

Short positions... gold funds top the table

■ Gold funds gave a dazzling performance in 2019, says Emma Agyemang in the Financial Times. Charteris Gold & Precious Metals, which oversees £16.3m in assets, returned 52%, the highest total return of more than 2,500 UK-based funds. Gold's rise last year also propelled Ruffer Gold to number three in the table with a 44% overall return. UK mid-cap and smaller companies funds also performed well. Aberdeen Standard UK Smaller Companies came in second with a 46% return. Franklin UK Mid Cap was fourth, with 42%. Absolute return funds, which aim not to lose investors' money, were, as so often, absolutely useless. The three worst-performing funds of 2019 were Garraway Absolute Equity, BMO Equity Market Neutral, and Oxeye Hedged Income reporting negative returns of 57%, 30%, and 22.5% respectively. The fourth worst-performing fund was Neil Woodford's suspended LF Equity Income Fund, which lost just over a fifth of its value.

■ Last year's buoyant markets were bad news for short-sellers – and especially bad news for Russell Clark, whose Horseman Global Fund has been betting on stocks falling since 2012. In 2019 the fund suffered its biggest-ever annual loss, slumping by 35%, notes Nishant Kumar on Bloomberg. The fund raised its net short position to a record 111% of gross assets in October. But the S&P 500 index surged by 31.5% last year. Horseman Global was managing a mere \$241m at the end of November, down from \$1.7bn at the end of 2015. Clark said to clients that the year “had not worked out as planned”. The “media shy” Australian started managing the fund almost a decade ago, says Laurence Fletcher in the Financial Times. His fund made double-digit gains in 2014 and 2015 before losing around 24% in 2016.