

Racin'



Issue 377 (Part 1)

October/November 2022

NMRC CLUB EVENTS QUESTIONNAIRE 2022

A quick reminder that more feedback is still required so can all members who have not yet responded please help the club committee by completing a short online questionnaire to help us understand what sort of events members would like to attend this next year.

Even if you rarely attend events it will still help us if you can complete it!

For those not on the internet please send your views about stable visits, racecourse events, preview nights, guests speakers etc to NMRC at 53, Dalebrook Rd, SALE, M33 3LB.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PNBCGND>

QUEEN ELIZABETH II TRIBUTE

As the most influential follower of horse racing in the UK for many decades, Harold Heys has reflected on the impact our late monarch has had on the 'sport of kings' in the last 96 years.

The full article is on pages 3 & 4.

As our monarch for 70 years, the Queen has no doubt endured many events that she did not really want to attend, yet as the picture below shows, she always seemed to love her time on the racecourse!



I am not sure whether Her Majesty had any favourite jockey to ride her horses but she certainly had a huge number who were eager to wear the royal silks as the photo below shows!



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COMPETITION NEWS

59's DRAW RESULTS UPDATE

The latest '59's' winner is as follows:

August 6th – 20 – Alan Parker (Stockport)

Sept 3rd – 06 – Tony Jarvis (Co. Durham)

Your £50 prizes will be sent out shortly.

The winning number is determined by the 'bonus ball' drawn in the UK Lottery on the first Saturday of the month.

Thanks to all who continue to support the draw. All numbers are currently allocated.

HERITAGE HANDICAPS COMPETITION 2022

With just 3 weeks of the competition remaining the leaders in the main competition are:

116.1 Mike Campbell

109.45 Brendan O'Meara

107.6 Linda Boswell

105.85 Jim Flanagan

102.5 Maureen Dawson

In the supplementary 'exactas league' the leaders are:

301 Helen Goodwill

216.4 Ken Unsworth

138.5 Carol Evans

138.3 Alan Preston

129.6 Brendan O'Meara

ALEX BIRD COMPETITION – 2022

As entrants will already be aware the final round of this year's challenge was suspended after Day 2 of the Doncaster meeting out of respect to HM Queen Elizabeth II.

There will now be two replacement days at the Newmarket 'Future Champions' meeting on October 7th/8th.

AUTUMN BOOK COMPETITION

We have a new competition, for jumps racing fans this time, with a prize of **Paul Ferguson's Jumpers To Follow** annual up for grabs as the prize. (see page 11 for NMRC special discount).

Rather than test your past racing knowledge, entrants will this time be asked to use their 'crystal balls' to predict the first three home (in the correct order) in the **Charlie Hall Chase on Saturday 29th October**.

In case there are multiple winners there will also be a tie break required to predict the winning time of the winning horse. Last year the winning time on yielding ground was 6 minutes 16.92 seconds.

To enter, just send in your predicted 1-2-3 (in correct order*) and winning time plus your name/address/phone number as follows:

E mail info@northernracingclub.com

Text to 07858 034694

Answerphone 0161 973 5921.

Entry deadline is Saturday Oct 29th at 1pm.

*If no one predicts all three in the correct order the next best entry will be used in this order: 1st/2nd; 1st/3rd; 1st only; 2nd/3rd.

The winners of our last book competition, courtesy of **Marten Julian Publications** were as follows:

David Byrne (Wirral)

Frank Turley (Fulwood)

The Queen loved racing – and racing loved her.

By HAROLD HEYS

THE QUEEN'S love of horses began in earnest when she was barely ten years old. She was on a Royal tour of the North East with her parents, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth and were visiting a Durham coal mine. They had stopped to look at a small Shetland pony type that was about to go down the pit to work, mane and tail shaved as was the custom.

Within a few minutes "George" had been presented to them as a gift for the two princesses. It was the first of many gifts of horses presented to the Queen over the coming years. Some, the Princess admitted, were rather a challenge when she was young.

One of the first was Pixie who lived on the Balmoral estate and was "very naughty" Elizabeth told a friend. In her early years, George and Gem and Snowball taught her so much. Greylight, a Welsh mountain pony, came next and none of them could be described as the perfect partner for Elizabeth. However, she did learn how to ride and accepted the challenge with determination, learning all she could from grooms and instructors about a pony's welfare.

