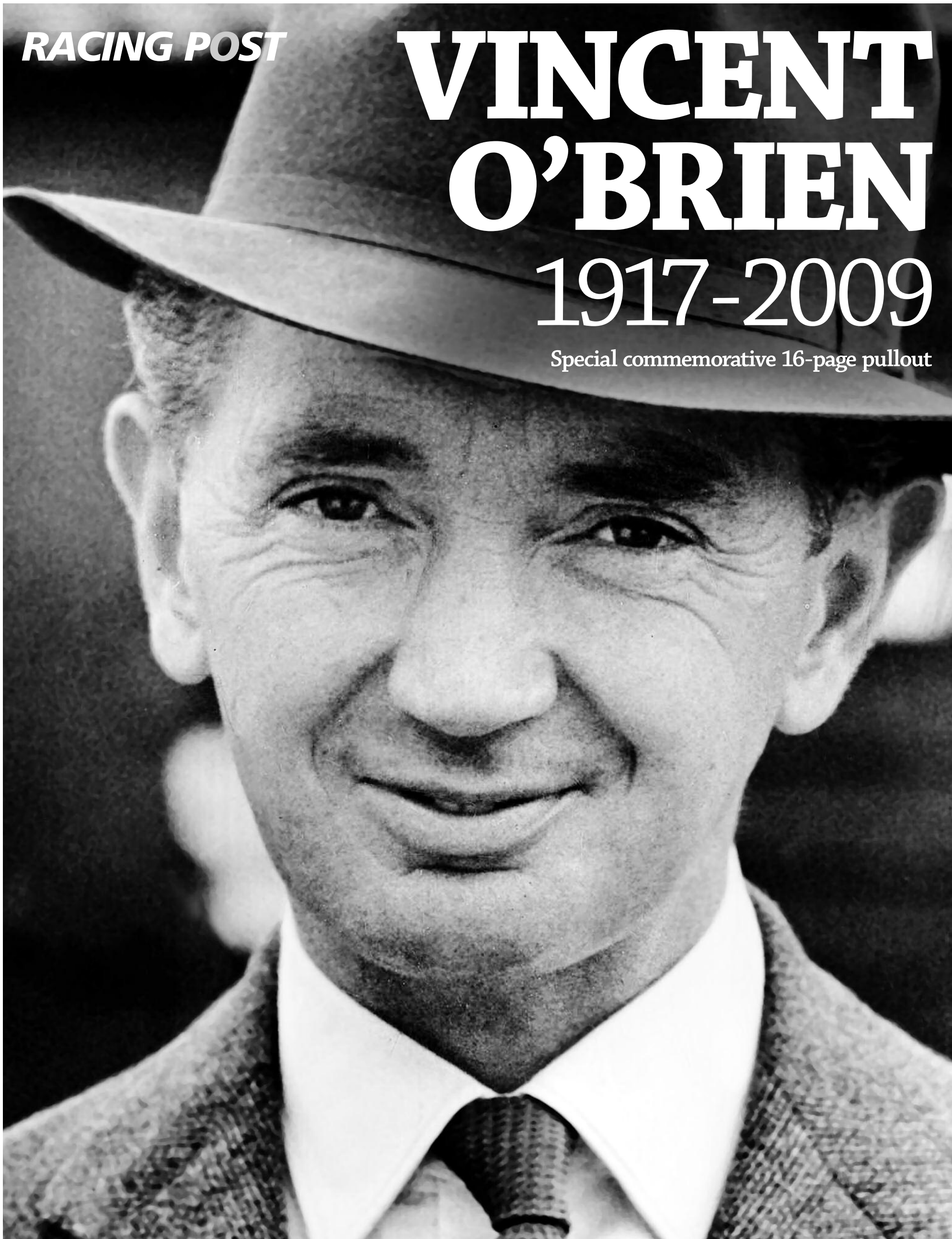


RACING POST

VINCENT O'BRIEN

1917-2009

Special commemorative 16-page pullout



VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009



Lester Piggott, one half of the most formidable partnership in Flat racing history, recalls the greatest days he shared with O'Brien

A match made in racing heaven

VINCENT was the best trainer I, or any other jockey, ever rode for. I first met him in March 1954 at the Cheltenham National Hunt Meeting, soon after I'd started riding over hurdles. By then he was already a training phenomenon over the jumps, having won the Champion Hurdle three times, the Gold Cup four times and the Grand National for the first time, with two more Nationals to come.

His parting shot to me at our first meeting was, "Let me know if you ever want to ride in the Grand National", but I never took him up on that offer.

By 1958 he was beginning to concentrate on the Flat, and he asked me to ride his mare Gladness in the Gold Cup at Ascot. This was my first ever ride for him, and I soon became aware that what made him so special was the thoroughness of his preparation, not only of the horse but in this case of the jockey.

As there was no opportunity for me to sit on Gladness before the day of the race, Vincent set up a sort of makeshift cinema in his Ascot hotel room and showed me films of her previous races, talking me through the best way to ride her. This was in those days a highly unusual idea, but it worked. As planned, I kicked on at

the home turn and Gladness showed great courage to resist all that the other runners could throw at her.

I first rode a Classic winner for Vincent on Valoris in the 1966 Oaks, and for the next dozen years or so we shared many great moments. Winning the Derby with Sir Ivor, Nijinsky, Roberto and The Minstrel was of course very special, but so were the two Arcs of Alleged. I rode plenty of other top-class horses for him, including the sprinters Solinus, Thatch and Saritamer, and we teamed up for 19 winners at Royal Ascot, including four in 1975.

All wonderful memories, but the most golden of all came late in the day for both of us.

In 1990, five years after my retirement from the saddle, I'd gone to Ballydoyle to ride work, mainly for old times' sake. I'd agreed to ride in a veterans' race at The Curragh soon after that, and Vincent put me up on his horse Legal Legend.

Three weeks after that race, in which I finished third behind Yves Saint-Martin and Willie Robinson, Vincent phoned me and suggested, "Why don't you make a comeback?"

I agreed to think about it, but didn't really take the suggestion seriously until he phoned again and invited me to lunch in a private room at the Berkeley Court Hotel in Dublin in September 1990.

Over lunch, Vincent promised that if I took out a licence for the rest of that season he'd give me first choice of his rides the following year, by which time his arrangement with then stable jockey John Reid would have finished.

VINCENT'S conviction that I should ride in races again spurred me into action, and in mid-October 1990 I returned to the saddle.

The following week, with John sidelined following a fall on Arc day, Vincent asked me to go to the Curragh to ride four of his. They all won, and a few days later I was on my way to New York to ride his colt Royal Academy in the Breeders' Cup Mile.

Sadly Vincent was suffering a bout of flu and could not travel across, but Jacqueline and Charles were there to watch Royal Academy get up and win narrowly from Itsallgreetome. Given

my long association with Vincent, this was the most satisfying winner I ever rode.

Almost as memorable was Royal Ascot 1993, when I won the Cork and Orrery Stakes for Vincent on College Chapel, who ran in Jacqueline's colours. Vincent was persuaded to lead College Chapel into the winner's enclosure, and received a wonderful reception. It proved his last Royal Ascot winner, and mine.

Moments like those are the evidence of Vincent's genius, but they don't explain it. For me, his outstanding quality was his insight into the individual nature of each and every horse in his care. He instinctively knew what each of his horses was capable of, and of how to release each horse's potential.

A vital element in this was his attention to detail, and there are so many instances of Vincent making sure that every base was covered. For example, when saddling The Minstrel before the 1977 Derby he stuffed the colt's ears with cotton wool, to lower the chances of the drawn-out preliminaries on a hot day making him boil over, and dispatched his tallest assistant, John Gosden, to the

start to remove the earplugs before The Minstrel was put into the stalls. Vincent was taking no risks.

He was always innovative in his thinking, be it sending Sir Ivor to Pisa to escape the cold and damp of the Irish winter before his three-year-old season, or using his own flying horsebox to transport his runners to England and France, cutting journey times and thus minimising the stress and strain for the horse.

Vincent was the best trainer ever at maintaining the value of a horse, a crucial skill in the late 1970s and early 1980s when many of the horses in his care were worth millions.

HIS insistence that nothing was to be left to chance could cause problems for me in the run-up to a big race. He tended not to decide until the last possible moment which horse would run, as he waited to see what conditions were like on the day. As a freelance rather than his retained jockey, I was having to keep my own options open, which could be difficult if Vincent had not made his mind up.

That astonishing attention to detail was to be seen everywhere at Ballydoyle, and it was noticeable that he never had a very large string. He wanted to operate at the level where he could get to know each individual animal as closely as was humanly possible. Everything he did was geared to keeping his horses happy and relaxed at home so that they would perform to their full potential on the racecourse, and the results speak for themselves.

There's really no argument. Vincent was the greatest.

Colossus who rose to unassailable heights



Alastair Down
pays tribute to the
trainer who changed the
face of racing forever

SO passes the man against whom every trainer in the history of racing can be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

The Bible tells us that “your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions”, but neither in their most fertile imaginings could begin to conceive of a set of achievements comparable to those of Vincent O’Brien, man for all seasons and benchmark for every age.

For over 50 years, first over jumps and then on the Flat, he redefined forever what it was possible to win

‘O’Brien was a pioneering figure in the incalculably important process of restoring Irish national pride’

with the racehorse at the highest level. When he landed the Cheltenham Gold Cup with his very first runner in Britain the cynic might have said “well it can only go downhill from here”. In fact Cottage Rake was not a summit but merely a springboard, a case of “I have ignition” before O’Brien blasted off into the stratosphere he was to make his own.

And if there is a single pivot round which the sport of racing swung from the ancient to the modern it was O’Brien. He began his training career during wartime in an Ireland little removed from a third world country which, while free, was still saddled with the cancerous economic consequences of savage and destructive misrule by the English.

He retired as a trainer 25 years on from a man being put on the moon and through his championing of the Northern Dancer line had redrawn the future of the thoroughbred. The harvest reaped these days by John Magnier and Aidan O’Brien is



O’Brien with daughters Susan (left), the future wife of John Magnier, and Elizabeth in April 1957

extraordinary, but the seedcorn was of Vincent’s drilling.

What is more, O’Brien was a pioneering figure in the incalculably important process of restoring Irish national pride and self-belief. Here was a man who was simply the best in the world at what he did and he was Irish – into how many ponds of private endeavour must that pebble have landed.

The extraordinary statistics of his career have been chewed over elsewhere, but what is astounding about O’Brien was the way in which

he always strove to raise his game. Not for him the temptation to rest on his laurels, to put his feet up in any comfort zone, he was always questing for the next challenge, be it jumps to Flat or the breed as recognised to the breed as modified by fresh blood from over the Atlantic.

His three consecutive Grand Nationals with Early Mist, Royal Tan and Quare Times in the mid-1950s remain far more extraordinary testament to his ability than the triple Gold Cup of Cottage Rake or the Champion Hurdle treble of Hatton’s

Grace. Great though both those achievements were, they relied first and foremost on the brilliance of the individual horses involved.

