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## Reading between the lines

**W**HEN we bought Park Farm back at the end of 2003 we were desperate for boxes and I must now confess that I used my knowledge of the planning system and a large dose of poetic licence to get things done in a hurry.

Very soon after the purchase was completed I got a phone call from Richmondshire District Council Planning Department. They said they had heard that we had purchased Park Farm, Middleham, and they had also heard that we were knocking down cowsheds, building stables, building gallops and building an airstrip. I have no idea where they heard all that from but I said that we were not knocking down cowsheds (true at the time), that we were not building stables (we were separating existing buildings into what would become stabling but I didn't tell them that), and that we had no immediate (did I say 'immediate'? I hope I did but I might have, inadvertently, missed the 'immediate') plans to build gallops or an air strip. The rest is history.

I was reminded of this recently when reading Bill Barber's interview with ARC managing director, Tony Kelly. Mr. Kelly said, 'I've said it a dozen times and I will say it again, there are no plans to close any courses'. He didn't give any undertaking not to close any courses and he didn't even attempt to give an assurance that courses wouldn't close. He just said there weren't any plans.

### Burgeoning

He did say very clearly that they intend to pursue their plans to build an all-weather track at Newcastle and it is very clear that they want to have many more fixtures there than are currently run at the track on turf. So are we to take it that this would involve a further burgeoning of the fixture list? If so, can we expect even smaller fields or is someone other than ARC going to close some courses?

We now know that Tony Kelly is leaving ARC so it will be even easier for his successor to deny ever having given any undertaking to retain all existing tracks.

## Sadness tinged with relief

**T**ONY [A.P.] MCCOY has retired and I think the vast majority of people who have had the pleasure of watching him ride, like me, are experiencing two principal emotions: sadness, that he will no longer be riding; and relief, that he retired in one piece.

In the last few weeks he has been described by many as the greatest jockey of all time and by some as the greatest sportsman of all time. I am not going to argue with either statement but I think it is worth considering the attributes which have led to him being regarded by so many as a better jockey, and a greater asset to the sport, than John Francome, Frankie Dettori or even Lester Piggott.

His supremacy was not built on the number of Grade 1 races he won, on his record at Cheltenham, on his Grand National score, or even the amount of prize-money he amassed for the owners of the horses he rode. In fact, had the jump jockeys' championship been decided on prize-money rather than on number of winners, as many wanted for the Flat jockeys' championship along with the other

changes, eight of the last 20 titles, including this year's, would have gone elsewhere.

A.P. McCoy was recognised, above all else, for his work rate and his determination to give his best on, and get the best out of, every horse regardless of the class of race, quality of venue, or prize-money on offer. That, to my mind, is the true test of a jockey. A jockey must be judged on his ability to win races, not on his connections or his ability to secure the best rides in the most valuable contests.

### Maximising

A trainer, on the other hand, is often expected to play a part in selecting horses for owners and is invariably involved in planning the career with the aim of maximising the earnings and value of each horse. It is not for us to simply run our horses in the lowest possible grade to win the maximum number of races and, for that reason, I have always supported the system whereby the trainers' championship is judged on prize-money despite the fact that, if it were



*Tony McCoy -- always gave his best*

decided on winners, I would have been champion 10 times.

Is it not ironic that GBR chose this season, when Tony McCoy rode the

highest number of winners for the 20th successive year, to create the 'dog's dinner' that is the new flat jockeys' championship?

## THE ENEMY WITHIN

**O**FF THE BRIDLE' is hardly a fitting title for John Scanlon's column this month as he is, quite simply, spot on.

Unlike John, I did receive an invitation to the BHA/GBR industry update meetings but I received that invitation far too late to change plans that I had on those days. I was, very regrettably, unable to attend.

As John says, Nick Rust outlined some very ambitious targets and plans for the industry and he called for us to come together to help achieve those aims. We must do so and, from what I have seen so far, the

new BHA board and executive might just be the team who can put our finances in order and provide a significant increase in income. But getting us a bigger cake will not solve the problem if we continue to divide it into more and more slices by the continued expansion of the fixture list. And we will not attract more owners or get them to buy more horses if we make that cake completely tasteless through the proliferation of bland all-weather racing.

Steve Harman and his team have already demonstrated an ability to negotiate with government like no previous racing administrators, and Nick Rust has come out talking tough about his old employers, the bookmakers. But can they deal with the enemy within: the racecourses whose greed and disregard for the common good is ruining the sport?

**TUCKED AWAY** in the reports from the Industry Update meetings was a comment from Rod Street, chief executive of GBR, about 'new colours and designs for silks' being made available.

During my time on the BHA board there was a proposal from the executive for new designs of owners' colours. The designs, if I remember rightly, were the result of a competition for art students and they would have looked great on a T-shirt at Woodstock in 1969. It clearly had not been explained or understood that the purpose of racing colours is to make individual runners distinguishable at a distance. The designs and colours were, quite simply, not fit for purpose and the proposal was rejected by the board.

Now, I wonder, if Rod Street is about to sneak another of his harebrained schemes in under the radar while the new board are focused on, what they consider to be, 'bigger issues'. Sponsorship of jockeys by bookmakers is another proposal that has failed to find favour many times in the past but has now seemingly sailed through and been accepted.

Apparently, in attempting to explain what GBR does, Rod Street said that trying a lot of smaller things that go on to work can make a difference. I wonder how many small things that don't work it takes to do serious damage.

**CAROLINE LUCAS**, the Green Party's Brighton Pavilion candidate, did us all a favour by drawing our attention to the fact that their manifesto contains a pledge to end the use of the whip in horseracing and conduct a full review of the sport. She also quoted some very inaccurate figures on fatalities in racing and admitted that she obtains her data from Animal Aid.

It showed a desperately naive and ignorant view on animal welfare and a glance at their election manifesto revealed a section on 'animal protection' which confirms that she is not alone and that she was, indeed, toeing the party line.

In the interests of fairness, I thought it best to check out the manifestos of the other main parties. On searching for 'horse' I discovered that the SNP propose the registration or licensing of 'horse establishments' and that the others don't mention horses at all.