Moving on she became the consummate expert in the saddle with Burmese becoming her best-known mount at the Trooping of the Colour ceremonies for 18 years. Many readers will remember the occasion at the corner of Horseguards in 1981 when shots were fired in the crowd. Black mare Burmese, a gift from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, jumped forward but Her Majesty reined him in with a practised hand and continued serenely on as chaos ensued behind her.

The first Grand National I remember as a youngster was the 1956 "Devon Loch" race. My particular interest centred on a two bob each-way bet on Gentle Moya, runner-up to ESB who had coasted past the stricken Devon Loch, owned jointly by the Queen and her mother. I well remember the following morning newspapers with photos of the look of horror on Her Majesty's face as the panicked horse struggled to regain his footing.

I've always thought that this one moment was enough to persuade her to concentrate her racing interests on the Flat as Jumps racing was much too dangerous for her beloved horses. From 1960 onwards I went to watch 40 Nationals in succession, several more since, but I never saw the Queen at Aintree. Of course the Queen Mother took up the reins of NH racing and horses such as Laffy, The Rip, Makaldar and Special Cargo kept the Royal flag flying.



Her daughter turned her attention to the Flat and she was an almost ever-present at Royal Ascot every year while often popping into Sandown or Windsor. She occasionally ventured North, mainly to watch the big races at York – Royal Ascot week was transferred there in 2005 – and Doncaster but among small courses she ticked off her list was Beverley in July, 2002 to watch the Queen's Jubilee Handicap for Lady Riders. She twice visited Musselburgh – in July, 1995 to open the Queen's Stand and in July, 2016 as the course celebrated its 200th anniversary.

The first time as Queen she set foot in Yorkshire was to see the 1952 St Leger at Doncaster won by Tulyar. Her runner in the race, Gay Time, took it up three out but faded quickly.

I clearly recall seeing her at Chester's May meeting in 1966 and was surprised at the informality that surrounded her. She walked through the very large crowd from the stands and into the paddock with a cheery smile. It must have been a nightmare for her unobtrusive bodyguard but she was among friends. She loved racing and racing loved her.

So where does the sport go from here? King Charles III quite enjoyed the challenge of point-to-points and National Hunt racing as a young man and he became a very good polo player. But, unlike Camilla, his popular Queen Consort, he is hardly a horse racing enthusiast. There is no doubt that the interest of the Queen in racing generally helped enormously to encourage foreign wealth to make an indelible impression on the sport over many years.

I got to thinking which were her favourite racehorses over more than 70 years in which she had graced the sport as Queen. Aureole would probably have been No 1, but next in line? I was fortunate to come across an article in *Horse and Hound* which had asked her for her favourites. Yes, Aureole, runner-up in the 1953 Epsom Derby, to the giant Pinza, was top. He sparkled at four, winning the Coronation Cup, the Hardwicke Stakes and the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes in spite of unshipping Eph Smith on the way to the start.



Aureole was followed in the list by Doutelle, the first good winner she bred. The chestnut won the 2000 Guineas trial at Kempton and the Lingfield Derby Trial in 1957 and the following year the colt was placed in both the Gold Cup and the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes. In third place in the list was Highclere, winner of the 1000 Guineas and the Prix de Diane in 1974, followed by Phantom Gold. and Estimate. Frankie Dettori won two races on Phantom Gold, the Ribblesdale Stakes at Royal Ascot and the Geoffrey Freer at Newbury, while Estimate (Ryan Moore) won a first Gold Cup for her in 2013, the year after landing the Queen's Vase at the royal meeting.

Her Majesty had three other Classic winners – Carrozza, who landed the Oaks in 1957, Pall Mall winner of the 1958 2,000 Guineas, and Dunfermline who did the Oaks and St Leger double in the Silver Jubilee year of 1977.