But to win the Grand National with three different animals was to enter water-into-wine territory. The Aintree of those days was a fearsome place of huge, unyielding, upright fences with drops only lemmings could coach you about. If you televised a 1950s Grand National now it wouldn’t have an audience of 700m – it wouldn’t have an audience at all because nobody would dare show it.

Yet three times on the bounce ‘the Quiet Master’ won it with different horses all equal to the task.

But geldings being geldings, it is on the Flat that the O’Brien legacy will prove imperishable, an influence every bit as profound as Tesio’s piece of wood at the business end of the Epsom Derby which O’Brien made his own six times.

At the end of a different classic – the matchless film *Casablanca* – Humphrey Bogart says to Ingrid Bergman: “We’ll always have Paris” and, thanks to O’Brien, those of us wheezing round middle age will always have Nijinsky, the last winner of the Triple Crown, a badge of equine excellence unlikely ever to be worn again.

But if you want a vignette of Ballydoyle in full cry look no further than the Derby victory of *The Minstrel*, a colt who looked as if he’d come out of a primary school kid’s drawing book, but who had the wherewithal to respond to a ride of unanswerable ferocity from Lester Piggott, the supremely selfish sportsman on whom you could rely to execute the coup de grace with whatever bullet Vincent had so painstakingly loaded.

No other racing double act, no

‘He rightly returned, as heroes should, to die in the spiritual home of his native land’

alliance of different talents, has ever struck deeper fear among the hearts of their opponents. And folk were right to be afraid, to be very afraid, as they had about them in the pomp of their partnership an aura that was a full-brother to the invincible.

Vincent O’Brien rightly returned, as heroes should, to die in the spiritual home of his native land. His life spanned huge change, the modern Ireland of today barely recognisable to that of the years BC – before Coolmore.

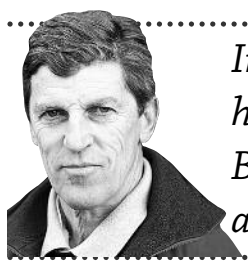
Publicly a quiet man, Vincent had one of those faces that knew a thousand things and might, just might, be about to tell you one of them. A diminutive colossus, he was a man possessed of both knowledge and wisdom, a rarer combination that is generally supposed.

His final winner was a horse called *Mysterious Ways*.

How very apt. After all, isn’t that the way in which they say God works?

VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009

'He had a cool, questioning intelligence, tilting his head to Hoover up information'



*In this article, first published in February 2008 as part of his 'Racing Heroes' series, **Brough Scott** recalls a visit to Ballydoyle in 1984 that showed Vincent O'Brien to have an innovative grip on the art of training racehorses*

HE WAS in a silent mood and it had been a tense morning at Ballydoyle. It was late May in 1984 and three weeks earlier El Gran Senor had won the 2,000 Guineas with an élan to match all the greats who had gone before. Now the Derby, what would be a seventh Derby and a 17th English Classic, beckoned. But Vincent O'Brien did not want to talk.

It was as if something was hurting him, as if all the worries of 40 years of training were closing in. The sun shone, the birds sang and El Gran Senor posed perfectly. It was an idyllic Tipperary May-time scene with the slopes of Slievenamona as a gleaming backdrop. But the man who had created this most wondrous of all academies of the racehorse was deep in his own thoughts. This was not arrogance, it was close to anguish. It seemed ill-mannered to intrude.

This reticence and sensitivity was absolutely central to O'Brien's genius. No-one had shouted that morning at Ballydoyle. No-one ever had. In a world of action, Vincent stood out for his stillness.

In a discipline where people spent a

lifetime discussing physique, the thing that struck you about O'Brien was his head. It was a head that was studious, fastidious, well-groomed and at race meetings always stylishly well-hatted. In it, you felt, were so many secrets of the racing universe that it was no surprise Vincent often mumbled and paused to prevent too many falling out.

The sensation, that morning, was of the pressure inside: of all the thoughts and ideas and options cramming into the skull; of what it must have taken to transform this sleepy, rural corner of 1950s Munster into the most disciplined, state-of-the-art centre on the globe. But Vincent was a human being too. At the end of the morning, with the photographer gone and the notebook still empty, his face eased. "Come in," he said.

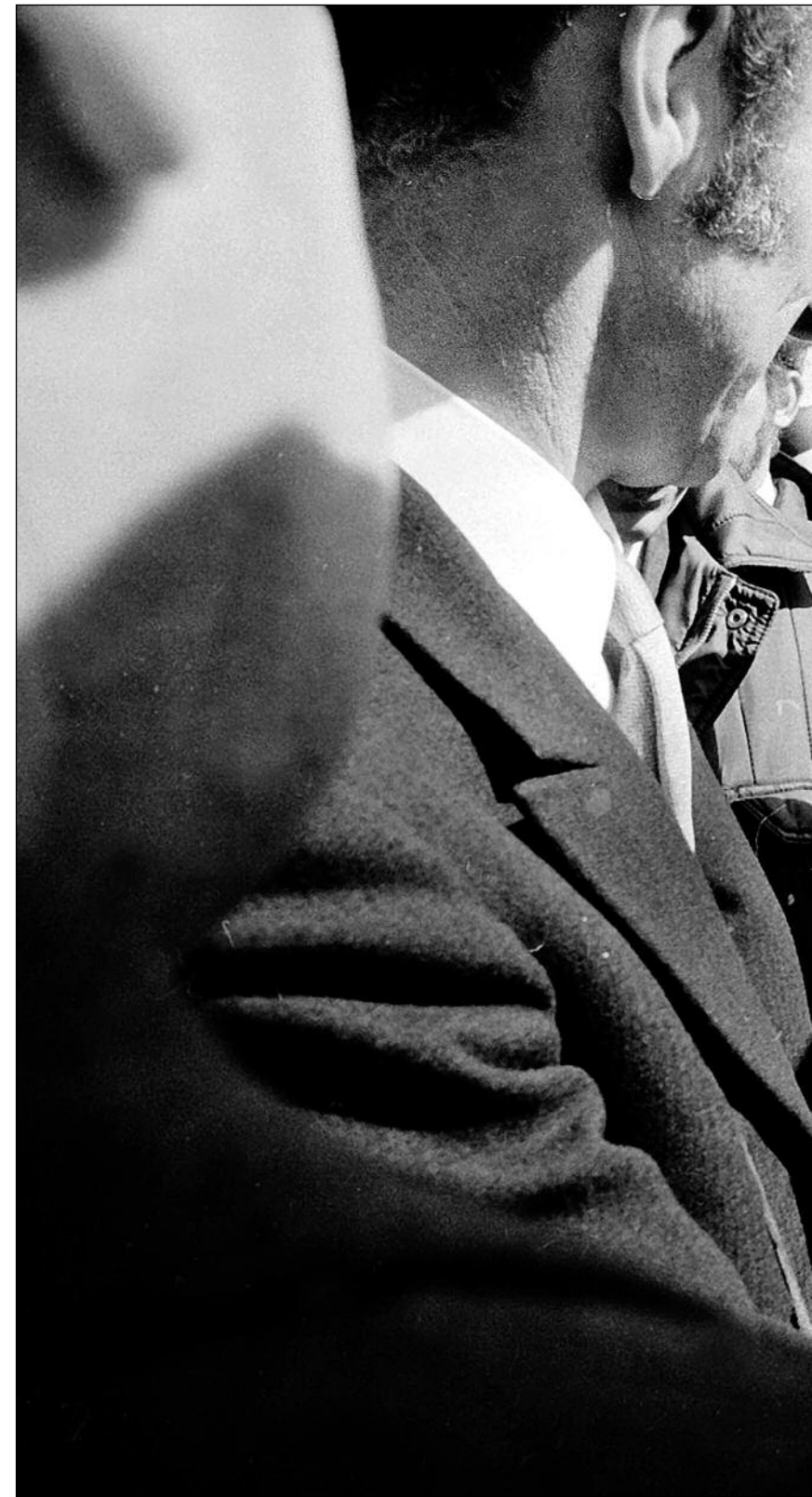
The kitchen was big but it was the fridge that was important. Out of it Vincent took a bottle of champagne and a large slab of smoked salmon. With characteristic neatness he then gathered plates and brown bread and butter, and we settled down to an afternoon of talk.

Vincent O'Brien had been the

ultimate magical, mysterious racing legend all my conscious life. There never had been, never would be anyone to compare.

Early Mist winning the 1953 Grand National was the first time I registered that something special was happening out there in Tipperary. The breezy, pukka tones of the Pathe newsreel would have told us the neat little figure in the slightly tilted trilby was trainer Vincent O'Brien, and that he had already won both the Gold Cup and the Champion Hurdle three years running, with Knock Hard adding a

'In his head were so many secrets of the racing universe, it was no surprise he often paused to prevent too many falling out'



fourth Gold Cup only three weeks earlier. There were pictures in the paper of the horses being loaded into planes at Limerick. That, in 1953, seemed a long way away indeed.

When Vincent saddled Royal Tan and Quare Times to make it three consecutive Grand Nationals, the fascination for a racing-addicted youth was complete.

Imagine the thrill when, after winning ten divisions of the Gloucestershire Hurdle (today's Supreme Novices') in eight years, he switched to the Flat in 1959. The previous year he had saddled those two super champions, the mare Gladness, who won the Gold Cup, Goodwood Cup and Ebor under 9st 7lb, and Ballymoss, who landed the Coronation Cup, Eclipse, King George and Arc de Triomphe. They were heady days and they were to get better.

For Gladness was the first O'Brien horse to be ridden by Lester Piggott and when, in 1966, Lester jumped ship from Noel Murless to win the Oaks on Valoris for Vincent, we had one of the most exciting, if least communicative, partnerships in racing

history. The aura they generated was unique and the fact that in public Lester said virtually nothing and Vincent very little, only added to their attraction. For it meant that the horses had to do the talking and often, as in the zenith of Sir Ivor and Nijinsky, that didn't leave many superlatives left unsaid.

When Vincent did speak, the words were quiet, careful and very respectful of the talents he trained. When I began to interview him on TV in the 1970s, it was like talking to a shy professor about a subject a bit too complicated for general explanation.

HE HAD a disarmingly modest smile but was not quite as bashful as he would have us maintain. One very reluctant day at Newmarket, I sent word that if it was too much trouble we would be happy to go on without him. In five minutes he was round. He didn't say much. But you could see he was Vincent O'Brien. The public should be aware of that too.

