

Press Release Sunday, 22 November 2026

French horse Erdenali makes Japanese racing history with a historic victory

Erdenali makes Japanese history

A major chapter in racing history was written this Sunday, 22 November 2026, at Kyoto Racecourse. Erdenali became the first foreign horse to add his name to the roll of honour of the Mile Championship (Gr1).

This is a major success for French training. Bred and owned by The Aga Khan Studs, trained in Chantilly by Francis-Henri Graffard and ridden by jockey Mickaël Barzalona, Erdenali snatched victory from Embroidery, ridden by Christophe Lemaire, the French jockey who has been based in Japan for many years.

Erdenali had notably won the Qatar Prix du Moulin de Longchamp (Group 1, the highest level of excellence in Flat racing) in France on 6 September at ParisLongchamp.

This other success has enabled Francis-Henri Graffard, France's leading trainer, to complete an exceptionally rare double in Japan with two different horses: following Calandagan's victory in the Japan Cup (Gr1) in 2025, Erdenali has given him a second Japanese Gr1 in two seasons. To find a European trainer who had won at this level in Japan with two different horses, one has to go back to Sir Michael Stoute, who won the Japan Cup with Singspiel in 1996 and then Pilsudski in 1997.

The connections of Erdenali must now decide whether to travel to Hong Kong. However, another major challenge is already looming for the same team (The Aga Khan Studs' silks, Francis-Henri Graffard as trainer and Mickaël Barzalona in the saddle).

In just one week, on Sunday 29 November 2026, they will be aiming for another remarkable achievement: securing back-to-back victories in the Japan Cup with champion Calandagan, who is also trained in Chantilly and was crowned the world's best racehorse of 2025 following his victory in last year's Japan Cup.

France Galop extends its warmest congratulations to Erdenali's connections.

QUOTES FROM THE WINNERS

Francis-Henri Graffard, trainer of Erdenali (Oise – Chantilly): "A huge challenge that required a great deal of effort"

"I am very happy. The whole team is delighted. It was a huge challenge that required a great deal of effort, and we achieved the best possible result.

It is a very difficult race to win, and I am happy to have managed it with such a wonderful horse. Mickaël [Barzalona, editor's note] managed to secure a good position. In the home straight, we had to wait a little before being able to take the lead.

He accelerated particularly well over the final 200 metres. Both horse and jockey produced a remarkable performance. Erdenali is a horse with a strong temperament and he remained calm. It was thanks to their partnership that we secured this victory. He has also been very relaxed since the race.

We will discuss with the whole team the possibility of travelling on to Hong Kong.

Taking part in the Hong Kong Mile is a possibility. We will make our decision based on the horse's condition, putting his welfare before any other consideration."

Nemone Routh, racing manager of The Aga Khan Studs: decision on Hong Kong imminent

"I am emotional and very happy. It was a major challenge for Erdenali because the journey was long. He is still a young horse, but he has a great deal of ability, and I am delighted that he was able to win. In the straight, he had to pass about half the field. But he is a tough horse and fought hard to secure victory.

It was a difficult race, but we managed to win, and I am very proud of that.

He is entered in the Hong Kong Mile and we have received an invitation. We will probably decide tomorrow whether he will take part in that race. He will first return to France, and we will then decide whether he should travel back out to Hong Kong."

Mickaël Barzalona, jockey of Erdenali:

"I am very happy. It was a major challenge for Erdenali. The race was not easy, but we fought together and I am delighted to have achieved such a result.

The pace was fast in the early stages, but I managed to secure a good position. I had decided to follow Embroidery and was able to stay in her slipstream.

I did not have many options for finding a way through. If I had gone around the other horses on the outside, it would have required a great deal of effort from my horse. So in the end I chose to stay on the inside.

In the straight, we managed to make progress along the rail and pass our rivals. We crossed the finishing line in first place. I think we ran a very good race."

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