

Francesca Nimmo and Charlie Poste now have 50 horses at Station Yard, having grown from 10 just four years ago



Access all areas Francesca Nimmo and Charlie Poste

Breaking and producing pointers and horses in for pre-training, Francesca and Charlie are rapidly building up a successful operation. *Hannah Lemieux* meets the couple at their base in Warwickshire

POINT-TO-POINT trainer Francesca Nimmo and National Hunt jockey Charlie Poste arrived at Station Yard with 10 horses just under four years ago. Fast-forward to today and the couple have grown their yard to 50 horses, split equally between their pointers and horses in for pre-training.

It may be a wet and windy morning when I visit the Warwickshire yard, owned by the Hutsby family and a stone's throw from Stratford-upon-Avon, but it is buzzing with activity despite Fridays being a "quieter" day.

As the fifth and final lot of the day pull out of the yard, led by Francesca, I jump into the yard buggy with Charlie at the wheel, plus the couple's two Jack Russells, Tiny and Nephew, eagerly anticipating their journey up to the gallops.

The string begin with a trot and warm-up canter down the "Old Railway", so named because it was the old line from Stratford to South Wales. When an all-weather surface was put down in the 1970s it was only the second of its kind in the country, according to Francesca and Charlie's landlord Fred Hutsby.

All the horses I watch go twice up the separate 4½-furlong gallop, which has a perfect gradual climb to it, are well-bred four-year-olds — by popular sires such as Scorpion,

the couple's business and riding under Rules for local trainers such as Robin Dickin and Tom Weston.

The youngsters are then broken in at Station Yard, all of which is done by Charlie — "including the pre-trainers; we can break in up to 100 horses in a year," he says. They are turned out until the autumn, with the aim of them running — and winning — in point-to-points in the spring as four-year-olds, before being sold on to go under Rules.

Although the most Francesca and Charlie have spent to date on a three-year-old store is £32,000, their system is similar to that across the Irish Sea, which has seen maiden debut winners being sold in England for six-figure sums.

"The Irish spend £60,000-plus on unbroken three-year-olds," says Charlie. "However, we're investing our own money so we have to be sensible."

Francesca highlights: "Buying from the sales is all about compromise — a young horse with impeccable breeding and perfect conformation will be out of our budget."

Charlie admits he is more impulsive when it comes to buying at the sales, and credits Francesca's good eye for conformation.

"At the sales, we are looking for athletic, straight movers with nice conformation — they're much easier to sell," says Francesca.

'When you're winning together, nothing beats that; the satisfaction is huge'

CHARLIE POSTE

Shirocco and Doyen. They were found by the duo at the sales as three-year-old store horses.

The couple — who live in a cottage on-site and have been together for "about seven years", says Charlie — have developed an expanding commercial business at Station Yard, reinvesting money they make from selling four-year-olds into the National Hunt game back into their business. Judging by the number of young horses in the yard, Francesca, 32, and Charlie, 35, are doing a lively trade.

"Throughout the year, we go to the sales and buy unbroken three-year-olds on spec. We maintain a 50% share and sell the rest to people looking to invest," explains Charlie, who won the 2011 Welsh National aboard Le Beau Bai.

He now splits his time between assisting

If all goes to plan, the youngsters go on to make winning debuts at four between the flags, before being swept up for a profit afterwards.

"Of course, you can never guarantee how a young horse is going to take to racing first time out," says Charlie. "They may have been working and jumping really well at home, but on raceday it is a totally new environment for them — some thrive and others need a bit longer to get used to it."

The pair credits the successful £55,000 sale of Kayf Tara daughter Fortunata Fashions back in 2015 for being the catalyst of their business.

"We were given a half-share in her when she was unbroken and it worked out very well," says Francesca. "She was the horse who got our business going and I don't think we could have envisaged it going so well."



Last season's novice lady champion Alice Stevens exercises a Dubai Destination four-year-old. Alice works full-time at Station Yard



'We want to build confidence and give them a pleasant experience': the four-year-olds stay on the bridle during their canter work

AS the string cool down and walk back to the stables following their morning's work, Charlie shows me the "jumping lane" situated down the old railway, which starts off with small logs before progressing to some barrels, tyres, bigger logs and two brush fences to finish. It's a brilliant tool for teaching the babies to jump properly.