In an earlier visit to Ballydoyle he



Vincent O'Brien In numbers

- 16** English Classics, including six Derby winners
- 26** Irish Classic victories
- 4** Cheltenham Gold Cups, including Cottage Rake's trio
- 1** Triple Crown winner – the great Nijinsky in 1970
- 3** Champion Hurdles courtesy of Cottage Rake
- 3** Grand Nationals, in consecutive years (1953-55)
- 4** British trainers' titles, two Flat and two jumps
- 13** Irish Flat trainers' titles between 1959 and 1988



Cottage Rake: triple Gold Cup hero for O'Brien

had also been keen to state who wore the trousers in the Piggott/O'Brien partnership, at least as far as preparation was concerned. "I think Lester is a great jockey," he conceded but, and he was happy to have this quoted, "I would like him to ride in all the big races but none of the gallops. All he does is mess them up trying to find out things for himself."

When he talked like that, you realised the innovative grip that he had on his metier. He had a cool, questioning intelligence, tilting his head to one side as he hoovered up any unlikely information you might be able to give him. He had a logical, perfectionist approach that put him years ahead of his time – not just flying horses, but weighing them, testing them, ensuring the best of everything as he made a science of an often haphazard profession.

In private he was much warmer and more relaxed, and had time for fishing, family and friends. On a train trip to York with his daughter Elizabeth in the summer of 1973 or '74, he was even talking of scaling down his whole operation and "doing it just for fun". But we were within

three years of the great Alleged/The Minstrel season that was to put the John Magnier/Robert Sangster Coolmore operation on the map and, with it, more need than ever for the O'Brien name on the ticket.

There were occasions when you felt that this commercialisation was compromising him, that the younger generation was in danger of prostituting his talent, as in the Classic Thoroughbreds fiasco when the O'Brien-picked yearlings turned out to be a costly embarrassment to all concerned. But training the

'This superhero was actually as much in thrall to all the wonders and absurdities of the game as the rest of us'

racehorse was where he got his fulfilment, was something he did better than anyone who had gone before. Asked around this time whether he was tired by the thought of having to win everything all over again, he paused, watched another couple of horses go up the gallop and then said quietly – "Is there anything wrong with winning everything all over again?"

He had certainly looked tired that El Gran Senor morning, but he brightened up once we got the champagne going. He didn't particularly want to talk about his current great horse, beyond saying what a thrill it was to have one who ranked with the mighty. He wanted to tell about the early days: of the fun he had himself jumping horses around the farm, of Cottage Rake and Hatton's Grace; of Bryan Marshall schooling at Ballydoyle, of thinking ahead, trying new things, of weighing horses like he did his greyhounds before his training began, of the gambles he had because "the money had to be won".

As he spoke a wonderful truth began to dawn. That this superhero

Vincent O'Brien has the press hanging on his every word after another big-race winner

was actually as much in thrall to all the wonders and absurdities of the game as the rest of us, that, at heart, the professor was a player too. How could we have ever doubted it? Look at those old black-and-white photos. There is Vincent on a donkey, Vincent in hunting gear, Vincent leading in the winner of the 1939 Irish Cambridgeshire on the wettest, soggiest of days at the Curragh, but Vincent's trilby and elegant overcoat as immaculate as if it were a passing shower in Piccadilly. He was already a diamond in the dress.

THEN there are the images of the Grand National parties, of the team in the early days at Ballydoyle, but also of Vincent shooting, fishing and skiing, most of all of Jacqueline and the children in all the stages of family life. You begin to develop the picture that 'the professor' was also a very complete man. He had a soft, chuckling laugh with a glorious sense

of the ridiculous. The abiding memory of that Ballydoyle kitchen is of Vincent O'Brien laughing at all the fun that had been had, of him shaking his head with the crinkly smile at just how silly some people had been.

The one thing that stood out in the conversation was the way he talked about the horses and the people closest to him. It was with lucidity, humour but also – and let's be very careful about this word – also with love. Not for nothing does the Bible call it the greatest quality of all, and it's not too strong an image to explain the very roots of the O'Brien phenomenon.

Nineteen years after El Gran Senor, the readers of the Racing Post voted Vincent O'Brien 'Racing's Greatest'. There was a small lunch in London to celebrate. Lester was there, and Scobie Breasley, Peter O'Sullivan, Will Farish the American ambassador, and John Gosden, who put the cotton wool in The Minstrel's ears before the Derby. Vincent had slowed a touch and used the lift rather than the stairs. But he got the message. That all of us loved him too.

VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009

THE MASTER HORSEMAN OF HIS AGE

VINCENT O'BRIEN, who died yesterday at the age of 92, was perhaps the greatest trainer of racehorses in the history of the sport.

Starting from humble beginnings, he was for nearly half a century at the pinnacle of his profession, producing a long line of champions first over jumps, then on the Flat, and in the process becoming a national hero in Ireland.

He was largely instrumental in putting Ireland in the first division of world racing, and the variety and duration of his achievements, including three Grand Nationals, four Cheltenham Gold Cups, three Champion Hurdles, six Derbys and three Arc de Triomphe, were unprecedented.

A list of the champion Flat horses O'Brien sent out from his Ballydoyle stable to conquer Europe must include Ballymoss and Gladness in the 1950s; Sir Ivor in the 1960s; Triple Crown hero Nijinsky, Roberto, Thatch, Apalachee, Saritamer, Cloonlara, The Minstrel, dual Arc winner Alleged, Try My Best, Solinus, Thatching and Monteverdi in the 1970s; and Storm Bird, Golden Fleece and El Gran Senor in the 1980s.

Although the number of big-race successes diminished towards the end of his career, Royal Academy put the seal on his dazzlingly successful partnership with Lester Piggott by triumphing in the Breeders' Cup Mile in 1990.

Even if O'Brien had never trained a Flat winner he would still rank among the greatest of his profession, for in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, for sheer quality in



John Randall looks back at the life, times, achievements and records of Vincent O'Brien, arguably the greatest trainer of racehorses in the history of the sport and a genius blessed with an unrivalled eye for a future Derby winner

depth his stable dominated the jumping scene like no other before or since.

Cottage Rake scored a hat-trick of victories for him in the Cheltenham Gold Cup; Hatton's Grace did the same in the Champion Hurdle; Knock Hard added a fourth Gold Cup; and Early Mist, Royal Tan and Quare Times gave him a unique Grand National treble.

Michael Vincent O'Brien was born on the family farm near Churchtown, Co Cork, on April 9, 1917. He was the fifth of eight children of Dan O'Brien, a small-scale but successful owner, breeder and trainer.

School held few attractions for him and, after leaving at the age of 14, he spent a year with trainer Fred Clarke before starting to assist his father. He gradually (and unofficially) took over responsibility for training the horses and also rode in point-to-points and under Rules.

Dan O'Brien died in 1943 and his property passed to his eldest son, but young Vincent rented the stables and started as a trainer in his own right. His first winner was Oversway at Limerick Junction (now Tipperary) in May that year.

In 1944 he and his principal patron, English wool merchant Frank Vickerman, landed a coup in the Irish Autumn Double with Drybob

(Cambridgeshire dead-heat) and Good Days (Cesarewitch), who both started at 20-1. It was a staggering strike for a small stable and served notice that the trainer had no master at laying a horse out for a specific target.

This ability, and his judgement of form, served him well in his rise to the top, for it is no exaggeration to say that the O'Brien racing empire was based on shrewd betting. He was a heavy gambler in his early days, most of his coups being placed by Nat McNabb.

His first champion was Cottage Rake, who was sent into training with him by breeder Dr Otto Vaughan and was then bought by Mr Vickerman with his Drybob/Good Days winnings.

'It is no exaggeration to say that the O'Brien racing empire was based on shrewd betting'

Cottage Rake did not run in England until his first Cheltenham Gold Cup, in 1948. His trainer was little-known and he was allowed to start at 10-1, but he decisively beat the best chasers in England. Next time out he finished second under 12st 7lb in the Irish Grand National.

The following season Cottage Rake was unbeaten in four races, picking up the King George VI Chase and, in his second Gold Cup, beating the English star Cool Customer. He completed his Gold Cup hat-trick in 1950 and thus became one of only four horses to win jump racing's most prestigious prize more than twice, the others being Golden Miller, Arkle and Best Mate.

The next O'Brien champion, Hatton's Grace, arrived in his yard as a fully exposed, small and unimposing eight-year-old, and proceeded to win the next three Champion Hurdles (1949-51).

When landing his first title he dethroned the reigning champion National Spirit, and he became the first horse to win three Champion Hurdles and the first to win the race at the age of 11.

Hatton's Grace was owned by Harry and Moya Keogh, who also had Cheltenham Gold Cup winner Knock Hard in the stable.

Knock Hard fell at the

second-last in the 1952 Gold Cup when going like a winner but made amends under Tim Molony the following year, even though by that time the gelding no longer enjoyed jumping and had a bad heart.

The most remarkable aspect of O'Brien's three best jumpers was that each had the speed to win top handicaps on the Flat in Ireland: Cottage Rake the Cesarewitch, Hatton's Grace the Cesarewitch twice and the Lincolnshire, and Knock Hard the Lincolnshire.

Few trainers would even have considered running champion jumpers in such races, let alone been capable of winning with them. No wonder they sprinted away from their rivals up the Cheltenham hill.

THE week after Hatton's Grace's third Champion Hurdle in 1951, O'Brien moved from Churchtown to a yard of his own at Ballydoyle, Co Tipperary, where he gradually built up one of the finest training establishments in the world, a stable which became synonymous with excellence in the Thoroughbred.

An equally decisive change in his life occurred later that year when he met Jacqueline Wittenoom, the daughter of an Australian politician. They

were married that December.

O'Brien's exploits at Cheltenham had already put him at the top of his profession when he became the only trainer ever to win three consecutive Grand Nationals.

His first Aintree hero, Early Mist, had been in the stable for only a few months when scoring by 20 lengths in 1953, and he was the first of two consecutive National winners for owner 'Mincemeat' Joe Griffin and jockey Bryan Marshall.

