

ALEX FUSSEY IS 'UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT' WITH BRIAN GOODWILL

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INTERESTED IN RACING?

Being born and bred in Newmarket a natural interest in racing soon developed from a young age (I mean you can't not have one in Newmarket can you!) I would go regularly with my father and soon became a junior member when age allowed. My choice of reading at primary school was always the Racing Post! That was a source of great amusement to the teachers.

WERE YOU SURPRISED TO WIN AN EMERGING TALENT AWARD AT THE HHPA LUNCH IN DECEMBER, DID YOU ENJOY THE DAY?

I was delighted to even be shortlisted! So yes! It was a very surreal day, one of those occasions where you look around and think what am I doing here! My father was able to come with me as well which made it extra special considering all the travelling he's done with me over the years when I was getting started.

Whilst it was a fantastic personal achievement it also felt like a real sense of acknowledgment to all those who are on the commentary roster and the work they do.



WHAT WAS YOUR PROFESSION OUTSIDE OF RACING?

Very different! I used to manage one of the busiest pharmacies in the East. Thoroughly enjoyed it but it was extremely challenging as you can imagine. I dread to think how many prescriptions I've prepared!

Becoming a commentator was always the goal but I was well aware that it's very tough to achieve. So I made sure I built foundations and had a successful career elsewhere as no guarantees I'd be doing what I am today!

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

I'm not sure if I'd call it relaxing (I'm a shade competitive I must admit!) and due to work commitments I don't play anywhere near as much I as previously did, but I play lawn bowls. Last year was the first that I haven't entered a whole

raft of competitions, but in my time I've won several County titles, played at the National finals regularly and won a National team event as well.

DO YOU ENJOY WORKING IN FRANCE?

It's not quite as glamorous as it initially sounds! We do our coverage from a studio and are required to cover every meeting taken on the service. Usually this means we are calling 3/4 cards a day from about 11am until 9pm (a rough guide). I enjoy the variety of racing to call, it's always good to get a grips on another jurisdiction. Plus being a part of a number of top races during the year is always exciting.

WHAT ARE YOUR LONG-TERM AMBITIONS?

Naturally I would love to call the group ones/biggest races we have and work my way upwards in that regard. I would also like to call at as many of our racecourses as possible (hopefully all)! I've made good progress on that front over the last couple of years.

DO YOU BET AND CAN YOU TELL US OF ANY MEMORABLE WINS OR NEAR MISSES?

Occasionally but never on a race I'm calling. In my younger days before working in the industry I recall watching an evening card at Kempton and deciding to put on what you could only describe as a silly 25p each-way accumulator on the 7 races. Somehow the first 6 won and I managed to cash out a very tidy profit just edging north of four figures! The luck continued with the 7th horse losing proving the cash out to be a wise move. Funnily enough I've never pulled that off again since!

WHAT OTHER SPORTS DO YOU ENJOY AND HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PROFESSIONALLY INVOLVED IN ANY OF THEM?

To be honest anything sporty and I'm in! I don't participate in anything else regularly now apart from the odd round of golf. I used to swim competitively and in fact some of my first commentary experiences came within that sport. Initially just local events but that spiralled upwards to the National Finals. It's very rare you'll find me not watching something sport related if I'm at home!

WOULD YOU REGARD IAN BARTLETT AS YOUR MENTOR?

Ian has been fantastic in terms of advice and guidance and has always been at the end of phone for any questions or queries, I'm extremely grateful. The whole commentary roster team are friendly and helpful, I do hope I can be as equally supportive to those who may come into the role in the future.

EVERYBODY FANCIED OCEAN SWELL. I WONDER WHY?

By HAROLD HEYS

DARWEN reporter Norman Bentley spent much of the Second World War working on his second major interest – horse racing. It wasn't easy. In fact, it was hard graft. The Army always seemed to have something for him to be doing when, as any racing enthusiast knows, the Sport of Kings tends to take up most of what spare time you have...

Norman became a good pal of mine when I started work as a young reporter in the late 50s. We were both well into horses. And one day over a couple of pints he told me the tale of how he almost gave 'em up. For good.

The Derby was approaching in the summer of 1944. I'm not sure how long Norman had been in the Army but certainly long enough to establish himself as the regimental bookie as he and his pals prepared for the Big Day, the er, D-Day Invasion in early June... The money rolled in for the big race – the 1944 Derby – but a few days before the race, the lads were on their way, edging out of their base on the south coast to join up with the hundreds of boats who had crossed over to France for the Invasion which was well under way.

A few days before his pals actually got ashore on t'other side they were aboard a large English ship swilling around in a heavy sea somewhere off Dunkirk. "Give it a couple of days, lads," confided their sergeant. "Much too rough." Meanwhile, the Derby was looming – fast.

Norman's usual plan of campaign was to shuffle around the Camp with a brush under his arm and pick up the lads' bets for the big races. It was the same on board a ship.

Now, Norman had quickly worked out that the more money he took on a race, the more profit he was likely to make. It was just a case of balancing the book. He really couldn't lose.

Most squaddies were happy to throw their few bob or ten bob notes on something or other. Only snag is that this Derby book was steadily becoming the most one-sided in the history of the British Army.



Everybody. Yes, *everybody* wanted to put their money on an outsider: *Ocean Swell*. As opposed to going for the well fancied *Happy Landing*. No, it didn't matter that the sea was as rough as a badger's backside or that *Happy Landing* was the last thing on anyone's mind.

Our Norman pressed on, but didn't make much headway. And on the morning of the race, he faced a skinner – unless something came out of the pack. Anything except for *Ocean Swell* who had finished down the field in the 2,000 Guineas and who was going off at around 28-1.

In the Derby, Jack Jarvis's jockey Eph Smith had chosen to ride *Tehran*, and the ride on *Ocean Swell* went to Willie Nevett. They were never in with a smell. Still, Nevett had already won one war-time Derby on *Straight Deal* a year earlier.

The early pace for the 1944 Derby was slow but the field quickened just after half-way and Nevett sent his horse into the lead just three furlongs out. In a furious finale *Ocean Swell* stayed on strongly showing pluck and stamina to win by a neck from *Tehran* with the fast-finishing *Happy Landing* a short head back in third.

Of course, late that evening the weather was perfect and Norman and his Regiment were able to step off their ship at dawn to begin the long slog through Belgium, Holland, and by the following spring, into Germany. I remember going into Germany, " Norman told me. "I think I paid out the last two Derby winners just as we crossed the border."

The following year *Ocean Swell* won the Ascot Gold Cup but by that time Norman Bentley was back in Darwen and back covering his home town...

Editor's Note: Back in the years of steam trains they used to give trains great names and yes *Ocean Swell* fell into that category! Pictures of the horse are all 'licensed' but not so the train (withdrawn in 1962) so here we go steam train fans – see page 22!



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Next Racin' Deadline is Friday 26th July