

Novel training system on track for Lambourn



Horses take exercise on the monorail system at Kurt's stud farm in Istanbul

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Lambourn, a racing village craving a boost, will soon be the base for a revolution in training. At first glance a throwback to Victorian times of horse-drawn transport, the rail system is actually a high-tech approach aimed at eliminating human error.

It is the brainchild of Mehmet Kurt, 66, a Turkish industrialist who has now settled in England with the express aim of installing a £7 million showcase version of the monorail training method he first developed and trialed successfully in Istanbul.

Up to 14 horses are loosely tethered within purpose-built cabins and are then asked to walk, trot or canter at varying speeds, monitored by ten cameras sending back instant,

sophisticated data to a control tower. Its main uses will be for pre-training and rehabilitation.

Having forged a diverse business career in his homeland, embracing interests in textiles, confectionery, construction, energy and even football, Kurt is now focused on his passion for racing – and, specifically, for remedying the unsoundness of the thoroughbred.

He has owned and bred horses successfully in Turkey but his patronage within England is growing. Kurt is an owner with Charlie Hills, Marcus Tregoning and John Hills, who has recently moved his 35-horse string into part of the Kingwood Stud property in Lambourn that Kurt acquired two years ago.

Kurt, who presently lives in Chelsea Harbour, is also refurbishing the house at Kingwood. With planning permission granted, construction of a one-mile all-weather circuit is soon to begin under the supervision of Kempton Park's racing director, Barney Clifford, with the overhead monorail set for completion early in 2015.

British trainers tend to be creatures of habit, suspicious of the unknown, but Kurt has had plenty of encouragement. Andrew Balding, Paul Cole and Brian Meehan are among those who visited his centre in Turkey last year and Sheikh Mohammed has also enquired about its use for endurance horses in Dubai.

“The idea dates back to the mid-1990s,” Kurt said. “I had 15 horses at the time and 13 of them had bone or muscle problems. That set me thinking about what could be done.” Kurt became convinced that young horses, in particular, suffered too often from their interaction with humans. “I wanted to take the human element out of the equation and gradually, through trial and error, I developed the rail system you will soon see in Lambourn,” he said.

“I'm aware that people will say it is just an advanced form of the conventional horse-walker, but I disagree. In my experience, it is wrong to train them that way, as the horses become uncomfortable.

“Our system, in which cabin and horse move together, develops bone structure and strengthens muscles.”

Kurt is prepared for a degree of scepticism but you sense he has overcome much worse in his business career. Though research grants have been applied for, he is funding most of the project himself. “Our intention is to reduce the potential for mistakes, oversights and accidents caused by man,” he explained.

“We believe that the traditional way of training has reached its maximum potential. Our idea is that Lambourn will showcase the method to the rest of the world. ”