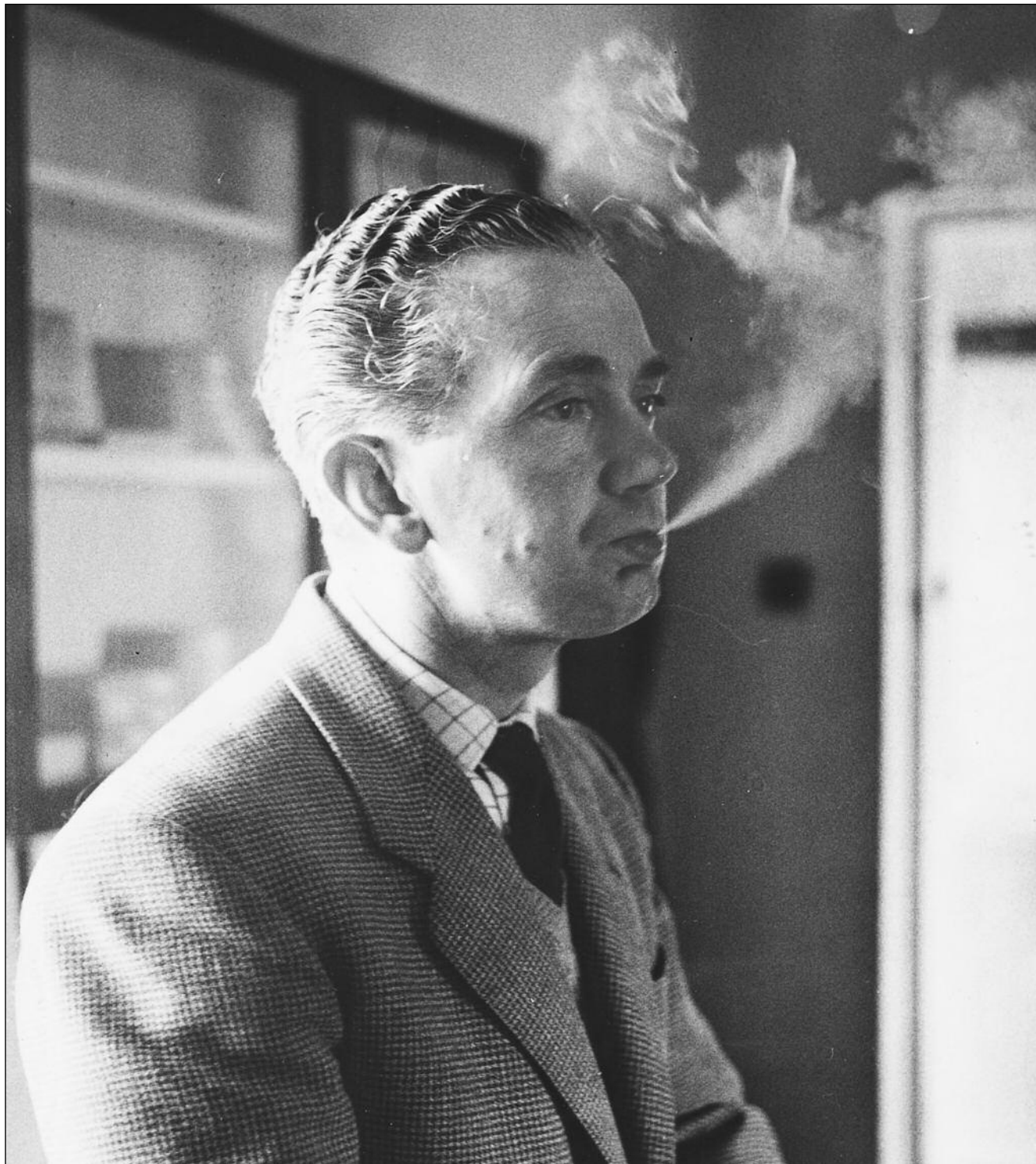
Their, and O'Brien's, second, Royal Tan, was a Grand National regular who was perhaps unlucky not to win the race more than once. In 1951 he and the mare Nickel Coin were the only ones left standing as they approached the final fence, but he blundered there so badly that he all but fell. At the same fence 12 months later he did fall, when holding third position.

Royal Tan's hour of glory finally came in 1954, when he just got the better of Tudor Line by a neck after a tremendous duel up the run-in. He was also third in 1956.

O'Brien's Grand National hat-trick was completed by Quare Times, who won the National Hunt Chase at Cheltenham in 1954 and on the big day at Aintree overcame the barely raceable conditions to score easily.

The trainer won the Irish Grand National with Alberoni in 1952 and another stable stalwart was Lucky Dome, winner of the Spa (now World) Hurdle in 1954.

Besides Bryan Marshall, the jump jockeys he used most often were Aubrey Brabazon (Cottage Rake, Hatton's



CV VINCENT O'BRIEN

- ▶▶ **Full name** Michael Vincent O'Brien
- ▶▶ **Born** Churchtown, Co Cork, April 9, 1917
- ▶▶ **Father** Dan O'Brien (trainer and breeder)
- ▶▶ **Assistant to** Fred Clarke, Dan O'Brien
- ▶▶ **Stables** Clashgannife House, Churchtown 1943-51; Ballydoyle House, Cashel 1951-94
- ▶▶ **First winner** Oversway, Limerick Junction, May 20, 1943
- ▶▶ **First big winners** Drybob (1944 Irish Cambridgeshire dead-heat), Good Days (1944 Irish Cesarewitch)
- ▶▶ **Champion Hurdle winner** Hatton's Grace (1949, '50, '51)
- ▶▶ **Cheltenham Gold Cup winners** Cottage Rake (1948, '49, '50), Knock Hard (1953)
- ▶▶ **Grand National winners** Early Mist (1953), Royal Tan (1954), Quare Times (1955)
- ▶▶ **First Classic winner** Chamier (1953 Irish Derby)
- ▶▶ **First English Classic winner** Ballymoss (1957 St Leger)
- ▶▶ **Triple Crown winner** Nijinsky (1970)
- ▶▶ **Derby winners** Larkspur (1962), Sir Ivor (1968), Nijinsky (1970), Roberto (1972), The Minstrel (1977), Golden Fleece (1982)
- ▶▶ **King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes winners** Ballymoss (1958), Nijinsky (1970), The Minstrel (1977)
- ▶▶ **Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe winners** Ballymoss (1958), Alleged (1977, '78)
- ▶▶ **Breeders' Cup winner** Royal Academy (1990 Mile)
- ▶▶ **Ascot Gold Cup winner** Gladness (1958)
- ▶▶ **Champion sprinters** Thatch (1973), Saritamer (1974), Solinus (1978), Thatching (1979)
- ▶▶ **Champion two-year-olds** Nijinsky (1969), Apalachee (1973), Try My Best (1977), Monteverdi (1979), Storm Bird (1980), El Gran Senor (1983)
- ▶▶ **Last Group 1 winner** Fatherland (1992 National Stakes)
- ▶▶ **Last winner in Britain** College Chapel (1993 Cork and Orrery Stakes)
- ▶▶ **Last Group winner** College Chapel (1994 Greenlands Stakes)
- ▶▶ **Last winner and runner** Mysterious Ways, MacDonagh Boland Stakes (Listed) The Curragh, September 17, 1994
- ▶▶ **Main jockeys** Pat Glennon 1962-63, Jack Purtell 1964-65, Lester Piggott 1966-80, Pat Eddery 1981-86, Cash Asmussen 1987, John Reid 1988-90
- ▶▶ **Champion trainer in Britain** 1952-53, 1953-54 (jumps); 1966, 1977 (Flat)
- ▶▶ **Champion trainer in Ireland** 1959, '69, '70, '72, '77, '78, '79, '80, '81, '82, '84, '87, '88
- ▶▶ **Most wins in an Irish season** 51½ in 1950 and 1959 (Flat & jumps combined)
- ▶▶ **Most wins in a British season** 18 in 1977

Compiled by JOHN RANDALL

Grace), his brother Phonsie O'Brien, Martin and Tim Molony, Pat Taaffe and, over hurdles, Tommy 'TP' Burns, who was equally effective on the Flat and later became assistant trainer at Ballydoyle.

A measure of O'Brien's domination of the National Hunt scene was provided by the Gloucestershire (now Supreme Novices') Hurdle at Cheltenham, which was run in two divisions. He trained the winners of ten divisions in eight years including Stroller (1954), who was beaten narrowly in the following year's Champion Hurdle, and Saffron Tartan (1957), who won the Gold Cup after passing out of his hands.

Overall O'Brien won 22 races at the Cheltenham Festival in 12 years, but after the 1959 meeting, having won everything worth winning over jumps, he concentrated exclusively on the Flat. He had realised he could not fulfil his ambitions in that direction unless he pursued them single-mindedly.

He had won his first Classic with Chamier in the 1953 Irish Derby on the controversial

disqualification of English challenger Premonition, and he deliberately set out to attract new owners.

AT DONCASTER sales in 1955 he met John McShain, a rich Irish-American, and bought him some yearlings, one of whom was Ballymoss, the trainer's first Flat champion.

Ballymoss was slow to mature but suddenly improved in the summer of his three-year-old career, coming second to Crepello in the Derby and winning first the Irish Derby, then the St Leger to give the trainer his first English Classic.

As a four-year-old in 1958 Ballymoss was the best horse in Europe, and Scobie Breasley partnered him to victory in the Coronation Cup, Eclipse, King George and Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

In that same season another of McShain's horses, Gladness, proved herself the champion stayer by winning the Ascot Gold Cup, the Goodwood Cup and, under top weight, the Ebor Handicap by six lengths.

She was the first horse from the stable to be ridden by Lester Piggott.

The most traumatic episode in O'Brien's career was the loss of his licence over the Chamour affair in 1960.

Chamour returned a positive drugs test after winning a maiden event at the Curragh, and the trainer was warned off for 18 months. He had to leave Ballydoyle while his brother Phonsie took over the stable.

O'Brien had the support of almost the whole racing world, which recognised that, quite

'He realised he could not fulfil his Flat ambitions unless he pursued them single-mindedly'

apart from the question of his integrity, no-one needed to use dope to win a moderate event with a colt who, soon after, won the Irish Derby on merit.

Eventually the Turf Club, faced with legal action, reduced his suspension to 12 months.

Another of O'Brien's rich American owners, Raymond Guest, provided him with his first Derby winner at Epsom in the form of Larkspur, though the colt was a very lucky winner under Australian Neville Sellwood in 1962. No fewer than seven runners fell or were brought down at halfway, and Larkspur never won again.

O'Brien won the Oaks with Long Look in 1965, and the following year he became champion trainer in Britain thanks to Glad Rags (1,000 Guineas), Valoris (Oaks) and Pieces Of Eight (Eclipse, Champion Stakes).

Valoris was the horse who forged closer links between O'Brien and Piggott, for at Epsom the latter elected to ride her in preference to a filly trained by Noel Murless, to whom he was stable jockey.

His choice caused a split between him and Murless, and freed him to link with Ballydoyle for 15 years of almost unbroken success.

The first outstanding O'Brien/Piggott champion was another of Raymond Guest's colts, Sir Ivor, who won the Grand Critérium as a juvenile.

SIR IVOR continued to carry nearly all before him as a three-year-old in 1968. In the 2,000 Guineas he trounced Petingo, and in the Derby he unleashed an awesome finishing burst to reel in the seemingly uncatchable Connaught in a matter of strides.

He was beaten in the Irish Derby and the Eclipse, but returned to something like his best when second to Vaguely Noble in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, and ended his career in a blaze of glory by carrying off the Champion Stakes and Washington DC International.

In that same year O'Brien bought a yearling who became the best and most famous, horse he ever trained: Nijinsky.

Charles Engelhard, the American platinum magnate, asked him to go to Windfields Farm in Canada to inspect a colt by Ribot. The trainer advised against the purchase and recommended that the owner buy instead a son of the untried stallion Northern Dancer. This inspired choice of the yearling Nijinsky had a dramatic effect on the fortunes of both trainer and stallion.