Here are a handful of *Did You Know?* lines:

- The Queen won her first treble when Pall Mall, Atlas and Might and Main all won at Haydock in May 1957.
- Princess Elizabeth, had her first runner in October, 1949 when Astrakhan (Willie Smyth-Tommy Burns) came second in the Sandwell Stakes at Ascot.
- Devon Loch never won another race after his Aintree collapse with the Grand National at his mercy. He finished his days as Noel Murless' hack.
- The Queen won her first race in the US when Unknown Quantity (Jorge Velasquez) took the Grade 1 Arlington Handicap at the Chicago track in August, 1989.
- Her most successful year's racing was 1992. Abbey Strand won at Lingfield in late December to take her final score to 26.

And finally, an example of Her Majesty's sense of humour:

I'd always thought that her disinterest in football was one of her most endearing traits. I gave up on the sport in the mid-60s when Blackburn Rovers cast little Bryan Douglas adrift after a stellar career with the club – and England – to get kicked around the Lancashire Combination with Great Harwood. Anyhow, former FA chairman David Triesman, admitting that he didn't manage to get the Queen much interested in a match at Wembley, recalled asking her who she had thought had played the best. "The Band of the Scots Guards," she told him, keeping a straight face, but with a twinkle in her eye!

Editor's Note: In case our reader's missed it, on Saturday 24th September, Chester's 4.35 race was named ' In Memory of Queen Elizabeth II Novice Stakes'. The name of the race winner was **Silent Monarch**.....

RACECOURSE 'MUSIC NIGHTS' BY PHIL EVANS

Due to Covid-19 restrictions in recent years, it is nearly three years since I have been on my 'soap box' about this topic. However, as we are now at the end of the 'music night' season I thought it is worth reflecting again on the matter.

It is well publicised that racecourse attendances are down around 15% on mainland UK this year (compared to 2019) but 'music nights' are generally still well attended and Haydock reportedly had a sell-out crowd of over 16,300 when *Madness* performed after racing this summer.

It is fair to say that courses hold these events to boost income and these nights will probably help offset 'losses' on their other activities (such as mid-week racing!). Courses do, of course, try and utilise all of their assets to hold other non-racing events such as corporate events, social functions etc and this is fully understandable.

However, music nights are the only events they hold when racing is also taking place on the same day.

Compare this to other sports such as football and cricket where the bigger clubs wouldn't dream of holding these events on the same day as their sports activities.

The big question to me is why does racing hold these events on race days rather than fixture free dates? If I were to draw a 'Venn diagram' to demonstrate the scenario with one circle being for regular racegoers attending and the other for fans of the act performing attending I am pretty sure the 'over-lap' of the two groups would only be around 10% of those attending being there for both racing and the music.

Does that matter? Well yes it does as the price for these events tends to be at least double the normal price in the UK. So, unless the meeting is a really good competitive card, most racing fans will give it a miss (many more may do so just to avoid the huge crowds!).



The stock message from the race tracks over the years has been that these events help to introduce racing to a new audience who will hopefully return to future racing only events. However, I doubt that there is any hard information to back up this point of view. Indeed, some of the race cards put on this summer on UK music nights have been pretty awful with low grade races and few runners being the norm at most tracks and hardly likely to attract 'newbies' to come back again!

Is there a better way? Yes I think there are two better options.

My first way is for racecourses to do the same as other sporting venues and hold the music events on a different night to when sport is taking place at the venue. That way you are getting the 'music' fans only attending for their event and the racing fans can still attend the race day as usual. It is more than likely that the aggregate crowds of the two events will be greater than the one 'merged' event. More tracks could then follow the example set by York and have back-to-back music events on a Friday/Saturday (without necessarily needing racing fixtures) which is surely more profitable for tracks as the stage etc only needs setting up once. Indeed it may even lead to a series of events over several weekends! If courses still want to use the music events to 'tempt' newbies to racing why not give those attending either a 'free' ticket or at least a discount on a future race meeting (which could also be tracked to see how many take up the offer!). By holding the events on a non-raceday it may also allow some smaller tracks to hold weekend music events given that many will usually have few race days at weekends. I would have thought that this model should work better at tracks with fewer meetings, such as Aintree & Cartmel, where the true race fans will not feel aggrieved at having to forego a meeting due to the inflated entry prices at merged 'music' events (and potentially a more modest card).

