

# VIVE LA FRANCE

by Damon Gabbedy



Entrainment at Chantilly'



Damon Gabbedy at Deauville races with French Agent Laurent Benoit and Rachel Northam from NSW

## Melbourne Bloodstock Agent Damon Gabbedy's French Connection

Last year I was appointed the Australian and New Zealand representative for ARQANA.

Who or what is ARQANA many of you will ask? ARQANA is the very progressive French auction house, the William Inglis or Magic Millions equivalent in France. Created in 2006 by the merger of auctioneers L'Agence Française de Vente du Pur-sang and Goffs France, Arqana is headed by Chairman Georges Rimaud. The company's majority shareholder is the Aga Khan IV, France's biggest thoroughbred owner-breeder. The rest is made up of French breeders, with the remainder owned by Artcurial, the art auction house.

My role with ARQANA is to promote the French Thoroughbred and to entice Australians and New Zealanders to France to invest in some of the quality French bloodstock. Luckily for me, this includes two trips a year, the first being in August for the yearling sales and then again in December for the broodmare sales.

Well you can imagine my excitement at landing this gig, two trips a year to France!! How lucky one can be!

Last August I trekked off on my debut trip to Deauville and just quietly I was a little nervous about the whole thing. I've been to Paris before but this time I was by myself trying to get from the airport to the train station and then find my way to Deauville whilst not speaking or understanding a single word of French! To my relief the whole thing was a lot easier than I imagined. I landed in Paris, taxied to Gare du Nord (the train station) and then found the ticket counter and bought a one way ticket to Deauville. The only tricky bit was that I needed to change trains along the way but just like a sheep, I followed the crowd and the last stop was Deauville Trouville....easy!

Deauville is an absolutely gorgeous little seaside village on the Normandy coast. In fact many wealthy Parisians have villas in Deauville and live there in the summer, it is equivalent to Eagle Bay in Perth. Only a 2 hour train trip from Paris, the train ride allows you to take in some of the most beautiful country side in France. Once in Deauville, you can walk everywhere. I stayed at the Mercure hotel and walked to the races, sales, restaurants and bars daily. There is no need for a car or even a taxi for that matter.

ARQANA provide bicycles which I took advantage of. Riding is an even better way to get around and explore the town as you get to see a lot more. There were a few interesting moments trying to ride back to the hotel after a few drinks! You can imagine.....

Deauville is packed with restaurants and bars and has an amazing market in the middle of town that runs daily. The produce is just amazing, as is the way it is displayed. It is a great place to pick up a baguette and some delicious Normandy cheeses like Pont l'Eveque, Livarot or Camembert as well as the famous Normandy ciders and Calvados. Not only a food market, you can also pick up some great bric a brac as well as jewelry and clothes. For the more upmarket shopper, Deauville has some of the best designer boutiques around such as Hermes, Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Armani. It is also the home to Coco Chanel's first boutique.

Deauville offers some of the most amazing seafood on the Normandy coast. Most of the restaurants have an English menu and the majority of staff will be able to speak some English. If you like mussels then you will be in heaven!

A couple of useful phrases that I learnt were '*Une bouteille de vin rouge s'il vous plait*' A bottle of red wine please and '*C'est combien cette chemise*', how much is that shirt!



Beautiful Deauville

The Deauville racecourse is a very picturesque course that is directly opposite the ARQANA sales complex. With a calendar of almost 50 meetings spread over 7 months of the year, Deauville La Touques is one of France's leading flat racing venues. In summer, Deauville becomes the international showcase for the horse and a centre of attraction that draws holiday makers, informed members of the public

and every branch of the racing world. They host prestigious international group races (four Group 1 races during the August meeting) and the training centre accommodates 300 horses during the year, rising to almost 600 in August. The globally renowned mid-August ARQANA yearling sales and the 75 neighboring stud farms, birth place of the very greatest champions, all contribute to Deauville's prestige.

In the middle of the racetrack while the races are being run, you will find games of polo being played and there is something about watching a race while the jet set, glitterati and poseurs sit on the infield watching a chukka of polo.

Whilst walking to the sales one morning I was surprised when I encountered about a dozen racehorses walking through the town after they had worked out along the beach and were returning to their stables. It was a great sight to see the traffic stop as the horses were given right away.

The ARQANA yearling sales are the first on the European circuit, similar to the Magic Millions on the Gold Coast and attract yearlings from as far away as America and many from Ireland and England as well as the best the French have to offer. The sales complex is absolutely charming, easy to navigate and again there is absolutely no problem with the language barrier. The majority of breeders speak English and are very welcoming of international visitors. Some of the grooms have limited English however phrases like '*marchez s'il vous plait*' which means 'walk please' and hand gestures will get anyone through.

Also on hand to assist are The French Racing and Breeding Committee (FRBC) and ARQANA teams. They are the most unbelievably helpful organizations that I have encountered. Getting tickets to the races including members privileges is not a problem. At the Group 1 race-day that I attended at Deauville, the FRBC was able to provide me with tickets into the mounting enclosure for the whole program where I rubbed shoulders with France's leading owners, trainers, jockeys and breeders. They can also assist with organizing tours of the leading studs and racing stables anywhere in France.

The European yearling is slightly different to Australian bred yearlings. They are more refined, leaner and lighter types and a bit light of bone. You soon realize that this is the breed and adjust your eye accordingly.

Last year's August sale was abuzz as Sheik Mohammed and Sheik Hamdan and their vast entourage actually attended the sales in person. I was wondering who all these men dressed in sharp black suits accompanying them but not really looking at yearlings were? It was then pointed out to me that these men were the Russian body guards!