Nijinsky proved himself the champion two-year-old of 1969 with victory in the Dewhurst Stakes, and confirmed his supremacy over his contemporaries in the 1970 2,000 Guineas.

Two top-class French colts, Gyr and Stintino, opposed him in the Derby, but the extra half-mile made no difference and he produced a devastating turn of finishing speed the moment Piggott asked him.

Nijinsky was scarcely out of a canter to add the Irish Derby and King George to his laurels, and his victory in the St Leger meant that he was the first colt to win the Triple Crown since Bahram in 1935.

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VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009

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At this point Nijinsky was unbeaten in 11 races and was hailed in some quarters as the horse of the century, but an attack of ringworm, suffered before Doncaster, left its mark and he was below par in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

He produced his familiar speed to lead inside the final furlong in Europe's premier race, only to falter and swerve under pressure and go down by a head to Sassafra. He was a shadow of his former self when second to Lorenzaccio in the Champion Stakes 13 days later.

Those defeats, although two of the lowest points in O'Brien's career, did not detract from the colt's achievements. Nijinsky was unquestionably a great horse and the trainer's success with the son of Northern Dancer persuaded him that he had tapped into a source of equine excellence.

On his later regular visits to the top US sales, he concentrated on the blood of the Canadian champion, and he was largely responsible for the Northern Dancer dynasty becoming by far the most influential of modern times. Other offspring of Northern Dancer who helped to make Ballydoyle the world's most successful training establishment included The Minstrel, Try My Best, Storm Bird, Lomond, El Gran Senor and Sadler's Wells.

Nijinsky himself became a great sire, and sons of his who achieved top-level success for O'Brien included Kings Lake, Golden Fleece, Caerleon, Solford and Royal Academy.

Roberto, who became O'Brien's fourth Derby winner in 1972, attracted controversy throughout his career and was never a public favourite.

Having finished second in the 2,000 Guineas, the colt was due to be ridden at Epsom by Bill Williamson, but the jockey suffered a fall a few days before the race and owner John Galbreath replaced him with Lester Piggott. The latter rode the most powerful whip finish of his career to get Roberto home by a short head from Rheingold, but public disapproval of the jockey switch meant that the victory was greeted in silence.

After flopping in the Irish Derby, Roberto then had the temerity to inflict on Brigadier Gerard the only defeat of that great champion's career. In the inaugural Benson & Hedges Gold Cup (now Juddmonte International) at York, Panamanian jockey Braulio Baeza set a scorching pace from the start on Roberto, who never faltered and came home three lengths clear of the public's hero.

The following year Roberto won the Coronation Cup in scintillating style, but he failed too many times to be a great horse.

Vincent O'Brien and his wife Jacqueline pictured at home in 1994





His stablemates in 1972 included Boucher (St Leger), Abergwaun (Haydock Sprint Cup) and Home Guard (Diadem Stakes), and in 1973 Cavo Doro nearly added to the trainer's Derby tally, finding only Morston too good.

Another Ballydoyle three-year-old, Thatch, was the best miler and best sprinter in Europe that season, for, after being beaten by soft ground in the 2,000 Guineas, he won the St James's Palace Stakes, July Cup and Sussex Stakes.

That year the trainer also saddled champion two-year-old Apalachee for a deeply impressive victory in the Observer Gold Cup (now Racing Post Trophy) and Cellini to win the Dewhurst.

Apalachee finished only third when hot favourite for the 2,000 Guineas in 1974 and never ran again, but stablemate Saritamer was the season's champion sprinter by virtue of wins in the July Cup and Diadem Stakes.

In 1975 O'Brien achieved the remarkable feat of saddling six winners from seven runners at Royal Ascot, notably subsequent Goodwood Mile victor Gay Fandango (Jersey Stakes), Blood Royal (Queen's Vase), Swingtime (Cork and Orrery Stakes) and Boone's Cabin (Wokingham). His juveniles were headed by Irish champion Malinowski (second in the Dewhurst) and Sir Wimborne (Royal Lodge Stakes).

The most precociously fast filly ever to come out of Ballydoyle was Cloonlara, whose spreadeagling victory in the 1976 Phoenix Stakes made her Europe's champion two-year-old filly, though temperament later got the better of her.

Thatch, Apalachee, Swingtime, Cloonlara and King Pellinore (second in the 1975 Irish Derby) ran in the colours of Irish-American Jack Mulcahy, who told O'Brien to get "a piece of the action" – i.e. to become a part-owner of the horses he trained and thus profit directly from his expertise at increasing their value.

O'Brien later described this as "the best advice I ever got" and it made him extremely rich, first through the Mulcahy horses, then through the horses owned by the syndicate headed by Robert Sangster.

Sangster wanted to expand his breeding and racing interests but had difficulty buying potential stallions which other people had raced. His solution was to buy yearlings with top pedigrees and make his own stallions.

To this end he needed the best possible trainer, which meant O'Brien, and he also linked up with John Magnier, who later became O'Brien's son-in-law and ran the breeding side of the operation from Coolmore Stud.

Sangster provided the enterprise and Magnier the business brain and expertise in the stud world, while O'Brien

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VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009

Rollcall of legends – and one final brilliant flourish at Belmont Park

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was responsible for selecting the yearlings and developing them into the champions that were needed to finance the exercise. For nearly a decade, with the considerable assistance of Northern Dancer, they dominated European racing.

Danny Schwartz was a member of the syndicate from the start, and other members from time to time included Bob Fluor, Simon Fraser, Jean-Pierre Binet and Stavros Niarchos.

From this time O'Brien limited himself to training about 40 horses, nearly all of them colts with stallion potential, so that he could give his unique brand of individual attention to each of them.

In the first year of the O'Brien-Sangster partnership, 1975, they went to Keeneland sales and bought several yearlings with stallion pedigrees, notably The Minstrel, a son of Northern Dancer.

In 1977, when the first of them were three-year-olds, the scheme came to spectacular fruition, as they included not only the two best horses in Europe, Alleged (who had been bought as a two-year-old) and The Minstrel, but also Marinsky and Godswalk, backed up by the champion two-year-old Try My Best.

The Minstrel had won the Dewhurst Stakes, but was only placed in the 2,000 Guineas and the Irish equivalent and it seemed his chance of Classic glory had vanished. Piggott, however, advised that the colt should run in the Derby, in which he rode one of his strongest finishes to prevail by a neck from Hot Grove.

The Minstrel followed up in the Irish Derby and completed a notable treble in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes by gamely holding off Orange Bay by a short head. He was

immediately despatched to stud.

After the King George it scarcely seemed possible that The Minstrel was not even the best three-year-old colt in his stable, but when the later-maturing Alleged ran away with the Great Voltigeur Stakes the following month, an even greater star emerged.

Alleged suffered the only defeat of his career when second to Dunfermline in the St Leger, but then put up a majestic front-running performance to win the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

DURING this *annus mirabilis*, when O'Brien was again champion trainer in Britain, he had other three-year-olds who would have been the stars of almost any other stable, notably Artaius, who won the Eclipse and Sussex Stakes.

The lesser lights included Lady Capulet, who won the Irish 1,000 Guineas on her racecourse debut; subsequent champion sire Be My Guest, who landed the Goodwood Mile; the wayward Marinsky, the most talented sprinter in Europe but disqualified in the July Cup; and Godswalk (King's Stand Stakes), Valinsky (Geoffrey Freer Stakes), Transworld (Irish St Leger) and Padroug (Ulster Champion Stakes).

The stable also housed Meneval (Hardwicke Stakes) and champion juvenile Try My Best (Dewhurst Stakes).

Ballydoyle's fortunes were merely excellent in 1978, though that did not seem likely when Try My Best trailed in last of all in the 2,000 Guineas and Alleged had to miss his summer engagements with a virus.

Alleged returned in the autumn by beating the Longchamp course record in the Prix du Prince d'Orange, and crowned his career with another decisive victory in the

Arc, making him the only dual winner of Europe's premier race since Ribot.

Of his stablemates, Jaazeiro won the Irish 2,000 Guineas, St James's Palace Stakes and Sussex Stakes, and champion sprinter Solinus the King's Stand Stakes, July Cup and Nunthorpe, while Junius landed the Middle Park Stakes.

In 1979 O'Brien trained two more European champions in Thatching, who scored a brilliant victory in the July Cup, and Monteverdi, who took the Dewhurst Stakes; he also saddled Godetia to win the Irish 1,000 Guineas and Oaks.

The following season he had yet another Dewhurst-winning champion two-year-old in Storm Bird, though that colt, like Monteverdi, failed to fulfil his promise. That autumn the long-standing partnership with Lester Piggott ended and Pat Eddery was appointed stable jockey.

In 1981 O'Brien's star three-year-old was Kings Lake, who was first past the post in the Irish 2,000 Guineas, only to be disqualified in favour of English challenger To-Agori-Mou but then reinstated amid great controversy. The colt also took the Sussex and Joe McGrath Memorial Stakes.

He also had high-class juveniles Achieved (Phoenix and Champagne Stakes), Peterhof (Flying Childers Stakes), Woodstream

'When examining a yearling at Keeneland, O'Brien would go into a trance'

(Moyglare Stud and Cheveley Park Stakes) and maiden-race winner Golden Fleece.

Golden Fleece won the Ballymoss and Nijinsky Stakes in the spring of 1982 and then faced his only serious test in the Derby, in which he showed a dazzling turn of foot to win decisively in near-record time.

He had the potential to become a great champion, but his large, fragile frame could not stand further training and he retired unbeaten in four races.

That year the stable also housed the three best Irish-trained juveniles, Danzatore, Caerleon and Glenstal.

In 1983 Lomond was a late and successful substitute for Danzatore in the 2,000 Guineas, subsequent champion sire Caerleon gave the trainer his only success in the Prix du Jockey-Club, Solford took the Eclipse, Salmon Leap was the first colt to finish in the Arc de Triomphe (though only fifth overall) and El Gran Senor emulated his brother Try My Best by heading the Free Handicap thanks to his defeat of Rainbow Quest in the Dewhurst Stakes.

El Gran Senor's brilliant 2,000 Guineas victory over Chief Singer, Lear Fan and Rainbow Quest suggested he was the best miler since Brigadier Gerard, and he was made a hot favourite to follow up in the Derby.

Two furlongs out at Epsom, a record seventh victory for O'Brien in the premier Classic looked inevitable as El Gran Senor was cantering in the lead with all his pursuers being hard ridden, but one of them, Secreto, battled on tenaciously. El Gran Senor found nothing when Eddery asked him a question, and Secreto collared him close home to score by a short head.

Ironically, the winner was a son of Northern Dancer saddled by O'Brien's own son, David, who had started

Stunning scenes at the 1990 Breeders' Cup as Royal Academy (near) lands the Mile under Lester Piggott, who O'Brien had persuaded to come out of retirement just days earlier



training three years before in a separate yard at Ballydoyle. Never can a race have been more bitter-sweet for any trainer than the 1984 Derby for Vincent O'Brien.