My second way is to consider the 'Irish Option'. In this regard I have compared the summer series of events at both Newmarket and Leopardstown this year. The equivalent admission cost at Newmarket is nearly double

that at Leopardstown, yet this summer Newmarket's summer race cards have been generally very weak whilst at Leopardstown they usually include two Gr 3 races plus some valuable handicaps. By keeping prices reasonable in Ireland they do not alienate the true racing fans and even give seniors concessions at their music nights, no doubt knowing that this part of the crowd will almost certainly depart after the last race!

As most race fans will know, the sport in the UK has one of the worst funding structures in the world due to the on-line betting industry dominating rather than the on-course Tote pools as in other countries. This means that healthy on course attendances are more crucial in the UK and the current fall in crowds is going to have a major knock-on effect on the sport if it is not reversed fairly soon.

To continue the 'music' theme:

The likes of Cheltenham, Aintree, Royal Ascot are the equivalent of Glastonbury with all the headline acts likely to be there. People will attend these meetings from wide and far!

The secondary festivals such as Chester, Doncaster, Newbury are the equivalent of the bands playing at the larger arenas with many good acts appearing, but not all. Primarily locals attending but more of a regional audience.

The weekend ITV televised meetings are the equivalent of bands appearing at large local theatres etc where they will get a good following of local people but not many from outside the area.

As regards the rest of the racing fixtures, especially mid-week ones, I would compare it with bands appearing at local pubs etc (mainly supported by locals or friends/family of those appearing) and at most winter AW meetings, bands busking on the streets (with audience of those with nothing better to do!)

The biggest problem in our sport at present is that there are too many different 'snouts in the trough' for the limited amount of funds available.

So, when the BHA tries to reduce the number of fixtures/races the courses say 'no' as this will reduce their income. The bookies seem to be able to dictate how many meetings can be held as well which means that the fixture list remains bloated and the quality of some meetings is very unattractive for racegoers wanting to attend.

So, at least the music nights add more funds into the pot than would otherwise be the case.

I am not saying scrap them, but either make them more attractive/affordable (as in Ireland) or make them separate events so that tracks do not alienate true racing fans and, if held on non-race-days, the tracks should potentially be able to make extra money from these events if back-to-back events can be arranged.

Some examples of music events in 2022 with similar quality 'racing only' meeting details in brackets to compare. B=Bookmakers. R=Runners.

Aintree – 12,600 (3,000); 40B ((31B); 30R (52R).
Cartmel – 8,900 (5, 500); 43B (27B); 62R (60R)
Haydock – 16,300 (7,100); 43B (69B); 32R (56R)
Uttoxeter – 7,100 (5,700); 43B (56B); 56R (61R)
York – 25,100 (18,500); 133B (129B); 74R (90R).

At the time of writing, the Newmarket 'music night' attendances are not available.

An interesting insight to some of the music nights this year (besides the smaller fields than usual) is that for many meetings the number of bookmakers attending on music nights is actually less than for a much smaller attendance on 'racing only' days which implies that the betting turnover at these events is fairly modest and those attending are not particularly 'getting involved' with the sport.

One thing leads to another – By Christopher Leech

In July 2019 – nearly 40 years after starting – I completed the journey of visiting all 60 racecourses. I basked in the glory for a short period. But then I thought what next? Well, I decided to explore any opportunities I could, to see different aspects of the sport I love. So, over the last 3 years or so – I have done several different things, including some voluntary work called 'Race making' at Newmarket and Aintree. I have spent some time in a commentary box with friend Darren Owen, visited several Training stables and even been to Tattersalls and rubbed shoulders with Arab Sheikhs. This, together with my passion for horseracing photography. (@UndersOrdersPhotography) Alongside these segways, I remain an enthusiastic regular racegoer – and consequently, I'm a member of several clubs offering free or discounted entry tickets, including Racing TV and more recently the Racegoers Club.

It was being a member of the Racegoers Club that I seized an opportunity to explore another aspect, which was shared ownership. It was something I had given lots of thought about – but always thought it to be cost prohibitive. Anyway, I convinced my wife to buy me a share as a Christmas present in a 4-Y-O filly called **Tenaya Canyon (TC)** leased by the Racegoers club from Whitsbury Manor Stud and trained by Ed Walker at Lambourn. Once involved, I felt it was like following your football club on an FA Cup run. Her first appearance of 2022 was in the Stud's sponsored race at Bath. Not my favourite track, but hey, the cup run had to start somewhere. To make the long journey more palatable for my long-suffering wife, we stayed in the Cotswold's for a few days, taking in a meeting Cheltenham on the Wednesday, Bath on the Thursday Evening and the grand finale was the **Sir Peter O'Sullivan Lambourn Open Day (POSLOD)** on Good Friday. OK – it was horseracing focused, but we did have a lovely couple of hours strolling around Bourton-on-the-Water. I did say "long-suffering!"



