

“What’s in a name?” It’s a famous and oft-repeated question. And when Shakespeare’s star-crossed lover Juliet asks it she provides a no less

celebrated answer. “That which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet.” Romeo is called Romeo, sure enough, but his being the particular character Romeo does not depend on his being called Romeo.

Just as ‘a good horse is never a bad colour’ names are, ultimately, neither here nor there. If something is considered a class act the label it trades under will probably come to be considered good as well. Few names are inherently good, in, and of, themselves. Take any area of activity - horse racing, teams, bands - where names are prominent and I’d be willing to bet that the names we think most effective will be those attached to the animals, individuals or groups whose exploits we especially admire. An aura, charisma, call it what you will, is more often the reward for effort and achievement than something which itself makes celebrity possible.

And yet, we do have our preferences. And

Some names, because of the images they bring to mind, are truly names ‘to conjure with’ and when they are allied to competitive excellence they start to take on an almost magical quality. A few examples - and everyone will have their own - will convey the sense of what I mean.

Of the many Holway field trial champions, for instance, four names are particular favourites of mine. FTChs Holway Gaiety and Holway Jollity have names which perfectly capture the spirit of goldens at their best. Gay is a word that has now been so thoroughly appropriated for one purpose that we have forgotten that in animals it conveys a sense of being lively, spirited and alert. It is time we recovered this marvellous old word which I have loved ever since, as a lad, I visited Navy Days in Plymouth and thought the very best thing I went on was a compact and fast Motor Torpedo Boat with what I thought was the splendid name of Gay Charioteer. Jollity has the added bonus of prompting the strains of Jupiter, bringer of jollity from Gustav Holst’s Planets Suite.

And so it goes. FTCh Holway Barrister, always referred to as The Barrister, had a name with authority stamped all over it whilst FTCh Holway



PHOTOGRAPH: ALLSPORT/DAVID CANNON

Another outstanding performance from Desert Orchid... canine names often reflect their equine equivalents.

Name that song

Long, fancy registered titles do not guarantee success, says *Graham Cox*, but what we call our dogs every day means everything when training and working.

however intuitive they may seem we can sometimes account for why we have them. No-one, for instance, will ever convince me that The Beatles, with its arch pun, is as good a name as the Rolling Stones. Countless other examples tell the same story. Most great names achieve their greatness, some have it thrust upon them and a few are, as it were, born to it. Certainly, when it comes to dogs I have some favourites which I can readily explain. Simplicity matters. Long names with ‘ofs’ and ‘ats’, inevitable though they often are, never seem so effective as straight prefix and name arrangements.

Beyond that there is plenty more one can say about what makes for a name that has something about it. Alliteration, where words with the same letter or sound are used, often makes for a name that rolls off the tongue and sounds natural. But more important, for me at any rate, are the connotations the name has: the connections that they suggest.

Corbiere, whelped on Grand National day and given the name of an illustrious competitor in that most demanding of races, went on to acquire a supplementary name as his appearance and performances invited comparison with his equine contemporary Desert Orchid. The great National Hunt grey, like Red Rum and Arkle, captured the heart of the nation and Corbiere too became a huge favourite. Both had charisma in spades and the connection between the horse and the dog with a

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horse’s name seemed utterly natural.

If I were nominating the pick of the alliterative names I wouldn’t have to struggle to decide. Some names are a gift to commentators and at the 1986 CLA Game Fair at Harewood House the performance by one of the Irish team gave us every opportunity to repeat a splendid tongue twister. Ireland won by a convincing 35 points and in George Eastwood’s young black bitch Yubber Burr Ruby they had the best retriever and the top individual. Yubber Burr Ruby. Don’t you just love it. Say it once, and you want to say it again, and again. And we did. We had to.

Do I have an all time favourite? A name that I would pick if I could only pick one. I do. It is the name of a dog that I never saw, but it meets all my criteria for quality. It is associated with an exceptional animal, it has countless connotations, both immediate and less obvious, and it rolls off the