In retrospect, that defeat marked the end of the domination of European racing by the O'Brien-Sangster syndicate. Although El Gran Senor won the Irish Derby on his only subsequent start, he was the last English Classic winner trained by O'Brien.

OF EQUAL long-term significance for the trainer, though of a positive kind, were the victories the same year of Sadler's Wells in the Irish 2,000 Guineas, Eclipse and Phoenix Champion Stakes. His class, toughness and consistency served him well at stud, where he became the greatest sire of modern times in Europe.

The syndicate's last top-class performer was Law Society, who ran in the colours of Stavros Niarchos. The son of Alleged, having lost the juvenile championship through a narrow defeat in the Dewhurst, found only Slip Anchor too good in the 1985 Derby and gained compensation in the Irish Derby.

By the mid-1980s Arab owners had been making lavish purchases at the sales for several years, and now their investments began to bear fruit. The balance of power in racing was shifting

away from Ballydoyle, a trend that became more apparent when Pat Eddery decided in 1986 to leave the stable and accept a retainer from Prince Khalid Abdullah.

O'Brien, Sangster and partners could not, in the long run, hope to match the spending power of the Arabs, though at Keeneland in July 1985 they paid \$13.1 million for a son of Nijinsky. That remains a world record price for a yearling but the colt, named Seattle Dancer, did not justify his looks and breeding, though he won a couple of Group 2 events in Ireland.

Other disappointments for the stable included Gold Crest, Woodman, Tate Gallery and Caerwent, though they were balanced by Bluebird (1987 King's Stand Stakes) and O'Brien's last two Classic winners, Prince Of Birds (Irish 2,000 Guineas) and Dark Lomond (Irish St Leger) in 1988.

Eddery was followed as stable jockey by Cash Asmussen (1987) and John Reid (1988-90), during which time the fortunes of Ballydoyle became linked with those of Classic Thoroughbreds plc, an ambitious bloodstock investment company.

This public company, the brainchild of financier Dermot Desmond, raised £10 million in 1987 in order to invest in yearlings to go into training at Ballydoyle, and for four years most of the horses in the yard ran in its name.



O'BRIEN'S 12 BEST FLAT HORSES

Rating	Races won in best season
1 140	Nijinsky (3yo, 1970) Gladness Stakes, 2,000 Guineas, Derby, Irish Derby, King George VI and QE Stakes, St Leger
2 138	Alleged (4yo, 1978) Royal Whip, Prix du Prince d'Orange, Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe
3 136	Ballymoss (4yo, 1958) Coronation Cup, Eclipse Stakes, King George VI and QE Stakes, Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe
4 136	El Gran Senor (3yo, 1984) Gladness Stakes, 2,000 Guineas, Irish Derby
5 135	Sir Ivor (3yo, 1968) Ascot 2,000 Guineas Trial, 2,000 Guineas, Derby, Champion Stakes, Washington DC Int
6 135	Roberto (3yo, 1972) Vauxhall Trial, Derby, Benson & Hedges Gold Cup
7 134	The Minstrel (3yo, 1977) Ascot 2,000 Guineas Trial, Derby, Irish Derby, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes
8 134	Thatch (3yo, 1973) Vauxhall Trial, St James's Palace Stakes, July Cup, Sussex Stakes
9 132	Golden Fleece (3yo, 1982) Ballymoss Stakes, Nijinsky Stakes, Derby
10 132	Gladness (5yo mare, 1958) Ascot Gold Cup, Goodwood Cup, Ebor Handicap
11 131	Kings Lake (3yo, 1981) Irish 2,000 Guineas, Sussex Stakes, Joe McGrath Memorial Stakes
12 131	Sadler's Wells (3yo, 1984) Irish Derby Trial, Irish 2,000 Guineas, Eclipse Stakes, Phoenix Champion Stakes

from *A Century Of Champions* (1999) by John Randall and Tony Morris

O'Brien, Sangster and Magnier became major shareholders in the company, so that to some extent it was the old syndicate in a new guise, but in the end they found it impossible to succeed without the market dominance which they had enjoyed before the arrival of the Arabs.

A succession of promising two-year-olds ran for Classic Thoroughbreds including Classic Fame (National Stakes) and Saratogan (third in the Dewhurst) in 1988, but apart from Royal Academy they failed to justify the hopes placed in them and shares in the company slumped.

Royal Academy, a son of Nijinsky who cost \$3.5 million as a yearling, disappointed

when favourite for the Dewhurst, but as a three-year-old in 1990 he won the July Cup and was second to Dayjur in the Haydock Sprint Cup.

HE WAS then sent to Belmont Park for the Breeders' Cup Mile and Lester Piggott got him home by a neck in a driving finish. It was a particularly popular victory for the old trainer-jockey partnership, as Piggott had just made his comeback with O'Brien's encouragement.

However, Royal Academy's success could not revive Classic Thoroughbreds and the company was wound up in 1992.

Hopes of a more lasting revival in Ballydoyle's fortunes were raised by Capricciosa, who won the Moyglare Stud and Cheveley Park Stakes in 1990, and National Stakes winners El Prado (1991) and Fatherland (1992), but O'Brien, now in his mid-70s, was cutting back his string and he retired at the end of 1994.

Among his breeding interests he owned Lyonstown Stud, the registered breeder of Dr Devious, so when that colt won the Derby in 1992 O'Brien did finally win the race for the seventh time.

O'Brien's elder son David, besides producing Secret to upset El Gran Senor in the Derby, also trained Assert, Pas de Seul and Triptych, but he

perhaps inherited too much of his father's reserve and he gave up training in 1988, having found the pressures too much.

David's brother, Charles, served as assistant at Ballydoyle for several years before branching out on his own in 1993.

Vincent and Jacqueline also had three daughters - Liz, who married film producer Kevin McClory; Sue, the wife of John Magnier; and Jane, whose husband Philip Myerscough owns Ballysheehan Stud.

He remained involved in the sport as an owner with his younger son, and by accepting the many honours that were showered upon him. Perhaps the most significant of these was when he was voted the greatest figure in racing history in a poll of Racing Post readers in 2003.

Vincent O'Brien was an undemonstrative, softly spoken man whose genius was perhaps best demonstrated by his single-minded attention to detail.

When examining a yearling at Keeneland he would go into a trance, visualising the colt two years' hence at Epsom, and his record at spotting future champions was unrivalled.

No-one else has been both the greatest jump trainer and the greatest Flat trainer of his time, and the length and variety of his achievements testified to his status as the master horseman of his age.

O'BRIEN'S 23 CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL WINS

1948	Cottage Rake	Cheltenham Gold Cup	Aubrey Brabazon
1949	Hatton's Grace	Champion Hurdle	Aubrey Brabazon
	Castledermot	National Hunt Chase	Lord Mildmay
	* Cottage Rake	Cheltenham Gold Cup	Aubrey Brabazon
1950	Hatton's Grace	Champion Hurdle	Aubrey Brabazon
	Cottage Rake	Cheltenham Gold Cup	Aubrey Brabazon
1951	Hatton's Grace	Champion Hurdle	Tim Molony
1952	Cockatoo	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 1)	Mr Phonsie O'Brien
	Royal Tan	National Hunt Handicap Chase	Mr Phonsie O'Brien
1953	Knock Hard	Cheltenham Gold Cup	Tim Molony
1954	Stroller	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 1)	Pat Taaffe
	Quare Times	National Hunt Chase	Mr Bunny Cox
	Lucky Dome	Spa Hurdle	T P Burns
1955	Ahaburn	Birdlip Selling Hurdle	T P Burns
	Vindore	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 1)	Mr Phonsie O'Brien
	Illyric	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 2)	T P Burns
1956	Boys Hurrah	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 1)	T P Burns
	Pelargos	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 2)	T P Burns
	Stroller	Spa Hurdle	Harry Sprague
1957	Saffron Tartan	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 2)	T P Burns
1958	Admiral Stuart	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 1)	T P Burns
	Prudent King	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 2)	T P Burns
1959	York Fair	Gloucestershire Hurdle (Div 1)	T P Burns

* run at the April meeting

O'BRIEN'S 44 CLASSIC WINS

1953	Chamier	Irish Derby	Bill Rickaby
1957	Ballymoss	Irish Derby	T P Burns
	Ballymoss	St Leger	T P Burns
1959	El Toro	Irish 2,000 Guineas	T P Burns
	Barclay	Irish St Leger	Garnie Bougoure
1962	Larkspur	Derby	Neville Sellwood
1964	Ancasta	Irish Oaks	Jack Purtell
1965	Long Look	Oaks	Jack Purtell
	Aurabella	Irish Oaks	Liam Ward
1966	Glad Rags	1,000 Guineas	Paul Cook
	Valoris	Irish 1,000 Guineas	Jackie Power
	Valoris	Oaks	Lester Piggott
	White Gloves	Irish St Leger	Liam Ward
1968	Sir Ivor	2,000 Guineas	Lester Piggott
	Sir Ivor	Derby	Lester Piggott
1969	Gaia	Irish Oaks	Liam Ward
	Reindeer	Irish St Leger	Liam Ward
1970	Nijinsky	2,000 Guineas	Lester Piggott
	Nijinsky	Derby	Lester Piggott
	Nijinsky	Irish Derby	Liam Ward
	Nijinsky	St Leger	Lester Piggott
1972	Roberto	Derby	Lester Piggott
	Boucher	St Leger	Lester Piggott
1975	Caucasus	Irish St Leger	Lester Piggott
1976	Meneval	Irish St Leger	Lester Piggott
1977	Lady Capulet	Irish 1,000 Guineas	Tommy Murphy
	The Minstrel	Derby	Lester Piggott
	The Minstrel	Irish Derby	Lester Piggott
	Transworld	Irish St Leger	Tommy Murphy
1978	Jaazeiro	Irish 2,000 Guineas	Lester Piggott
1979	Godetia	Irish 1,000 Guineas	Lester Piggott
	Godetia	Irish Oaks	Lester Piggott
1980	Gonzales	Irish St Leger	Ray Carroll
1981	Kings Lake	Irish 2,000 Guineas	Pat Eddery
1982	Golden Fleece	Derby	Pat Eddery
1983	Lomond	2,000 Guineas	Pat Eddery
	Caerleon	Prix du Jockey-Club	Pat Eddery
1984	El Gran Senor	2,000 Guineas	Pat Eddery
	Sadler's Wells	Irish 2,000 Guineas	George McGrath
	El Gran Senor	Irish Derby	Pat Eddery
1985	Law Society	Irish Derby	Pat Eddery
	Leading Counsel	Irish St Leger	Pat Eddery
1988	Prince Of Birds	Irish 2,000 Guineas	Declan Gillespie
	Dark Lomond	Irish St Leger	Declan Gillespie

VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009

YOUR GREATS

In February 2003, Racing Post readers voted Vincent O'Brien their all-time No.1 racing great. Two years later, five of his horses figured in our poll of readers' all-time favourite horses. The extracts here recall the achievements of his most popular charges

NOBODY needs to apologise for naming Nijinsky as his or her all-time favourite. Those who saw him run may feel that no justification of, or explanation for, their choice is necessary.