At this sale I received an order to buy a filly for Mr. Ron Sayers of Yarradale Stud which made the sale even more interesting for me. Mr. Sayers was keen to acquire a filly with an international pedigree by either Singspiel or Rock Of Gibraltar. After inspecting all lots on the ground, we narrowed down our list and came up with a quality filly with terrific residual value, 'lot 191 by Rock Of Gibraltar out of Banakill', who has already produced two Group winners.

My bidding experience was interesting as obviously the horses are auctioned off in French but luckily for me the price was displayed in Euros on a board. After being initially confused, I managed to get the hang of it. Irish auctioneer Nick Nugent, a very talented man, manages to sell in French and mid way through switches to English if he spots someone like me bidding on a lot. For any of you who speak French, you will understand how difficult this is as the numerical system in French is totally illogical to a simple Aussie!

Mission accomplished, I had bought my first French yearling and the green and gold colours of Yarradale Stud will be represented on French racetracks soon.

The French have a fantastic owners bonus scheme for French bred yearlings, similar to the Westspeed, so Mr. Sayers has decided to leave his filly in France with one of the country's leading trainers, Pascal Barry. I will keep you posted on her progress.....

Since being purchased her half brother Obrigado, already a stakes winner has added a Group 3 win and Group 1 place to his record, adding further value to his sister.

In flat races, open to foreign runners, owners of French-bred horses receive a premium for all places in receipt of prize money: Additional 75% prizemoney for 2yo's, 63% of prizemoney for 3yo's and 48% of prizemoney for 4yo's and upward. That's a huge bonus on top of the standard prizemoney. If you happen to hit the jackpot and get a stakes horse, the rewards are huge.

Australians were out in force at the August sales last year with Patinack Farm snapping up three yearlings including the top price colt of the sale, a magnificent Galileo colt for 770,000 Euros. Melbourne businessman Peter Maher and his racing partner, Jayco caravans Gerry Ryan also purchased three yearlings by Montjeu, Captain Rio and Red Ransom that will be



At the Sales



*Racehorses walking through the town*



**A Rock of GibraltarxBanakill**  
yearling purchased by Ron Sayers  
of Yarradale Stud, now in training in  
Pascal Bary's yard at Chantilly

trained by Alain du Royer Dupre, principal trainer for the Aga Khan.

Peter has enjoyed a lot of success in racing in France; he won the French One Thousand Guineas with Valentine Waltz and later sold her for a big price.

With modern technology it is now a lot easier to race horses in France as you can watch the races live on the internet, and Sky Channel is actually covering French racing on a Tuesday and Wednesday evening.

I would highly recommend a trip to France and Deauville, especially as the countryside is amazing and the studs are just breathtaking. I was lucky enough to get a tour of the Aga Khans stud and also visited the Haras du Quesnay, owned by the Head family and home to Anabaa. This is the most picturesque property with the main homestead being an amazing Chateau. Tours of nearby studs are organized regularly by the ARQANA team and are well worth taking advantage of.

Deauville in August is just beautiful with sunny days that last until about 9pm. ARQANA welcome any visitors to a wonderful pre-sale cocktail party at the historic Villa Strasbourg and I was also invited to a pre race function at the Royal Barriere Hotel, one of the best in Deauville that boasts a beach view with the function held in the most extravagant and elaborate ballrooms you have ever seen! There is no shortage of things to do or see and I encourage all horse racing and breeding enthusiasts to make this one of their '101 must do' thing before you die!

For those of you who like the colder weather, then the December mare sale is for you. The ARQANA mare sale is held in December right after the Tattersalls mare sale in Newmarket.

My advice is to head to England and take in the Tattersalls sale and then on the final day of the non select session take the free flight that ARQANA provide clients from Stanstead airport directly to Deauville as I did last year. This is an easy 1 hour flight and you are picked up at the airport and dropped off at your hotel.

I believe that Deauville in winter is even more beautiful than August. During December, the market place is beautifully lit up with lights adorning the trees, giving a magical Christmas feel.

At this time of the year, the town is very quiet, the accommodation is cheaper and the restaurants are only half full, therefore it's never a problem to get a table anywhere at anytime. It really puts you in a festive mood and it can often snow, something that obviously excites a boy from Perth!!

The mare sale is a great chance for breeders to acquire some different bloodlines. Every year the Aga Khan has a reduction sale giving breeders a rare opportunity to get into some of his most famous pedigrees. There are many fillies and mares out of training and they are ideal for southern hemisphere breeders. Alternatively, it is not that hard to buy a mare in foal, you foal her down in France, wean the foal early and then the mare can return in time for our breeding season. The foal can be left in Europe and sold at a weanling or yearling sale in due course. The costs are a lot more reasonable than you would imagine.

In summation, I would highly recommend and encourage everyone to think outside the square and look into the French bloodstock scene. The thoroughbred world is getting smaller and smaller and the deeds of Miss Andretti and Scenic Blast have really put Western Australia on the map.

As your hard working ARQANA representative, I am here to assist anyone who wants to visit France and go racing, look at some studs and take in an ARQANA sale. So please do not hesitate in contacting me with any queries at all. Do what I did after the sales and reward yourself with a few days in Paris before heading home. *Paris in Decembre* is just unbelievable, *tres magnifique!*

I have recently become a Francophile and am attempting to learn French, not an easy task!

So VIVE LA FRANCE, and I bid you Au Revoir, Bonne Chance and *A'bientot* and I'm off to get *une bouteille de vin rouge!!* ■