



# The thrill of having a winner

**I**N days of old, when knights (and racing journalists) were bold, it was quite acceptable to disagree with columnists in other publications or even fellow columnists in the same paper.

When I had the privilege of writing a column for the Sporting Life back in the early 80s, under Editor Tom Clarke, I was never discouraged from entering into debate or exchanging banter with other columnists.

It was a different story, however, when I joined the Racing Post. There we all had to sing from the same hymn sheet and disagreement was unacceptable. I would guess that the same climate prevails today, although there is so little opinion of any kind in the paper that it is hard to know whether writers are expected to toe the party line or if they are simply denied the opportunity or space to express their views.

If that environment does still exist at the Post, then Lee Mottershead might feel that we at the Klarion have embarked on some sort of personal vendetta against him. That certainly is not the case. As I said last month, Lee



Mottershead's Monday Column is one of the few pieces of true journalism among the pages of tipping and quotes from trainers. But, when he drops a clanger and reveals his ignorance about some aspects of the sport, someone has to take him to task.

How dare he say in his June 27 column that, 'a kind, decent, owner will insist the groom leads the horse



into the winner's enclosure' and state that, 'that is always how it should be'? He infers that an owner, who might never have been associated with a winning horse before, shouldn't want to participate in the occasion, show his or her emotions and have the moment recorded for posterity. He effectively states that any owners who want to lead their horse into the winner's enclosure



are neither kind nor decent people.

I totally disagree, and I would be very disappointed if the attendants with a horse under my care who, like me and Lee Mottershead, are being paid to be there, didn't appreciate the owners' position and actively encourage them to enjoy the moment fully.

Lee didn't like our assertion in recent Klarions that he had

demonstrated naivety in his comments about racecourse gallops. Well, he is doing it again. He seems to assume that the groom who is leading up the horse at the races looks after it at home, rides it in the mornings, mucks it out, cares for its every need, and maybe sleeps with it. Well, some of that might have applied 50 years ago but, in the modern industry which has had no choice but to move with the times, individuals have different skills and aptitudes and a good team manager makes the most of them.

I learned very early on in my career that it was a waste of a good lightweight rider to have him or her mucking out when a big strong man could do the job in half the time. It also soon became apparent that just as some people are better at riding than others, some are better at grooming, some are better at preparing the horse for racing, some are better at driving the box, and

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some are better at leading up the horse.

We, and that includes every member of our race-day team, aren't there for a day out or the opportunity to lead the horse into the winner's enclosure. We are there to try to win the race and most members of the team, who also have an integral part to play in achieving our goals, aren't at the races at all, never mind leading the horse into the winner's enclosure. It obviously hasn't occurred to Lee Mottershead that the groom who grooms the horse every night when it is at home, the rider who rides it in the mornings, the person who mucks it out and cleans its stable, the manager who checks its legs every evening and tends to its ailments, or the groom who cleaned and polished it before the race, might feel that it is less appropriate for the race-day handler to hog the limelight than the owner who pays for their services.

It was a cheap shot at enthusiastic owners from someone, who I can only assume, has never owned a racehorse.

**□** On page 14 this month James Willoughby touches on the effect of weight carried on a horse's performance and suggests that our current scales might overestimate the effect of small weight changes. I have long felt that it is unlikely that small additions of a pound or so can materially affect the performance of a horse and I firmly believe that what James refers to as 'the class factor' has more impact, especially when a handicap rise (or fall) tips the balance and moves the horse into a different grade where it will run against a different class of opponent.

However, it is of course arguable and entirely logical to say that, if a stone matters, or five pounds matters, then one pound matters – the effect is just more difficult to measure. And, in our current situation, where our racing is dominated by handicaps it is prudent to pay attention to all rating changes when placing the vast majority of horses and/or planning their campaigns. I would imagine that any serious student of form, whether a punter or a dedicated fan of the sport, must also pay close attention to rating changes and should, at least, take account of the potential effect

of any weight change.

It therefore astounded me recently to discover that there had been a change to the rules some time ago which allowed for overweight, at weigh-in, if only one pound to be recorded in order for the official handicapper to take account of the discrepancy but that the information is NOT made available to the public or the connections of the horse.

The situation was brought to my attention by fellow trainer Daniel Kubler after our Scarpeta finished second, beaten half a length, behind his Harry's Endeavour. He was unhappy with the seven-pound rise given to Harry's Endeavour and contacted the handicapper to complain. He was surprised when the handicapper told him that one pound of the rise was a result of the jockey having put up overweight and that the same fate had befallen Scarpeta who was to go up six pounds, including one pound for an overweight jockey.

Daniel was adamant that his jockey had not put up overweight. He checked the race results and there was no record of overweight. He contacted me and the same applied. Nobody

in my camp was aware of any overweight or could find any record of it.

So, to cut a long story short, it transpires that Daniel and I were unaware of the ruling which states that the clerk of the scales will record overweight of one pound and inform the handicapper, but the information will not be made public or recorded in the horse's official form record.

I was dumbfounded. It seems impossible that the BHA would introduce such a ruling. I challenged the first handicapper I met about it, only to discover that he wholeheartedly agreed with me. It seems that the handicappers believe, quite logically, that this information should be in the public domain and on the horse's record. Can anyone give me any justification for this ruling?

## Measure for measure

John Scanlon, it seems, has gone metric. In some of his copy this month, he refers to there being so many 'metres' to go to the line. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, except that, in racing, our race distances are measured in furlongs and yards. It could, therefore, be argued that we should stick to one form of measurement and should not mix metres and yards.

Frankly, it doesn't really bother me but it does raise the question of whether the time has come for racing to go metric. We must surely accept

that the furlong is an outdated measure of distance which is almost never used outside of racing and, while most racegoers will have a reasonable conception of how far 100 yards is or, for that matter, 100 metres, I'd be surprised if many could tell you how many yards are in a furlong. (220!)

Is it, therefore, time for us all to go metric and start measuring our race distances in metres? Or will Brexit bring a return of more imperial measurements such as chains, links, rods, poles and perches? Somehow I doubt it.