The trouble is, Nijinsky is history. Many of today's racegoers did not see him on the racecourse, perhaps have never even seen him on video, certainly cannot begin to imagine what he meant to those of us who were privileged to follow his career and witness his unparalleled achievements at first hand.

What can younger generations, who acquire their belief system about racing merit from form analysts, understand and appreciate about a horse whose rating proclaims him inferior to Brigadier Gerard, Mill Reef, Shergar, Dancing Brave, Dubai Millennium and others who came after him? Blind acceptance of those judgements means he can find a place in their pantheon only as one of the lesser gods.

We who knew him and experienced him in the context of his time can but respond with a wry smile and treasure the memories.

For me it was love at first sight, in the paddock before the Dewhurst. It was not just that he dominated his modest rivals in appearance; he was a commanding figure, all power and majesty, who would have taken the eye in any company.

Nijinsky

*Position in poll: 10th
Northern Dancer-
Flaming Page*

Major successes

1969

Dewhurst

1970

2,000 Guineas, Derby (pictured), Irish Derby, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes, St Leger

This was a two-year-old whose like I had never seen before. All these years later, I can add 'or since'.

The race, of course, was a formality. Nijinsky treated his opposition with disdain, sauntering home in a style that allowed no doubts as to his championship status. He clearly ranked head and shoulders above the rest of his generation.

At home in Ireland, Nijinsky extended his unbeaten sequence to six before he returned to Newmarket for the 2,000 Guineas. Although he had 13 rivals this time, including proper racehorses, capable of top form in international company, he started at 4-7. And he brushed them aside, stringing them out like so many selling platters.

Nijinsky was odds-against for the first and only time in his career on Derby day. His

parents had both been ten-furlong horses, and who could be certain he would stay? Gyr, a big son of Sea-Bird, had already won the Prix Hocquart at the distance, and came from France with a huge reputation. His price contracted as Nijinsky (who had colicked overnight) became easier to back.

Gyr made it a race, striking for home and going clear over two furlongs out, but he was clearly outgunned once the son of Northern Dancer had been shaken up and shown the whip. As in the Guineas, Nijinsky had more than two lengths to spare at the finish.

Just how good was this horse? We were not going to find out at The Curragh, where the best of the opposition seemed to be colts he had beaten at Epsom. Unusually, he sweated up at the start, causing a few misgivings, but

'At Doncaster, on that magical September day, Nijinsky proved himself the complete racehorse'

the race was as straightforward as ever. Nearly last at halfway, and only eighth at the home turn, he made rapid progress from the two-furlong marker, led at the furlong, and readily drew clear to win by three lengths.

We learned more about Nijinsky's merit at Ascot, where only older horses opposed him in the King George. The home-based contenders were Caliban, fresh from his victory over Park Top in the Coronation Cup, Karabas, hero of the Washington International, and Blakeney, the previous year's Derby winner. From the continent came Crepellana, heroine of the Prix de Diane and Vermeille, and Italian Derby victor Hogarth. A group of such proven international stars was entitled to test the young pretender's mettle.

Test him? He routed them.

Here was a scenario that could never have been imagined, with one Derby winner emerging from a pocket, delivering a stout challenge under strong driving, and gradually wearing the leaders down, while the other Derby winner, coming from further back and never off the bridle, simply loped along in his cruising gear, picking them all off at will.

Make no mistake. Blakeney ran the race of his life that day, pulling four lengths clear of the others over the final furlong. But Nijinsky humiliated him, and did so seemingly without effort.

With his unbeaten sequence now in double figures, Nijinsky was scheduled for a long rest, while Vincent O'Brien pondered over a suitable prep race for the Arc. Some rest. The colt contracted a nasty bout of ringworm, spent weeks



OF THE TURF



Sir Ivor *Position: 61st*

Sir Gaylord-Attica

Major successes 1968 2,000 Guineas, Derby (pictured above, left), Champion Stakes, Washington DC International

This tough dual champion won in four different countries and put up a stunning performance in the Derby. Held up, he produced a dramatic burst of speed to cut down Connaught inside the final furlong and secure his second Classic victory in a few strides. The memory of that triumph remains compromised by the fact that, after Epsom, he lost his next four races, including

the Arc, in which Vaguely Noble beat him on merit by three lengths. But his owner had the singularly American idea that the function of a racehorse is to race, and his attacking policy paid off when Sir Ivor ended his career in a blaze of glory with a victory in the Washington DC International that saw transatlantic competition come of age. *JR*



El Gran Señor *Position: 62nd*

Northern Dancer-Sex Appeal

Major successes 1983 Dewhurst Stakes 1984 2,000 Guineas (pictured above), Irish Derby

He ran only once at a mile, so he might seem an unlikely contender for the title 'best miler since Brigadier Gerard', but his majestic 2,000 Guineas victory was of such superior quality that his claims are hard to deny. In a vintage Classic, the colt showed a spectacular turn of foot to beat Chief Singer by two and a half lengths, with Lear Fan and Rainbow Quest among those spreadeagled far behind. He

was no one-race wonder, as he proved a champion in both his seasons and was a short-head away from retiring unbeaten. He snatched defeat from the jaws of victory when touched off by Secreto in a controversial finish to the Derby – people still debate whether rider error or shortage of stamina was to blame – but made partial amends on his farewell at the Curragh. *JR*



The Minstrel *Position: 82nd*

Northern Dancer-Fleur

Major successes 1976 Dewhurst 1977 Derby, Irish Derby, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Diamond Stakes

One of the best in a golden era. A deeply ingrained racing prejudice says you shouldn't trust chestnuts – and, according to old sages, there was another no-no with The Minstrel in that he had four white socks. How wrong they were. Not only did he possess abundant talent, what set him apart was his remarkable

courage to come back for more after some incredibly hard races, including a kitchen-sink job from Lester Piggott in an unforgettable Derby duel that saw him just prevail from Hot Grove. After winning the Irish Derby, he beat Orange Bay (by a short-head) in a King George battle that nearly rivalled Grundy v Bustino. *GE*



Hatton's Grace *Position: 94th*

His Grace-Hatton

Major successes 1949 Champion Hurdle, Irish Lincolnshire, Irish Cesarewitch 1950 Champion Hurdle, Irish Cesarewitch, 1951 Champion Hurdle (pictured above, left)

An ugly duckling who became one of the immortals of the Turf, Hatton's Grace was the first horse to win the Champion Hurdle three times, and helped to start the O'Brien legend. This remarkable dual-purpose performer won top-class Irish handicaps on the Flat whilst proving himself a champion over jumps. He was

small and unimposing, but his appearance enhanced his popularity and his Flat-race speed was devastating up the Cheltenham hill. The first 11-year-old to win the Champion Hurdle, he might have won it even more often had he been trained by O'Brien throughout his career instead of only from the age of eight. *JR*

undergoing treatment, and it soon became clear that it would be a rush job, preparing him for whatever would be his next engagement.

The announcement that the St Leger would be the target came as a surprise to many. The trials were over, and there had been lively ante-post activity on the assumption of an open Classic staged in the absence of the season's star three-year-old. Suddenly, it was going to be a different race, potentially a historic one, with the first Triple Crown in 35 years on the cards.

We had become used to the idea that Triple Crowns belonged in the past. We were in an age of specialisation; it was no longer reasonable to expect that one colt could dominate his generation at three over a mile in the spring, over 12 furlongs in the summer, and 14 furlongs in

the autumn. Moreover, this was a colt who had been precocious enough to dominate at two.

At Doncaster, on that magical September day, Nijinsky proved himself the complete racehorse – the best of 693 who had entered for the Guineas, of 667 nominated to the Derby, of 533 entries for the St Leger. And over all three distances his authority was overwhelming.

Of course, that was not the end, but perhaps it should have been. However, defeats in the Arc and Champion Stakes could not obliterate the mighty achievements that had gone before.

Favourite for every race he contested, Nijinsky will always remain a favourite. Pigs will fly before we see another champion two-year-old go on to Triple Crown glory.

Tony Morris

Pen portraits by John Randall and the late George Ennor

VINCENT O'BRIEN 1917-2009

'He planned everything. Everything went like clockwork and he made a difficult job look easy'



Master trainer **Michael Dickinson** looks back on the "happiest time of my life" – his two summers working for Vincent O'Brien at Ballydoyle

THE two summers I spent at Ballydoyle were the two happiest times of my life. In my opinion Vincent O'Brien is the best trainer in the world for the last 100 years.

I know this is a big statement – training 40 champions is obviously a high achievement, but there are two facts that make him stand out. First, he was the only very successful trainer who did not rely on numbers. World-class trainers in Europe, the US and Australia have all had 300 horses at one time, while 'MV' had only 44 horses the two summers I was in Tipperary. Rarely did he have more than 60, starting out with only 25 yearlings each year.

The other important fact to strengthen my claim is that during the 28 years that my friend Johnny Brabston worked for him, he can only remember two fatalities – that is one every 14 years.

During my time there I rode 24 different horses, and with the exception of Cavo Doro, who paid the price of running down the hill at Epsom on very firm ground when runner-up in the 1973 Derby, all the others I rode were sound free movers. These included two champion sprinters, Saritamer and Abergwaun, St Leger winner Boucher and Apalachee, and I can't ever remember seeing a lame horse.

However, getting my foot in the door at Ballydoyle was difficult. On three separate occasions I wrote to Mr O'Brien for a job. I did not want paying and I was prepared to do any job just to experience working for a man who I believed at the time was the best trainer in the world.

But each time I wrote I received a polite letter saying they had no vacancies, which was no surprise – why would they need a second-rate jump jockey from Yorkshire?

When I was working for Kevin Prendergast one summer, I noticed that every time I went racing at the Curragh, 'MV' would have two runners. Both would win in such an effortless, stylish, almost graceful manner, and I was mesmerised even more about the Ballydoyle machine. As a result, the following year, as the jumps season was drawing to a close, I made a final bid to work at Ballydoyle.

I took a train from Yorkshire to Epsom the day 'MV' ran Roberto in the Coronation Cup, with the view to talking to him. As I started to walk up to him I ran out of courage and went into reverse gear, so that long journey to Epsom was wasted. However, later I noticed Ron McGee from the Press Association talking to him. I knew Ron well and later asked him what it was like talking to the great Vincent O'Brien. Ron replied: "Easy – win or lose he is always very approachable."

With this intervention came new confidence, so as he was leaving the racecourse I followed the great man out to the car park and asked him for a job. I believe the fact that I had worked for Frenchie Nicholson, whom he knew very well, and that I was a fully qualified member of the Institute of Advanced Motorists got me my dream job.

