

BUSINESS MATTERS

Howard
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reports

TurfTrax is alive and playing to its strengths

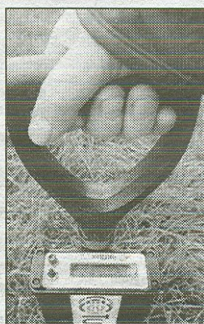
TURFTRAX, inventor of the GoingStick – along with tracking systems that flickered briefly on a number of racecourses plus a comprehensive weather log – is alive and well, which is more than seemed possible a year ago.

Then, the quoted company, formed in 2000, was in dire straits after major bookmakers decided to put on ice plans to take up an in-running betting service and the administrator had been called in to pick over the pieces.

Today, TurfTrax chairman Adam Mills, who admits to having personally sunk a small fortune into the enterprise, has rescued the bits worth saving, while the separate quoted company has set off down the road of property investment under the name of Arteon, remaining as a plc.

Mills explains: "We spent £12m developing cutting-edge technology, but our timing on the commercial side was dodgy and the money ran out. Now we have brought back TurfTrax as a low-cost business with the capacity to expand.

"We've worked hard to get back all the things we developed – software, patents and know-how – and we have



The GoingStick gets a ringing endorsement from Ascot clerk Chris Stickels

a much simpler business model, where, in effect, we're saying, 'Here's some clever stuff; if you want it, you'll have to pay for it.'

With Mike Maher as managing director and proven promotional experts Revolution Sports Marketing on board, TurfTrax is playing to its strengths, concentrating on the GoingStick, which since March 2007 all British racecourses are bound by the rules to use, and the weather station, which takes out the risks associated with local and regional records.

More significantly, TurfTrax remains committed to horseracing but is looking

to other sports for its future customers.

Mills says: "Our products are relevant to all sports where knowledge of surfaces is imperative. Horseracing is a key market, but the timing is right to expand into new areas."

The Emirates stadium, Stamford Bridge and Twickenham have used the weather system, which operates on 27 UK racecourses. Others in football and rugby are being targeted, and cricket and golf are next on the 'have-a-look' list.

Ascot is a client, and clerk of the course Chris Stickels provides a ringing endorsement, saying: "The GoingStick has become standard equipment, and I find the weather station really useful, particularly as it can be accessed remotely.

"I start work every morning by logging on to pick up the latest data, which is updated through the day."

The TurfTrax tracking system remains in place, and is attracting particular interest in the Far East. Mills hopes it will reappear in the UK, but says there will be a big difference if it does. "We're looking at more affordable ways to bring it back," he says, "but this time we won't spend a lot on the effort."