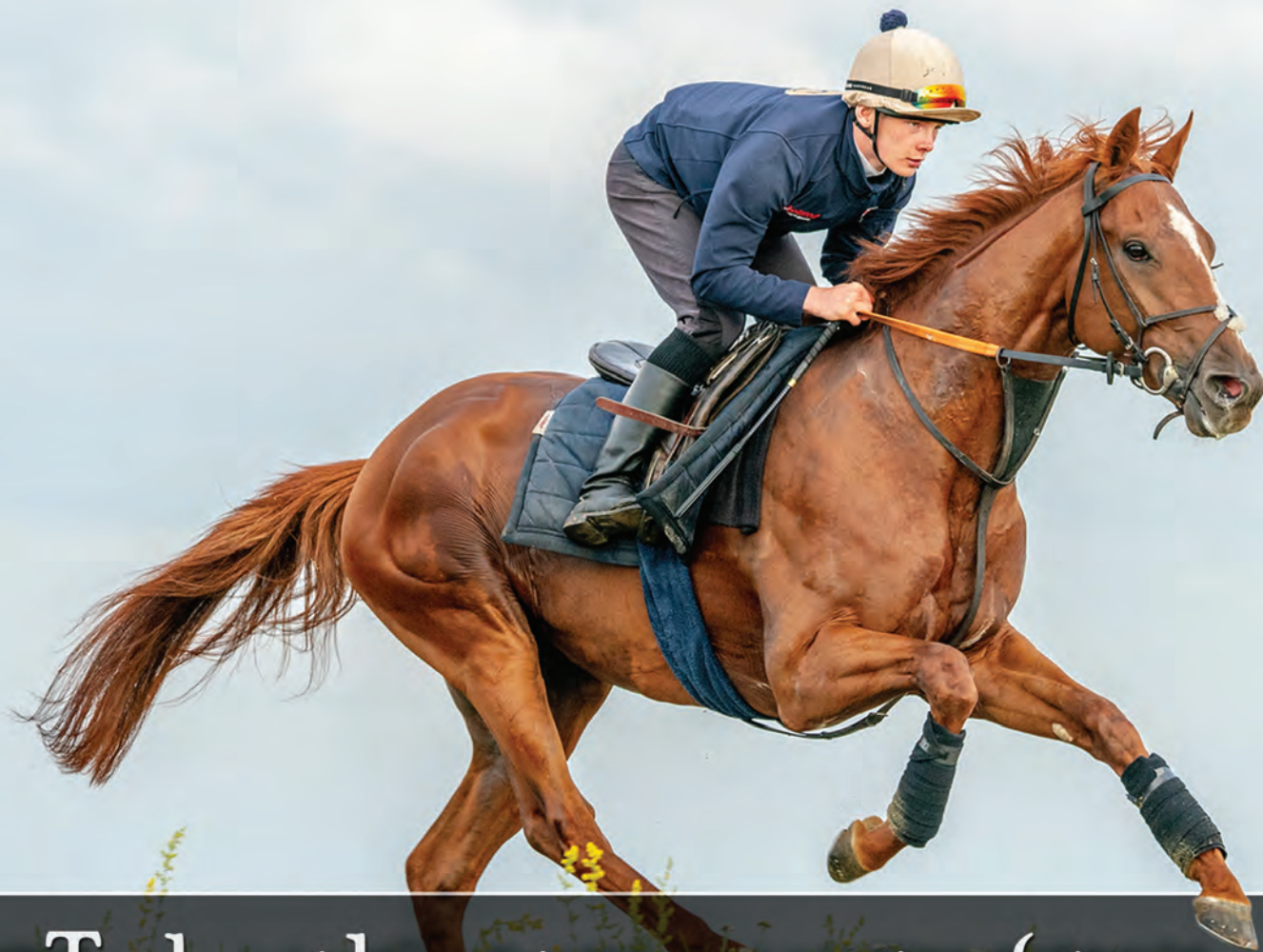
beating his own previous high of 34 in 2015-16, and set a new domestic record of 257 wins.

“Vincent O'Brien is the legend of the game. For me to do something only he has is extraordinary and something we never even thought of or could comprehend doing,” Mullins reflected.

“It has to be better than anything we've done before as to win the two championships in the modern era was something we thought could never be done, and we never dreamed of doing it until a few years ago when we got pipped at the post. I said then if we ever got an opportunity again we'd do everything in our power, which we did. It's brilliant and I'm amazed at the goodwill I've had from the racing fraternity and the public.”

For Skelton, it was a cruel blow, as he had finally managed to trump his own mentor and 14-time champion Nicholls, only to be blindsided by the insurgent. Both were magnanimous in defeat, but they know what Mullins is like. Now he has got a taste for it, he won't want to relinquish the crown. After all, it took long enough to get there.





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A second Gold Cup for Galopin Des Champs capped a historic Cheltenham Festival as the Willie Mullins juggernaut rolled on

# UNSTOPPABLE

By Richard Forristal

**A** CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL that provoked an acceptance from the authorities that change would be necessary was ultimately defined by the same, indomitable force who has made it his own personal fiefdom over the past decade.

Willie Mullins had farmed ten of the previous 13 leading trainer awards coming into the 2024 gala and needed just six winners to become the first to saddle 100 at the festival. Such was his dominion over the markets for the week's 28 scheduled races – reduced to 27 due to the cancellation of the cross-country chase – that an 11th title and the magic ton were considered formalities. It wasn't a case of if, rather when.

Such a predictable hue coloured proceedings throughout a week that, at its best, possesses an endearing capacity for shock, awe and romanticism. In 2024, seven odds-on favourites and too many Grade 1s lacking in real depth or competitiveness proved a catalyst for the Jockey Club to announce a suite of changes for 2025 designed to diffuse those challenges.

The deep malaise that has plagued British jump racing plus an 18 per cent drop in festival attendance across two years – doubtless exacerbated by the cost of living crisis and extortionate hotel charges during the week in Cheltenham – obviously informed those changes to the race programme.

However, more than any other individual, the manner in which Mullins has imposed his grip on the festival inevitably played a part too. Much like Arkle brought about a different system of handicapping for races he contested, the Closutton colossus exerted such pervasive and sustained superiority over all others that the festival's declining element of variety and enchantment reached a tipping point.

On the Tuesday of the 2024 festival, Mullins hit the crossbar with Mystical Power in the Supreme Novices' Hurdle after his market leader Tullyhill flopped. There was no mistake in the Arkle Chase when Gaelic Warrior justified favouritism by devouring the opposition, and then State Man, who was 10lb and more clear of a Champion Hurdle field devoid of reigning title-holder Constitution Hill, did his job professionally at odds of 2-5. Before he had cooled down, Lossiemouth, sent off at 8-13, hacked round in second gear to claim the Mares' Hurdle. Embassy Gardens was unable to live with the high-class Corbetts Cross in the National Hunt Chase finale, but the relentless juggernaut was on its way.

It kept on obliterating all in its path on Wednesday. Ballyburn confirmed his precocious talent by dancing up at odds of 1-2 in the Gallagher Novices' Hurdle. In 2023, Mullins saddled the first three home; this time he was responsible for the first five. Then Fact To File, an 8-13 shot, crushed his Brown Advisory rivals to thrust himself into the 2025 Gold Cup conversation. The day closed with Jasmin De Vaux sealing the Closutton ton, driven home by Mullins' son Patrick to ensure a poignant footnote, just weeks after the death of their mother and grandmother, the great matriarch

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▲ Photo opportunity: Galopin Des Champs and Paul Townend are the centre of attention after their second Gold Cup win



