

# U ACCESS (IRL) BAIN CAPITAL GLOBAL EQUITY LS SUSTAINABLE UCITS

## Quarterly Comment

For Professional Investors in Switzerland or Professional Investors as defined by the relevant laws.

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### Market Comment

- Q2 2022 was another tough quarter for global markets, with few places to hide for investors. Both global equities and bonds corrected meaningfully, with most Developed Market (DM) equities entering a bear market. The main drivers of this market uncertainty were the persistently high inflation data, and DM central banks' hawkish stance on interest rates policy, particularly by the Fed. Interest rates volatility remained high during the quarter as recession fears started to gain momentum in May and June. As a result, high yield spreads, which had remained relatively tight until May, widened to over 600 bps at the end of the quarter.
- The war in Ukraine continued to have an impact as well, in particular on energy and commodities markets which are the most directly impacted by this situation. In China, the strict lockdowns imposed by some of the main cities contributed to meaningful market volatility, both in equities and fixed income, in particular the real estate sector that remains under pressure. However, a more accommodative stance by the authorities towards some sectors that had been hit in the last several months triggered a rally in Chinese equities in June.
- In this disruptive environment, we believe that expanding asymmetric exposure through alternative solutions is a smart asset allocation move today. We are convinced that one efficient way to improve the risk-return profile of a traditional long-only equity portfolio is to favour Long/Short sector specialists like U Access (IRL) Bain Capital Global Equity LS Sustainable UCITS. The four sectors of domain expertise, consumer, TMT, healthcare and financials, are all experiencing disruptions, which generate attractive opportunities on the long and short sides.

Sources: *UBP, Bloomberg Finance LP, BofA Merrill Lynch*

### Performance Review

- For the second quarter of 2022, U Access (IRL) Bain Capital Global Equity LS Sustainable UCITS returned -5.24%, bringing YTD performance to -3.88% (Class C USD, net of fees). The Fund was down for the quarter, but preserved capital in an environment of double digit losses for the broad equity markets. A disappointing quarter from the investment team's perspective despite the challenging environment, and we can point to one specific area that contributed to this result for the quarter.
- The Fund's outsized long exposure to consumer discretionary businesses performed poorly in Q2 and we effectively overstayed our welcome. While we do not manage the Fund's weightings to any benchmark, our premise for holding a material allocation to these types of businesses was the following: We believed the rotation of consumer spending from the purchase of goods towards services/experiences would overwhelm recession risk as travel expenditures would likely pull forward enough demand to post significantly positive year-over-year comparisons. We also believed our retail investments would benefit from a trade-down effect during slowing growth or recessionary periods as has been the case in prior recessions. As the Russian war with Ukraine extended into the second quarter, equity markets quickly shifted towards a recessionary posture and inflation continue to accelerate.

All performance figures are given net of fees. Past performance is not a guide to current or future returns. See full disclaimer at the end of the document.



- What became clear was that even good management teams could no longer forecast major shifts in spending or consumption patterns given the artificial consumer bubble we existed in the last few years. Looking back, we were too slow to adjust the Fund's exposure to consumer discretionary as multiples compressed and the Fund significantly underperformed the market in May. To re-position the portfolio, we exited long positions in Expedia, National Vision Holdings, Five Below, Amazon.com and Ross Stores and refocused our work on opportunities we believe are less economically sensitive (see below) and have significant asset value (e.g. Accor).

### Portfolio Activity

- Despite the challenge facing investors today, we have not run for cover into the most defensive stocks; rather we have increased portfolio concentration while at the same time, continuing to manage the portfolio with lower gross and net exposures. We generally underwrite long positions to a 20% expected base case IRR over a 2-3 year period and this continues to hold true today. We have done this by concentrating the portfolio in businesses with high quality and sustainable earnings growth trading at what we believe are reasonable valuation levels – in other words a growth-at-a-reasonable-price (“GARP”) portfolio. Following is a sector-by-sector review of the Fund's core holdings and themes:
- **Consumer** – The consumer sector exposure is at lower levels relative to the Fund's history, having repositioned the portfolio as we previously discussed. Current positions include an eclectic mix of four businesses we believe have earnings durability and a differentiated fundamental story relative to market consensus.
- Long Beverage Cans (Crown Holdings) – Long-term exposure for the portfolio (since 2016) with underlying strength in demand continuing given consumer preference for aluminum over plastic packaging. Favorable resolution to the company's strategic review allows for up to 20% of the company to be repurchased by year-end 2024. Effectively a public LBO in a stable industry with commodity price pass-through and long-term contracts trading at approximately 12x EPS.
- Long European Beverages (Coca-Cola European Partners) – Revisiting a position we were involved in several years ago. We believe the company is a re-opening beneficiary due to Coca-Cola's high away-from-home exposure and re-opening makes visible the impact of a multi-year cost/operations improvement opportunity. Hard event on the acquisition of Coca-Cola Amatil, which we believe is under-appreciated by the market.
- Long Travel (Accor) – We believe Accor is a re-opening beneficiary benefitting from the shift in consumer spend from goods to services. Primary markets in Europe and Asia (approx. 25% of revenue), which lag the U.S. in COVID re-opening. The company is expected to complete a portfolio simplification process over the next two years, which will complete its transition to a fully asset-lite hotel franchise business, following the Hilton playbook which was a large position in the long portfolio several years ago.
- Long auto servicing (Driven Brands) – Franchise business in the auto service sector. We believe the company benefits from an aging U.S. auto fleet and the non-discretionary nature of auto-repair expenses during a time of shrinking consumer budgets. The company's car-wash segment has the highest discretionary spending risk but is a relatively small portion of the overall business. Driven has beat its earnings guidance the last two quarters, and we believe they will continue to do so.