"With the youngsters it is all about gradual progression," explains Charlie. "We take them down the jumping lane every week, so it



Pictures by Peter Nixon

The string cool down after their canter as they walk back to the yard



The jumping lane is a brilliant tool and horses go down it weekly



Nephew, one of the couple's two terriers, accompanies the string on exercise

becomes second nature, and when they turn up at the races it is the norm.

"We want them to learn a correct jumping technique. The lane allows them to flow over the fences at a steady pace, using themselves properly and learning where to put their feet."

Monday mornings are typically designated schooling days, with the rest of the week a mixture of "strong" and "steady" gallops. Friday is the "easy" day, and all the horses have Sundays off.

I ask Francesca and Charlie about what type of fast work they do with the horses.

"We don't 'work' [fast gallop usually upsides another horse] the four-year-olds," says Charlie. "They are too young at the moment and will have plenty of that when they are in training under Rules."

"For now, they don't come off the bridle the whole way up the gallop. We want them to build confidence and for it to be a pleasant experience, and still to have fuel left in the tank at the top."

FRANCESCA and Charlie also have a few "older" horses for pointing, but Francesca highlights that "no one comes to us wanting to own a pointer just for the fun of it — that doesn't happen as much any more".

"Unless you have a deep-rooted passion for pointing, owners are more drawn to National Hunt because the prize money and hospitality are better," adds Charlie.

The pair tutored last season's novice lady champion, Alice Stevens, who works for them full time, and they provided Luke Scott with his first winner this season on Summer Sounds. They also train Susquehanna River for owner/rider Harry Arkwright, whose debut win came at Garthorpe last month.

With the likes of National Hunt trainers Dan Skelton and Olly Murphy, to name a few,



Francesca leads the string along the 'Old Railway', one of the country's first all-weather gallops

sending horses to Station Yard for pre-training, Francesca and Charlie appear to have that side of the business sewn up, too.

"Sometimes we are breaking in horses that have cost more than £200,000," says Charlie. "But you have to treat them all the same despite their price tag; it is the same process."

The biggest thrill for these two is seeing the horses they did all the groundwork on go on and succeed under Rules, such as Shannon Hill, who is with Alan King, and Anytime Will Do, a winner this season for Dan Skelton.

The pair's best result yet in the sales ring came at Tattersalls' Cheltenham February Sale this year, when four-year-old Garry Clermont, a winner on his second pointing run, made £150,000. The son of Maresca Sorrento will continue to race under Rules for Jonjo O'Neill.

"Of course, we get attached to them," says Francesca. "We've done all the work with them from day one."

But, as Charlie adds, the "biggest kick" for them is winning with a four-year-old, selling them and watching them flourish under Rules.

Finally, I ask them how they make being a couple and business partners a success?

"I think we balance each other out," says Charlie with a smile. "When you're winning together, nothing beats that. We go to the sales together, we buy together — we're involved the whole way together. So the satisfaction when a horse wins is huge." **H&H**

'YOUNG HORSES NEED TIME TO REST'

FRANCESCA and Charlie put emphasis on creating a relaxing environment for the horses so that during the afternoons the young horses in particular can rest and absorb their huge learning curve.

"We try to keep their routine simple and relaxed — our team of staff are calm around the horses, which helps," says Francesca. "The four-year-olds are growing and maturing all the time and it takes a toll on them. When Charlie and I come back for evening stables at 5.30pm, most of them will be lying down having a snooze."

The routine ensures that all the riding and yard duties are done by 2.30pm, and evening stables are as brief as possible (hay, feed, rug, check legs, water — no mucking out) so that the horses are able to rest completely. It takes a mere 40 minutes for Francesca and Charlie to put the horses to bed.

"We want them to be left alone as much as possible after their morning's work — we want them to rest and relax, not have people busying around them," adds Charlie.

"We always keep an eye on how the four-year-olds are coping with life. If some are starting to find the work hard and perhaps need a month off, that is fine. You have to wait for them to be ready, nothing good comes through forcing," he adds.

"You can see the ones who are thriving on their work and ready to move on to the next level. Similarly, you can tell the horses who are struggling and need more time to come right."



Susquehanna's owner/rider Harry Arkwright leads up the 4½-furlong gallop