It was a lovely few days, although TC underperformed on the track – but we particularly enjoyed Lambourn Open Day. I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone with an interest in Horseracing. It was Good Friday and glorious weather. Like most we headed straight for Nicky Henderson's Seven Barrows and his stable stars. The man himself was Commander-in-Chief instructing Stable staff to lead the likes of Altior and Sprinter Sacre around. It was during the visit I spent a few quid on a mug with the great man's face on it, but given it was for charity – I spent another few quid on some raffle tickets. The next stop was Ed Walker's to hopefully see Tenaya Canyon post-race. Not for one second realising that the number of staff available meant that

restrictions were in place on where the public could wander. TC was off limits! But, using my Northern charm made my case to see her, given the distance we had travelled etc. Well, a discussion then ensued out of earshot and my body language reading skills were telling me we were to be disappointed. How wrong can you be? The head girl Sam came over and said, "Follow me." and took us to the barn where TC was resting. We had a lovely private time with TC, taking pictures etc., she is incredibly good looking, well-mannered and relaxed for a sprinter.



We also met Rosie, who rides her out daily – and Oisin Murphy was knocking about - so he had a picture taken with me! The final part of Lambourn Open day is fun 'n games on the local playing field. The highlight being Camel racing with the likes of A P McCoy and Nico de Boinville. to iterate a famous strap line – "Just do it!"

Following our return up north, about a week passed, before a series of phone calls from the same unrecognisable number occurred. Like most people, I do not answer any calls from a number not in my contact list. So, when the fourth call occurred, I answered to give them a verbal

volley, but before I let fire, the lady on the end said. "Mister Leech, it's Sandra from the Lambourn Open day." "Yes" I replied with a certain trepidation... "You have won 1st prize in our raffle" – Oh my God! – I thought I would be riding a camel at next year's event. But no. It was a day at the races for 2 of my choice with ITV playing host. Wow, what an absolute stonking prize! So, after a certain amount of to-ing and fro-ing – we settled on Ladies Day of the York Ebor meeting, one of my favourite courses by some distance. To make it extra special - I added the Wednesday and Friday either side, for Baaeed's appearance in the Juddmonte and the cavalry charge that is the Nunthorpe.

So, I headed to York on the Wednesday morning on the train. Yes, it arrived on time, and all went to plan with the bus transfer from the station. So, I was on-course by 12:00 to take in the atmosphere. Baaeed was indeed the star attraction. I noticed that you could circulate quite freely around the paddock for every race, bar the Juddmonte. Racegoers obviously left the Champagne bars and boxes to see the superstar in the flesh. There are many comparisons with Sea the Stars, Frankel et al. I am very much in the camp that they all should be enjoyed just as much as each other.

My wife joined me on the Thursday for the ITV day. Our host was Mike Dillon, a very familiar face around UK racecourses. Mike now works with ITV as a consultant between the TV production and the actual Horseracing staff, Trainers, Jockeys, Owners etc. Mike had previously worked for Ladbrokes for 46 years. Also, unbeknown to me, Mike was a great friend to and is a trustee of the Sir Peter O'Sullivan Trust. He also helped save the Grand National when it was imperiled in the 1970s.

We met in the TV compound early doors, where Mike introduced us to the various production staff in the Outside Broadcast trucks. We were left with the impression it is a very complicated business, plus Mike made a very good point, that for a 4-hour broadcast, there is actually only 20-30 minutes of racing action. So, a lot of other content is required to frame the races etc. I did confess to Mike, I'm a Racing TV subscriber, so hardly watch ITV. But ITV's audience is not for the typical ardent racegoer such as me.

