While trainer Sean Tarry had one hand on the 2018-19 Champion Trainer title in June, it took Lyle Hewitson until 3pm on the final day of the season to secure the Champion Jockey title.

But the big question that remains, is who will be crowned Horse of the Year at the glittering black-tie gala Equus Awards on 13 August.

It really does seem to be a two-horse race between Hawwaam and Do It Again.

Hawwaam is the top stakes earner of the season with R5.6 million thanks to his six victories in seven starts.

Do It Again is just a short head behind on R5.1 million, with three wins from five starts. Those three victories came in the L’Ormarins Queen’s Plate, the Vodacom Durban July, and the Rising Sun Gold Challenge – all three Grade 1 races.

Hawwaam, also won three Grade 1s – the Daily News 2000, the Premier’s Champions Challenge, and of course the SA Classic.

But Hawwaam was also scratched at the gate before the July and bolted from the parade ring.
at the SA Derby where he was also scratched.

But the Equus Awards isn’t just about these two horses.

The finalists in the other categories are as follows:

Champion Two-year-old Filly – distance immaterial: Gabor, Miss Florida.
Champion Three-year-old Colt – distance immaterial: Chimichuri Run, Hawwaam, Soqrat (AUS).
Champion Three-year-old Filly – distance immaterial: Celtic Sea, Clouds Unfold, Front And Centre, Return Flight, Silvano’s Pride.
Champion Older Male – distance immaterial: Do It Again, Kasimir, Pacific Trader, Rainbow Bridge.
Champion Older Filly/Mare – distance immaterial: Camphoratus, Oh Susanna (AUS).
Champion Miler – (1400 – 1600; age/gender immaterial): Celtic Sea, Do It Again, Soqrat (AUS).
Champion Middle Distance – (1800 – 2200; age/gender immaterial): Do It Again, Hawwaam, Rainbow Bridge.
Champion Stayer – (2400 and up; age/gender immaterial): Dynasty's Blossom, Magnificent Seven, Return Flight, Samurai Warrior, Walter Smoothie.

Voting Criteria: The awards are based on graded races and in particular Grade 1 races. As regards the stayer category, the winning horse will be at the discretion of the voting panel. This decision was taken as the only Grade 1 race of this distance category in SA is the SA Derby, which would mean that this should be the obvious winner based on a single run. This would also have excluded fillies and mares.

Breeder Awards:
Stallion of the Year
Broodmare of the Year
Breeder of the Year

Individual Awards:
Champion Apprentice
Champion Jockey
Champion Owner (based on stakes earned)
Champion Trainer (based on stakes earned)
Horse of the Year Award

The voting panel comprised of Matthew Lips, Alistair Cohen, Lennon Maharaj, David Thiselton and RA chairman Larry Wainstein as non-voting chairperson.
The 2019-20 horseracing season has started and TAB is making exciting changes to its betting menu for the new season, including a new daily “Blitz Race Meeting” from Friday 9 August.

The Blitz meeting will always comprise seven races and will combine into one “race meeting” the best South African and international races in a mid-afternoon timeframe.

Five multi-race bets will be in operation on each Blitz meeting - Place Accumulator (Races 1 to 7), Pick 6 (Races 2 to 7), Jackpot (Races 3 to 6), Pick 3 (Races 5 to 7) and a Daily Double (Races 6 and 7).

The aim of Blitz meetings is to take most, if not all, of the best-quality races from South Africa, the UK, France, Singapore and Hong Kong in mid-afternoon and combine them into a notional race meeting that TAB customers can bet on.

It’s an exciting concept and marks the first time that TAB has put the cream of local and international races into one daily basket that customers can take a range of bets on.

Betting turnovers highlight that the R1-unit Rolling Double on all consecutive races at South African race meetings holds little appeal for the majority of TAB customers nowadays.

Consequently, Rolling Doubles on local races will fall away from Friday 9 August and be replaced by a Daily Double with a R6 unit.

The first leg of the Daily Double on South African meetings will always be the race after the first Jackpot leg. Thus, on a nine-race programme the Daily Double will be on Races 6 and 7 with the Bipot starting on Race 2, the Place Accumulator on Race 3 and the Pick 6 and Jackpot on Races 4 and 5 respectively.

The new Daily Double should put the spotlight on the big race at most local meetings because it will normally incorporate the main event. That coupled with a R6 unit, which should ensure significant payouts, will hopefully re-energise the bet and renew its appeal to TAB customers.

