

# Fifty shades of hay

Frankel



## NON-FICTION FRANKEL

Simon Cooper  
(William Collins, £20)

Review by John Aizlewood

He was an entitled, routine-obsessed prima donna – haughty towards his peers, as nosy as a curtain twitcher, wholly ignorant of his past and cursed with an unnaturally fast metabolism that resulted in a permanent food fixation. He was also, by widely shared consensus, the finest racehorse ever to tread turf.

The facts are simple enough. Over a 26-month career, starting in 2010, Frankel won all 14 races in which he competed. He had the luck of being injury free, of being ridden by only one jockey and of being trained by the brilliant Sir Henry Cecil. Ultimately, though, the explanation for Frankel's success couldn't be more prosaic: he was simply faster than the rest.

Confronted with a subject who can't speak and a career al-

most without mishap, a besotted Simon Cooper does a sterling job, although such is the absence of drama that he is forced to pad the tale by devoting a chapter each to the other horses who faced Frankel in his first race.

Cooper claims he secured access to the inner circle simply by travelling to Newmarket and knocking on the door of Frankel's owners, Prince Khalid bin Abdullah's Juddmonte operation. He has used that access adroitly, although jockey Tom Queally and Prince Khalid himself remained elusive and Cecil died a few months after Frankel's final race.

The union between Kind, Frankel's sprinter mother, and his father, Galileo, a middle-distance maven, was no accident, but it was a freak all the same. Cooper

estimates that such are the complexities of equine sperm and eggs, Kind and Galileo would have to create a foal every year for the next 18,000,000,000,000,000 years to produce another Frankel.

Cheekily, Cooper places himself in Ireland's Coolmore stud at Frankel's conception, alongside the parents and half-brother Bullet Train, who would become Frankel's training pacemaker and the only horse the alpha male would defer to. If the world turns as it should, Cooper's detailed description will secure a coveted Bad Sex Award nomination: "When the pheromones of Kind's steaming urine hits Galileo's nasal organs, he holds a pose as if he were a sommelier savouring the bouquet of a rare vintage."

Chain-smoking, obsessive



At a canter Frankel won all 14 races in which he competed GETTY

Cecil is the saga's pivotal figure. He would begin prowling around his yard at 4am, he had feeds of Frankel's security camera piped into his bedroom and the horse's training regime dictated the timetable for the chemotherapy Cecil's cancer would never respond to. Cecil was the first to recognise how extraordinary Frankel might become but, crucially, he understood how to transform theoretical superiority into actual victories.

A wry, amiable guide, Cooper takes intriguing tangents aplenty, whether detailing the life of Prince Khalid's phenomenally successful American trainer Bobby Frankel (whom the horse was named after) or the history of thoroughbreds, all of whom descend from three Middle Eastern stallions, imported around the turn of the 18th century.

His real skill, though, lies in detailing Frankel's day-to-day life at Warren Place stables, where everyone from training riders to grooms dedicated their lives to the horse. If it all sounds too good to be true, so was Frankel.

What now? Cecil's widow sold Warren Place in 2015 and Queally's career plateaued. Galileo is still a successful Coolmore stallion and Kind is a leading Juddmonte broodmare. Frankel is very much around, too, living a gloriously pampered, hay-filled retirement in Newmarket, during which he has never run faster than a light trot or carried a human on his back. He sires progeny by the hundred every year, for £175,000 a time. Life, for him, is good. It's the least he deserves.