



Top marks for Chairman Steve

IT is a real privilege, and an indication of the Klarion's standing as a serious racing publication, to have a question-and-answer session with Steve Harman in this month's issue.

I actually sat on the panel that interviewed Steve for the position of BHA chairman and I served under him on the board for over a year, until he sacked me (only joking – I came to the end of my term and he duly 'replaced' me), so I know him and his style of leadership pretty well and I think, despite a few hiccups along the way, it has been a very good time for the BHA.

I must admit that I was one of those who were sceptical, to say the least, when he chose a 'poacher turned gamekeeper' from the betting industry, in the shape of Nick Rust, for his new Chief Executive. But I couldn't have been more wrong and I now see that he was the perfect man for the job, especially if you

see the job and the principal objectives as Steve does.

I don't really know many of his other new board members but I am confident that he knew what he was doing when he selected them just as he did in selecting Nick Rust. I think his biggest achievement, by far, has been that he has changed the relationship between racing and government and has somehow navigated his way around what has always seemed like an insurmountable betting industry lobby in Westminster. If he can achieve his objectives on Levy replacement, that alone will mean that his time at the helm will be a memorable one for us all.

Knowledge

I still have reservations about the board's lack of knowledge and experience in the specifics of horseracing and 'horsemanship', for want of a better word. But I appreciate that neither the chairman, nor even his board, can be expected to be involved in the minutiae of the day-to-day running of the sport. For this they need a good executive but sometimes I wonder, and a few of Steve's answers did little to allay my fears, if the executive are strong enough in some departments and if the board and CEO have the knowledge to take them to task.

As a result of my veterinary background I am always interested in veterinary issues affecting racing and, when on the BHA board, I took a particular interest in the workings of the BHA veterinary department. That department was revolutionised by Chief Veterinary Officer Peter Webbon more than a decade ago and during the first part of my time on the BHA board the work was very ably carried on by Tim Morris,

who – I note – had the same title. Steve wasn't chairman at that time and so wasn't around on the numerous occasions when the issue of disclosure of 'wind' surgeries and other veterinary procedures was raised. Tim Morris consistently pointed out that the BHA must not bring in rules which they cannot police and clearly – or, at least, clearly to most who understand the mechanics of the surgery – you cannot police whether or not a horse has had wind surgery.

Since Tim's departure the BHA has brought in new rules to govern the use of some drugs – particularly anabolic steroids – from birth until retirement from racing and, while the principles are admirable, it was clear to some of us that it would be difficult to police. I fear, when I read Steve's answer to a

question on the disclosure of information and when I hear elsewhere of plans to appoint a new 'Director of Equine Health and Welfare' – that doesn't sound like a chief veterinary officer to me – that the veterinary department, if such a department still exists, could march blindly into further problems.

I have also taken a keen interest in the marketing of our sport and been critical of what is now called GBR (Great British Racing) – formally Racing For [No] Change – and their lack of understanding of the basic principles of the sport.

Their desire to put psychedelic shirts on jockeys rather than distinguishable racing colours has driven me to distraction and I could not help but note from Steve's answers that they are still

chipping away at this point.

I actually think that the idea 'to provide businesses with the opportunity to register silks in their own corporate colours' is a brilliant one. I recognised at the very beginning of my career that corporate ownership of racehorses was a much easier thing to sell, rather than personal or partnership ownership, when returns to owners are pitiful (remember Hinari?). But the authorities have done nothing but put obstacles in the way over the last 20 years and, if we are now going to allow corporate colours, I cannot help but ask why we have restricted branding on paddock sheets to a mere 64 square inches in a rear corner and why the BHA employ 'logo police' to fine trainers if a groom so much as wears the wrong baseball cap.

And, as for 'new patterns for general use with the aim of providing owners, new and old, with the chance to register some more interesting racing colours', I have seen

some of their ideas and patterns and, frankly, they would look better on a wall than in a race, where the purpose of racing colours is to allow viewers to distinguish one horse from another.

To be fair, Steve did say, when I left the board, that I should not hesitate to pick up the phone and tell him if I thought he was doing something wrong. But I was born with a spurtle in my hand and it is so much more fun to air my views in the pages of the Klarion. Sorry, Steve!

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Bring it on!

HAPPY New Year! Here we go again. The clock has been zeroed and is already ticking on the 2017 season. It was a pity that we fell just short of having 200 winners in 2016, and further reduced numbers makes me wonder if double-centuries might be a thing of the past for us, but it was another great year and I am sure it will be business as usual in the coming months.

Our latest Group 1 winners, The Last Lion and Lumiere, have been retired to stud but many good horses have remained from the 2016 team, including Group race winners Frankuus, Yalta and Kilmah, so we still have a lot to look forward to.

The make-up of the

team is changed a little again with slightly fewer two-year-olds than last year but we showed in 2015 and 2016 that we can modify our methods and style to suit whatever type and number of horses we have in the yard. For me, the most important thing is to feel that we got the best out of the team we have and I am determined that we will do the same in 2017.

Our facilities have been considerably upgraded again with, in particular, the addition of our new water therapy complex and I am very excited about the season to come. There will be challenges, as always, but we'll meet them head on and, hopefully, we'll come out the other end smiling, and carrying the trophies.

'DUNG' DEAL

THE RCA's 'PASS' scheme is up and running. Missing on the occasional cylinder, perhaps, and 'pinking' on contaminated fuel but running nonetheless. And woe betide anyone, owner or not, who gets in its way.

I think I got my PASS (Privileged Access Swipe System) card about six weeks ago and for a while it remained in the 18-inch deep pile in my in-tray along with the other 'junk' mail.

At first I was content to leave it there and, perhaps because I don't go racing much at this time of the year, I wasn't experiencing any difficulty getting into the races but then I realised that it could get me into the stables as well. I immediately discarded what was left – about two-thirds – of my old stable pass and decided to stick with the shiny new, dung-coloured, one.



It all seemed like a good idea until I was reading the NTF weekly newsletter and I discovered the RCA's true intentions. As is so often the case, there is an ulterior motive – greed. Not content with the fact that racehorse owners seem willing to send their horses to race on British racecourses with little hope

of covering the transport costs let alone training fees, entries or purchase price, the RCA has decided to make it as difficult as possible for them, or their friends, to get in to watch them without paying more.

I knew exactly what they were aiming for when I saw that 'if an owner wishes someone else to use their badges, they need to arrange this themselves and not via the trainer'. I queried it but was told that the NTF and BHA were 'consulted' (how often have we heard that before?) on the system several months ago and didn't raise any objections at the time.

I took it up with the chief executive at Hamilton Park, where I am on the board, as we sadly are not one of the seven or eight tracks who have decided against using the system, and she told me that abuse of complimentary badges is a 'huge problem'. I'll reserve judgement on that and maybe initiate a count to estimate how many of the 8,000 or so badges which my owners are entitled to each year actually get used.