The new Daily Double will also be added to the betting menu for selected international race meetings screened on Tellytrack. When the Daily Double is offered on such international race meetings, it will always be on the last two races with the exception of Dubai, Mauritius, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Those four countries will be treated identically to South African meetings with the race after the first Jackpot leg forming the first leg of the Daily Double.
Mike de Kock is setting up a satellite yard at the Cranbourne Racing Centre outside of Melbourne, Victoria.

In a post on his website he said that his South African racing operation will remain the stable’s main base for the time being, to be employed as a platform to feed the Australian stable with horses from South Africa.

He explained: “We are doing this as a pre-emptive move for our exports protocols opening up, we are confident this will be happening soon. We have been doing things the other way around, focusing on importing horses from Australia. Soon we’ll be exporting from South Africa at an exchange rate of roughly 10 rand to the Australian dollar, which is a great opportunity and makes good business sense. We will also be supporting the Australian market as we have been doing.”

De Kock said that Australian Racing and officials at Cranbourne have bent over backwards to accommodate the venture. He commented: “They have been unbelievably helpful. They are building us new stables with a number of other benefits included. The training facilities are excellent with everything from treadmills to good tracks.

“We’ve been going to Australia for a number of years and Mathew will soon be leaving to gain work experience in their industry, to pave the way. Australian racing is run in a very professional manner, they have great organisational acumen and integrity.

“Setting up the new operation won’t happen overnight. There are many official and administrative arrangements to put into place, this could take from six months to a year.”

De Kock’s departure follows after trainers Chesney van Zyl and Joey Ramsden have announced that they are heading to Australia and Singapore respectively.

In an earlier interview de Kock said they “travelled around the country (Australia) to look at what they have and I was impressed with the facilities we saw there.

“What particularly impressed me was the fact that the racing industry is very well supported by the government, who understand the industry is a major employer of labour in the country.”

De Kock will set-up fifty boxes at Cranbourne.

Mathew de Kock
The National Horseracing Authority’s Handicapping Panel awarded a Merit Rating of 105 to debut winner two-year-old filly WORLD RADAR after her emphatic win in a maiden juvenile plate for fillies over 1200m on the Fairview turf course on Friday, 26 July.

It is extremely rare for any debut winner to be given a three-digit Merit Rating, but this was an exceptional case.

In a field of 14, the first four to finish were all on debut.

The margin between the winner and the runner-up was 6.75 lengths, with a further 10.25 lengths between second and third, and half-a-length between third and fourth.

Such was the strength of this performance that second placed GLORY DAYS ran to a rating of 89, which in itself is higher than the mark achieved by most two-year-old maiden winners.

The first previously raced horse to finish, SPEECHMAKER, was beaten a total of 18 lengths into fifth place. In order to take what in reality is a somewhat conservative view, the Handicappers to rate the race using SPEECHMAKER to the worst of her four previous performances, being the 64 which she achieved when finishing 6th of 9 on her debut in a juvenile plate in February.

This leads to WORLD RADAR achieving a rating of 105, and given that the race was dominated by unknown quantities racing for the first time there was no reason to question it, especially when the race could easily be rated higher.
Bumper Easter crowds and well-attended big meetings helped British racecourse attendances rise by two per cent in the first six months of 2019 compared to the same period in 2018.

Courses welcomed a total of 2,801,512 racegoers, while the average attendance of 3,979 was also up by two per cent.

However, these encouraging green shoots come against the backdrop of three consecutive years of declining average attendances.

Average crowds at British meetings last year fell to their lowest this century.

While the big meetings such as Cheltenham, Epsom and Royal Ascot attracted increased numbers, the bottom of the pyramid made up of the winter all-weather fixtures reveal figures in stark contrast. The lowest attendance of 146 was at Southwell, while the other five lowest were all at Newcastle, three of them under 200.

The monthly crowd figures for this and last year varied not only because of the equine flu shutdown but also because Easter was in March last year but fell in April this year.

Easter has become a boon for courses since Good Friday racing was introduced and showcased the climax to the all-weather season with finals day at Lingfield.

Racing squeezed in 20 meetings over the four days of Easter holidays and this year attendances topped 100,000, with Good Friday leading the way.

David Armstrong, chief executive of the Racecourse Association, said: “I’m delighted to see the hard work of racecourses pay off and result in an increase to both the total and average attendance figures, with excellent performances by racecourses of all sizes.”

The six days lost to equine flu in February were negated by the 704 meetings held this year, matching the total in the same period last year. – racingpost.com