- **Financials** – As we discussed in the Q1 letter, we entered 2022 with an outsized financial sector long portfolio invested in multiple regional banks (US, Europe, India) and select insurance companies. The Russian war in Ukraine quickly accelerated already high inflation, thereby accelerating the market’s move towards a recessionary mind-set, which is generally bad for banks. To adjust, we began pivoting the Fund’s exposure away from banks towards the insurance sector, where we see the same benefits to rising rates with much less credit and economic risk. Notably, we favor property and casualty insurers and specific insurance companies.
- **Auto Insurance (Allstate)** – We believe the company is a late cycle beneficiary of an auto-pricing cycle and the potential for substantial cost inflation to subside in the second half of 2022 and 2023 from declining used car pricing, lower miles driven (due to high fuel costs) and supply chain improvements. See detailed position write-up in the Q1 2022 letter.
- **Property and Casualty (AIG, AFG and Everest Re)** – We believe specialty line and reinsurance rate increases are likely to persist throughout 2022, providing a tailwind to a sector that also is a beneficiary to higher interest rates. We also expect consolidation in the space, which makes AFG an attractive potential target, while AIG’s publicly announced spinoff of its Life and Retirement division is pending.
- **Healthcare** – The Fund currently has its largest weighting to pharmaceutical companies since 2019. General characteristics we like include high revenue and cash flow predictability in an uncertain world; attractive valuations relative to the sector’s history and the market and interesting product pipelines with the potential to sustain forward revenue growth.
- **Long GSK, Sanofi and Roche** – see New Long Position discussion below for a detailed review of GlaxoSmithKline.
- **Internet/Media** – Opportunistic investments across sports franchise value and core digital advertising
- **Long Liberty Formula One** – We believe strategic and operating improvements continue to drive a better product, resulting in increased viewership and fan engagement ahead of global media contract renewals, especially in the U.S. with race viewership up significantly year-over-year. While the stock is more expensive today than a year ago, we believe the uniqueness and scarcity of Formula One make it a premium asset.
- **Long Alphabet** – We believe the company benefits from its position as a core digital advertising platform at a time when ad spend is under scrutiny due to reduced consumer internet usage as global economies continue to reopen post COVID. Recent market volatility has reset valuation while the company’s diversified platform (Internet, video, cloud) creates a high-quality growth business with tangible earnings and cash flow.
- **Technology-Software** – As we discussed in our Q4 2021 letter, one of the largest pivots we have made in the Fund is our approach to software, shifting exposure to companies with tangible earnings and cash flow from longstanding core products that support attractive growth opportunities in next generation “tech 2.0” type businesses. Long-term investors with Public Equity will know we invest in both core, cash-flow generative software businesses as well as more speculative next generation growth opportunities that often are valued at a high multiple of revenue (with no earnings). In the current environment, we are excited that we have identified high growth potential opportunities in software businesses that are anchored by real and durable earnings. Core positions in Software include the following:





- Cash Cows (Oracle, Checkpoint, Akamai) – After underperforming the technology sector for 5-10 years, we believe certain ‘value’ tech stocks should begin outperforming – specifically those that have leveraged their high-margin ‘cash cow’ revenue streams to invest in new growth drivers, both organic and inorganic. Each of these three companies has a sticky, high margin core business (firewall, database, and CDN, respectively) that has provided the cash flow to invest in cloud-based security and database offerings. As these next-gen products begin to reach meaningful scale, we believe it is leading to an acceleration of consolidated revenue growth on the P&L.
- Digital Transformation Anchors (Microsoft, Splunk and Service Now) – Exposure to this theme consists of high-quality businesses that often sell directly to the C-suite versus a business unit or lower-level employee, and they demonstrate extremely low customer churn. We expect these to be among the most resilient companies in our coverage looking forward, particularly if corporate IT budgets encounter macro headwinds.

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## Outlook

- These are challenging times for investors, and we are not certain any professional manager today has faced a similar set of macroeconomic circumstances where central banks are tightening into recessionary conditions. It is during times like this that we anchor to our investment philosophy: share prices ultimately follow earnings over time, which feels appropriate today after a multi-year period of market excess built on hopes, dreams and unicorns.

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