

Scholarship report of Florida:

I am so grateful to the Alex Scott future trainers travel award for allowing me the opportunity to travel to Florida to work with part of the Herringswell stable headed by Graham Motion based at Palm Meadows in Florida. The first big difference to training in the USA opposed to the UK was that although Graham's main yard is based in Maryland, he also had a team of horses at both Tampa Bay and Palm Meadows. Graham cannot train at three places at once so relies on good communication, frequent visits and absolute commitment from his assistants. I was lucky enough to work with Alice Clapham who managed a barn of 26 horses and around 17 members of staff.

In America the horses move to a different state depending on the time of year and season so during the winter months the horses are predominantly running at Gulf Stream Park and Tampa Bay Downs both based in Florida ahead of a select number of horses heading to the festival in Keenland followed by New York before returning to the main yard in Maryland for summer.

Throughout my time at Palm Meadows I was only able to start to comprehend the organisation and communication involved in running a racing yard in this way. To make things more interesting and to add to the logistics of organising, you get your stalls at the training centre allocated based on the amount of runners you had at the track in the previous year. To me it sounds like a logistical nightmare and yet it always appeared to run so smoothly, quite possibly a sign of a very talented team.

Stepping outside of my comfort zone I relished a new challenge and I was fully intending on making the most of my opportunity so in those first few mornings when I probably appeared to be a bit like a rabbit in headlights, I focused on observing as much of their day to day routine as possible as well as trying to help out in any way I could without getting in the way. So my first few duties included hot walking, rolling bandages, sweeping the yard and raking the walkways which believe me looks easier than it is. Day two and I had my first experience of getting on board, albeit on the pony which also came as a new experience as we don't tend to ever pony horses to the start in the UK. In theory it is very simple, you ride the well behaved pony and lead the slightly agitated racehorse; in reality though it can mean an awful lot more than that and can also prove to be more difficult than it seems. After that I rode a horse that was having a hack and a steady gallop along a dirt gallop parallel to the track, this was a very straightforward ride given the horse had recently raced.

By the end of my first week I had settled into the normal routine, checking the set list at 5.30am and set your tack for the groom, followed by walking a horse that may have breezed or run in the couple of days previous before 6am when the first lot goes out. A regular day would consist of four lots usually galloping 1m ½ on the track and a further two or three lots either hacking up the hack path or breezing. Graham likes to breeze a fit horse every week and they will usually have at least five breezes before running. A breeze will be timed over

3f-5f and usually working between 11-13seconds a furlong. At any one time there could be 100 horses on the track so you always needed to keep your wits about you and dread the moment you hear the siren to alert you of a loose horse – thankfully I was never the cause of this!

Breezing was an exciting opportunity as it is completely new riding to a specific time. It did take a little bit of getting used to, responding to the information given or instructions through your ear piece and it was very difficult if you didn't have your ear piece turned up loud enough (it was a lesson learnt quickly.)

One of the areas I was fascinated with was the Americans' view on medicating and vet work. In America generally speaking the purse is valuable and ranged from anything between \$35,000 and \$150,000 on a typical race card at Gulf Stream and therefore money is available to be re-invested back into the horse. The horses are seen by the vet almost every day, scoped every week, acupuncture every third week and they received muscle treatment through an electro-magnetic tube every other day. They also take regular X-rays of most of the joints; usually every three months so any changes can be identified and dealt with.

Another contrast to how things are done in America is the different roles people have within the yard. They have riders who purely ride – trust me you can barely get them to roll a bandage. You have hot walkers who walk around six horses a day and then you have the grooms who bath the horses, saddle their horses and tend to their every need on a daily basis, as well as travelling to the races with them and leading them up. The grooms were mostly Mexican and very interesting to spend time with. Not only do they deliver impeccable care but they also have remedies for almost any problem a horse might have. To them their horses are their world and no one is allowed near them. The attention to detail and care they took of their horses was extraordinary.

My afternoons were varied but mostly consisted of travelling to Gulf Stream to watch any of the yard's runners, holding horses for the farrier or spending the afternoon with a specialist vet who is sent down from Maryland to assess, X-ray, scan and treat the entire yard. And of course being in Florida I was able to spend some afternoons at the beach.

It was an absolutely fantastic trip that I have learnt a wide variety of aspects from and I hope I can implement some of them going forward. I feel extremely grateful to be given the opportunity not only by the Alex Scott Future Trainers Travel award but also from Mr and Mrs Motion for allowing me to be part of their team. I have certainly made the most of it. I have learnt an awful lot about teamwork, management and the importance of communication and I would urge anyone who can to go and do the same.

Emma Sayer