I believe when a film is being made, the size of the trailer is relevant to the part you play. Headline actor, biggest trailer etc. Well, ITV Racing use "Vroom with a view", which indicated to me, it was a tight friendly team. We had engaging chats with Mick Fitzgerald, who was passionate about POSLOD, and Jason Weaver, who was very praising of racing in the North, and in his race riding days, his wife was always more interested in tagging along, if he was riding at Beverley or Newcastle. Funnily enough, we did not get to chat with the adonis Oli Bell much, he was in makeup, who'd have thought it!

Next stop, course entry, and straight to the Parade ring, where the ITV Hub was set up and where we were introduced to the core presenting crew Ed Chamberlin, Johnny Murtagh, Brough Scott, and Matt Chapman. Lots of chats, pictures, and hand shaking. I'm sure I was glassy eyed. To say, we were hobnobbing it would be an understatement.

But it was to go up a notch for lunch. Mike, given his extensive contacts in horseracing, took us up to the Coolmore box. We were introduced to Kevin Buckley (Coolmore UK Representative) and Paul Smith – Joan and I were made to feel most welcome. I thought the waiter was an ex-snooker referee, given he was serving with white gloves on! I later tweeted them "If you are ever up at Haydock with a runner - I'll return the favour! Hopefully, they'll enjoy a pie and pint."

A blast from the past on our table was the football presenter - Jim Rosenthal and his wife, who again were good company – Jim was still livid about the recent football shenanigans that rarely sees the light of day



– Northampton Town missing out on promotion to Division 1 last season and Bristol Rovers scoring 7 at a very much under strength Scunthorpe United.

After a “to die for” fruit salad, we were back to the pre-parade and parade rings meeting racing royalty Frankie Dettori and Aidan O’Brien, When Joan said to Aidan, it was really nice to see him, he replied “the pleasure is all mine Mam” what a real gent!

Our interaction with Aidan was just after he saddled Tuesday for the feature race of the day, the Yorkshire Oaks. We then went up in a secluded lift, which felt a bit like entering the Twilight Tower of Terror into the commentary box to hear Richard Hoiles, do his stuff. So, from the mega technical luxurious OB trucks- the four of us, just about fitted in the commentary box. Richard was again engaging and good company. It was interesting to see him, use the various gadgetry, and make points about the use of binoculars against the TV

screen etc. But incredibly - he was still reliant on standing on a wooden box, so he could see over the edge of the commentary box!

We then went back to winners’ enclosure to welcome back Alpinista, her agricultural jockey, Luke Morris and Sir Mark Prescott.

It was at this point, Mike left us to our own devices. So, we hung around the parade ring to welcome the winners back. It was a day, where we felt like winners. In fact, I backed 4 winners. So, not only did we have a brilliant day, but we left the course in profit.

Still full of enthusiasm for top class racing. On Friday, I met up with Darren Owen. I reassured

Darren that Hoilesy, was not a patch on him. Obviously, knocking about with a well-known member of the racing fraternity, led me to be introduced to more racing personalities, such as Jamie Lynch, Jim McGrath, Ken Pitterson and Angus ‘Statto’ Loughran. What an absolute fantastic 3 days!

I once asked a Newmarket based trainer, "What's your favourite racecourse?" - The answer was York. So, I asked "Why?" - the reply was "they get it..." And after spending 3 days at the Ebor meeting. I absolutely get it too.

It was amazing to me - how one thing can lead to another. Taking a share in a horse, seeing her run at Bath, then visiting the open day, whilst in that part of the country, winning a raffle, which led to York and a fabulous day, I imagine it felt like a long odds accumulator coming in. I say imagine, because I have never had an acca come in – that is until now!



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GARETH TOPHAM 'UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT' WITH BRIAN GOODWILL



WHAT FIRST GOT YOU HOOKED ON RACING?

Unoriginal, but watching the Grand National as a kid. Mum and I would head around the local neighbourhoods with a sweepstake kit in the days leading up to the big race and come the Saturday, we'd all watch it together as a family. The Monday National in 1997 is the first I can recall – the year of the bomb scare. I'd have been eight at the time. I was gutted when it was announced on the Saturday that the race wasn't going to happen that afternoon. I also remember Bobbyjo's emphatic win in 1999 with fondness, despite the fact my entire household were on Blue Charm who finished 2nd! It's a great event and definitely one which lured me towards pursuing a career in the sport.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST PAID COMMENTARY?