With my car on the first ferry, I arrived at Ballydoyle. If I had seen the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids and Niagara Falls all on the same day, it could not have had more effect on me. When I made my first tour of Ballydoyle on a quiet, sunny, June Sunday morning, as a horseman I was in heaven. This was even more than I

expected. That day changed my life, and there was nowhere in the world I would rather have been.

The English press like to say that Vincent O'Brien was a good trainer because of 'attention to detail'. While that is not untrue, they miss the real point. Vincent O'Brien was a brilliant trainer because he was so good at the fundamentals, picking the right horse, safe surfaces and brilliant horsemen working for him. 'MV' had an incredible eye for a horse, gifted by nature and fine-tuned by hard work, self-criticism and much study. Selecting the right yearling is the most important part of a successful trainer.

Secondly, Vincent created Ballydoyle from nothing but four small farms joined together, forming a perfect environment in which to train a horse. This included beautiful grass gallops, the best all-weather gallops of their time, and a perfect setting. I credit 'MV' for inventing the modern all-weather gallop.

Before then, apart from grass gallops, most trainers only used some poor sand tracks, an occasional cinder track and a plough/tan. 'MV' designed the first shavings all-weather gallop, which was then copied hundreds of times over in England and Ireland. 'MV' laid all the gallops himself, not a sod was turned without his supervision, and he loved walking the gallops in the evenings. He was the one who ignited my passion for surfaces.

ALTHOUGH many of the staff at Ballydoyle would have made excellent trainers themselves, combining their natural horsemanship with devotion to 'the Boss' made them an unbeatable team. Of course, the little things add up, but without the fundamentals they mean nothing. Johnny Brabston, who worked for 'MV' for 28 years, 20 as a head groom, worshipped 'MV'. Johnny would explain training to me in such a delightfully simple, uncomplicated way – that is the way he and 'MV' operated. While the rest

of us would struggle with a problem, to them it was so easy to solve. Later, Johnny would come over to the US and for four summers his experience helped me to design my Tapeta surface.

'MV' planned everything. He was well known for peaking the good horses for the big races, but he was also brilliant at peaking some not very good horses, making them look good for a race or two, and selling them on at a substantial price after they looked far better than they were. All the horses were very easy to ride and were extremely well broken and relaxed. Everything went like clockwork and he made the difficult job of training look easy.

I was always impressed that by the time I arrived in early June, he had sorted out all the best two-year-olds and had them placed in order. This was in order on paper and in the stable yard, starting with the most promising horses in the lower numbered stables.

He was also highly organised and very tidy. I remember scoring brownie points when I came up with the idea of cleaning out the second tack room, which was in a mess, and then doing the job myself. Occasionally, he would drive himself to the airport in his Jaguar and I would sit in the passenger seat with my notepad. As he thought of all the jobs the staff at home could do I would jot them down, whether it would be giving a horse longer canter or trimming a hedge next to the all-weather to an exact height.

My parents and I were graduates of the hunting field and point-to-pointers, and although my parents were excellent horsemen (at that stage we had had a few winners under National Hunt rules), none of us had much idea how to train a horse properly.

Watching 'MV' was the ultimate university in contrast with previously asking myself ten times a day 'do I know what I am doing?', and wondering how real trainers trained. When we trained at Harewood we copied his feeding methods exactly –

oats, gowla, honey, eggs and Guinness.

It was always a pleasure to do jobs for Jacqueline O'Brien, a terrific lady with drive who played a major supporting role for her husband. She would tell me how Vincent was a good listener and would be open to any thoughts or ideas other people had. A perfect illustration of this was in 1990, when his jockey John Reid was hurt, and Mike Dillon, the public face of Ladbroke's and advisor to many of the industry's leaders, suggested Lester Piggott should take the ride on Royal Academy in the Breeders' Cup Mile. As history relates, this suggestion was taken on board with great success.

ALL the five children helped make my stay memorable and enjoyable. We had a filly in the yard called Lady Elizabeth, so I used to address their eldest daughter, who was called Elizabeth, as Lady Elizabeth. I called Jane 'Lady Jane' after the Rolling Stones song, and Sue 'Lady Susan'. When I sent the family a Christmas card addressed to Lady Elizabeth, Lady Susan and Lady Jane, they sent me one back signed The Royal Family, which I have kept to this day.

With regard to his sons, Charles was very young at the time and would play a lot of football on the lawn. He could do a great impersonation of Franz Beckenbauer, the ace German midfield supremo. David was always very polite and at that time did not know if he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. How appropriate it was that David turned out to be such a brilliant trainer, winning three Derbys in two years.

On my first day at Ballydoyle, I noticed a book on the coffee table called *Training Thoroughbred Horses* by Preston Burch. I was so impressed that someone who had won the Derby three times (at that time) would still be trying to learn, but that was 'The Boss'.

EDWARD WHITAKER/RACINGPOSTPIX.COM



Sadler's Wells leads his sons Galileo, Montjeu and High Chaparral at Coolmore Stud

Eternal legacy of a master



Tony Morris assesses O'Brien's enormous influence on the development of the thoroughbred

WHEN, in the spring of 2003, readers of the Racing Post named Vincent O'Brien as the greatest of racing's 'greats,' it was inevitably his unprecedented feats as a trainer under both codes which earned him the accolade. The public was bound to be influenced most by what it had seen in the 'shop window' – the hat-trick of Grand Nationals, his dominance of Cheltenham, and his subsequent fabulous record in the world's top Flat races.

But there was much more to O'Brien than his conspicuous supreme mastery of the art of preparing a thoroughbred for racing. No less remarkable was his knowledge and appreciation of pedigree, which was not only a key factor contributing to his success as a trainer, but may also now be seen as a major and enduring influence on racing and breeding worldwide. In the annals of the sport-cum-industry, only the Italian Federico Tesio, creator of Nearco and Ribot, has had a comparable impact in both spheres.

Even in the era of Ballymoss and

Gladness, as the public was just getting used to the idea that Vincent could train Flat horses too, he had immersed himself in breeding records and was familiar with American pedigrees. As a rare European presence at Keeneland, he was not out of place – and his trips there gained him American patronage, and American-bred horses, long before his competitors at home detected the wind of change that would revolutionise bloodstock breeding.

The victory of Long Look, home-bred by Jimmy Cox Brady, in the 1965 Oaks was the first of numerous high-profile successes achieved with American products, both off the farm and, increasingly, from yearling markets, an area where most Europeans had always feared to tread. By the time that Sir Ivor, purchased at Keeneland, had advertised the fact that North American commercial studs could also produce top-class European runners, O'Brien had snared Nijinsky for \$84,000 at auction in Canada, and thereafter his rivals were all playing catch-up.

Of course, none ever did catch up, and though the next Derby hero, Roberto, was a Darby Dan Farm home-bred, it was O'Brien's superior knowledge of pedigree and recognition of latent talent in commercial yearlings that kept him ahead of the competition in the years that followed. Everyone knew the names in pedigrees of stock offered at Keeneland and Saratoga, but few were so aware of family traits and characteristics and could identify which were the true 'A-List' individuals.

That expertise was crucial in the era

O'Brien with his son-in-law and business partner John Magnier

when O'Brien, in partnership with Robert Sangster and John Magnier, raided North America's principal sales with a view to obtaining potential top-class runners with further potential as top-class stallions. Conformation, of course, was important, and few judges have shared Vincent's precious gift of being able to examine a yearling and visualise its appearance in a year or two's time, but pedigree was paramount. That was the determining factor for inclusion on his 'A List'.

Year after year the team targeted sales in America to obtain a portfolio of well bred yearlings, and although a number inevitably failed to come up to scratch, there were always successful acquisitions which more than covered the losses and ultimately produced substantial profit. A prime example of that phenomenon came in 1975, a defining year for the group.

A brother to Apalachee, subsequently named Brahms, proved a dear purchase at \$500,000, but in the same Keeneland auction the partners gave only \$200,000 for a colt with a top-notch pedigree, crabbled by many for his want of size and even his colour and markings. Yes, he was a three-parts brother to Nijinsky, but he was

nothing like that Triple Crown hero in appearance and that counted against him in the market.

O'Brien's belief in the little chestnut colt was vindicated. This was The Minstrel, whose brilliant performances in the summer of 1977 had enormous consequences. His sale back to Windfields Farm, at a valuation of \$18 million, helped to finance deals that followed, focused attention firmly on Northern Dancer as the source of what was best in breeding, and that in turn was instrumental in setting the partners' recently established Coolmore Stud on course to become the colossus it now is.

The original plan, to develop well bred colts into champions and to sell them back into the American market for stallion duty, had run its course by the early 1980s. The Ballydoyle winner factory was now the chief supplier of stallions to Coolmore, whose rapid growth soon resulted in the establishment of powerful offshoots in Kentucky and New South Wales. The practice of shuttling, enabling horses to cover in both the northern and southern hemispheres in the same calendar year, enhanced Coolmore's influence to an enormous degree.

In 1983 The Minstrel's contemporary, Be My Guest (also by Northern Dancer, and bought by O'Brien as a Goff's yearling for a

then-record European price of 127,000gns) became Coolmore's first champion sire. That was also the year when Nijinsky's son Caerleon (acquired for 800,000gns at Keeneland) won the Prix du Jockey-Club for Ballydoyle, which also housed an unbeaten juvenile, destined for further distinction, in Robert Sangster's home-bred Northern Dancer colt, Sadler's Wells. Between them, Caerleon and Sadler's Wells would credit Coolmore with 16 domestic sires' championships in the 17 years to 2004. In 2008 Sadler's Wells's son Galileo took the title.

But the Anglo-Irish success barely begins to tell the story. Proof that O'Brien's impact has been a global phenomenon came with the publication of a list of all-time leading sires of Pattern and Graded winners worldwide. No fewer than nine of the top 35 – Sadler's Wells, Nijinsky, Southern Halo, Caerleon, Alleged, Sir Ivor, Roberto, Royal Academy and Bluebird – were trained at Ballydoyle in Vincent O'Brien's time there and have spread their influence over all five continents.

Sons and grandsons of O'Brien-trained celebrities also featured in that table, including Sir Tristram (by Sir Ivor), Storm Cat (by Storm Bird), Green Dancer (by Nijinsky) and Sir Tristram's son, Zabeel. In addition, Ballydoyle-trained El Prado, a son of Sadler's Wells bred at Vincent's own Lyonstown Stud, was North America's champion sire in 2003, and America's current champion filly, Rachel Alexandra, is by El Prado's son Medaglia D'Oro.

All the evidence indicates that the greatest of racing's greats in the 20th century has been just as surely the most important human contributor to the thoroughbred of the 21st.



A GREAT TRAINER A GREAT MAN

Clockwise from top-left: Vincent O'Brien holds court in the press scrum; with Nijinsky in 1970; the family man with wife Jacqueline and children Elizabeth (4), Susan (3) and baby David at Ballydoyle in 1957; after winning the Derby with Roberto in 1972