In 2006, the Cumberland point-to-point at Aspatria had their commentator fall ill just 48 hours before the meeting. My name was put forward despite the fact that I lived in Cardiff at the time – over 300 miles away! Even so, this seemed a great opportunity to get my name out there, so I went. The secretary very kindly put me up for the night and I remember drawing all the jockey's silks at her house the night before. It wasn't the most polished performance on the commentary front I have to admit, but what an experience, standing in an elevated bucket fixed to a tractor in line with the final fence but they must have been happy - as I went back every year until the land was sold and the meeting finished for good a few years ago.

WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE DAY IN THE CALENDAR BEYOND THE OBVIOUS?

My late father's favourite horse of all time was the Tim Easterby trained Pipalong. I remember watching her win the Great St Wilfrid Handicap at Ripon on the TV with him all those years ago and I've always had a soft spot for the race. Ripon is a beautiful racecourse and these days not far from home. Great St Wilfrid Saturday feels like a big Saturday and I've now called the race on a handful of occasions, the first time with dad accompanying me in the commentary box. Whenever I'm allocated the race, for all it's a tricky one to commentate on, I look forward to it immensely.

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM RACING?

With a two-year-old daughter there's not much relaxing at all these days, however we as a family like to get away a couple of times a year and I do switch off.

WHAT WOULD YOU PUT IN RACING'S ROOM 101?

These new exotic race times we have. Sure, on occasions they work but I don't think they've made a huge difference and certain tracks are serial offenders at getting races off late, whether it's a 2.50 or 2.53. We are still suffering clashes on a weekly basis, so it seems all a bit pointless to me.

ANY PARTICULAR FUNNY STORY THAT YOU CAN RECALL?

I laugh now but at the time it was frightening. I called the Super Sprint at Newbury a few years ago for the first time and it resulted in a photo finish. I called the two in the photo across the line before wrapping up the commentary. I switched the Racing UK volume up in my headset to hear the result announced as a large crowd drown out the PA system at the track. The presenter Angus McNae claimed the photo finish involved a horse I'd mentioned, and one that I hadn't which was in the same ownership as another in the race. I froze!

I couldn't check by looking out of the window as obviously the order of runners past the line had changed and it was very possible I'd got this wrong. Given this was one of the highest profile races I'd called I was anxious to say the least. The judge took ages to announce his verdict. When he did, it became apparent that I'd got it right and Angus had got confused. Thank God! 'The Captain' as he's known on the channel was called a lot worse in that commentary box in the minutes following the race!

WHO ARE YOUR RACING HEROES BOTH EQUINE AND HUMAN?

Persian Punch was my all-time favourite horse as a youngster and as a real National Hunt racing enthusiast he did well to get under my skin, but my word some of those finishes that he was involved in I'll never forget, that second Goodwood Cup win in particular.

Colleague Simon Holt did an awful lot for me when I was growing up wanting this job and I'll always be hugely grateful for his advice and mentoring. He's such a natural caller as well, the complete caller. He's got the voice, the rhythm, the turn of phrase and some of his commentaries make the hair on the back of my neck stand on edge. I certainly learnt from the best.

WHAT'S ON YOUR COMMENTATING BUCKET LIST?

I'd love to call the National, although I do fear for the race's future. Hopefully an opportunity will drop at some point. I've called a Group 1 on the flat and would love to commentate on a Grade 1 over jumps in the future.

WHAT IS THE WORST THING ABOUT BEING IN YOUR JOB?

The pressure. It's more intense than ever before. There's always some clever dick waiting to have a go at you on social media and believe me, if I've made a mistake, I know about it and there'll be no-one more gutted about it than I. I'm also starting to wonder about the sport's future long-term. Pressure from the outside is mounting and in a fast-changing world headlines on almost a daily basis at the moment are negative and calling on the sport to do more. I hope it can and I hope we can as an industry engage with new audiences going forward and show them all the positives of what I believe is a great sport and one that I'm proud to work in.

Editor's Note: Gareth is also a regular contributor on William Hill Racing Radio – well worth a listen!

PAUL FERGUSSON'S JUMPS ANNUAL 2022-23

Paul has again kindly offered NMRC member's a discount on this year's annual! Now in its 16th year of publication, Jumpers To Follow is an essential tool to guide punters through the entire National Hunt season.

KEY FEATURES FOR 2022-2023 INCLUDE:

- **Paul's 40 Leading Prospects** for the upcoming National Hunt season
- An additional 20 top prospects from Ireland in the **Across The Sea** section
- Get the opinion of leading jockeys - including Brian Hughes and Jamie Codd - in the **A View From The Saddle** section. **NEW for 2022** - Sean Bowen joins the team of contributing jockeys
- **Around The Yards** is Paul's personal view into stables up and down the UK, picking out the horses with most potential from each
- **Point-to-Point Graduates** - this section looks bigger than ever for 2022
- **News From France** - the latest imports from France
- **Big-Races Trends** - in the format of the Cheltenham Festival Betting Guide

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We also have a competition to win a copy of the annual on page 2 of Racin' magazine.

MY RACING LIFE – BY JOHN MCDONALD

In 1962, on my way to school, I asked my grandad to place an each-way bet for me on *Larkspur* in the Derby. This was an infamous race as seven horses, including the favourite *Hetherset* fell. I liked the sound of *Larkspur* as it conjured up an image of a knight such as Lancelot. (As it happens, it turned out to be a flower – also known as Delphinium!) Success at 100/6 had me hooked and my future betting became based on form study rather than names that I liked!

HORSES: *Lochsong* was my favourite flat horse and was wonderfully reliable and very exciting to watch at top speed. Over the jumps, *Decent Fellow* was my favourite. Narrowly beaten in the Triumph Hurdle in 1977, the horse went on to win the Irish Sweeps Hurdle as well as many other top races. He had an electric turn of foot but was unfortunately just below several greats of his era so never really got the recognition he deserved.

TRAINERS: Sir Henry Cecil was my favourite flat trainer. He was superb with fillies, at all distances, and was a charming man. He once gave a group of us a tour of his rose garden which was fascinating but we really wanted to talk about his horses! In the National Hunt sphere, Michael Dickinson was my favourite albeit his ill-fated venture with the Sangster's was a huge mistake. The duel between *Night Nurse & Silver Buck* at Haydock still lives on in my memory of top races to savour. My trainer(s) to watch in future is the partnership of Oliver Greenall & Josh Guerriero – a very ambitious team and beginning to assemble a nice bunch of horses.

JOCKEYS: On the flat I rate Johnny Murtagh as the best. He hardly ever made a serious error of judgement, was a superb judge of pace and very good in a tight finish. John Reid was perhaps the most under-rated jockey in that era. He had 'beautiful hands' and was a very astute tactical jockey. For the winter game Richard Dunwoody was the top man for me. A superb horseman who was very determined and had a 'ruthless streak' when necessary to get the race won. Robert 'Choc' Thornton would be my most under-rated jumps jockey – he was always very powerful in a finish and rode Cheltenham particularly well.

COMMENTATORS/TV PRESENTERS: I rate Simon Holt as being the best at identifying horse's colours during a race rather than just listing the horses in running order as the race unfolds. As regards TV presenters I find both Matt Chapman & Jonathan Neesom annoying with once being frantic and the other ultra-laconic!

RACECOURSES: York & Cheltenham are my favourites – boring I know but they are the best.

ON-COURSE EXPERIENCE: I have a 12.5% share in *Romeo Brown* and was at Haydock Park on May 7th this year to see my horse romp home in the Pertemps Long Distance Hurdle at 20/1. Whilst other McGoldrick Racing horses have won good races, this was my first time on-course to witness a triumph. A very exhilarating experience.

PROBLEMS IN RACING: With big stables dominating both codes to an unhealthy degree it seems inevitable that many more smaller trainers will leave what is becoming an unprofitable form of employment. Some form of subsidy for smaller yards might encourage them to expand their operations but how one could achieve this, given the internecine warfare within the ruling bodies in racing, is hard to imagine.

SIX JUMPERS TO FOLLOW THIS WINTER: *Romeo Brown* (hopefully); *Edwardstone*; *Camprond*; *Fortescue*; *Nells Son & Cobblers Dream*.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Why not do the same as John and send in your 'Racing Life Story' for publication?