

In the Klarion Spotlight



THIS MONTH: MJR owner Bob Smith

THE Klarion spotlight this month falls on Bob Smith. When Mark was a newly qualified vet, it was Bob who offered him a job in his veterinary practice at Newtown Stewart in Northern Ireland. Bob originally hails from Ayr in the West of Scotland, that racing town which Burns memorably described as being unsurpassed for 'honest men and bonnie lasses,' and, like Mark, he took his veterinary degree at the University of Glasgow vet school. The practice, which Bob joined on leaving university in 1956, often took Irish students who came to 'see practice'

in Ayr, so Bob decided to reciprocate and took a locum position in the small town of Castlederg. In the early 1960s he moved permanently to Northern Ireland, and some years later set up on his own account at Newton Stewart. Bob has become one of Mark's closest friends, and Mark recalls his time in Co. Tyrone with huge fondness. "I have no hesitation in saying that my time with Bob was hugely influential and certainly more important than any of the other positions I had in vet practice," he told the Klarion recently. "It gave me a really great grounding."

Full name: Robert Hugh Alexander Smith.

Date and place of birth: Born on February 21, 1933 in Ayr, Scotland.

Spouse/partner: Married Dorothy in 1964 in Mountjoy Presbyterian Church, Omagh. We have three sons, none of whom are interested in racing.

How, and when, were you introduced to horseracing? Grew up in Ayr and "cut my teeth" after qualifying in the local practice – McGregor & Gilmore. Mr Gilmore was originally from the West of Ireland (his brother was a clergyman in Kilalla, Co Mayo) and he, with his daughter, rode out his hunter every morning before we started work. There were two racing yards in the town – Gerry Lawrence in Cree Lodge and John Clark in Clyde House (on the beach). The practice also acted at Ayr Races – so there was plenty of opportunity to get involved if you were interested (which I was).

And to MJR? I first met Mark in Glasgow Airport. I had advertised in the Veterinary Record for an assistant and had two replies from Glasgow. I decided to conduct the interviews in Glasgow Airport; so started a friend-

ship which has lasted to this day. Mark worked with us for about a year and made many friends in that short time. There was not much horse racing near us and Mark continued his love of greyhound racing by going twice weekly to the local tracks. It was with great regret, but inevitable nonetheless, that he moved on to further his career.

What is your main occupation? Veterinary Surgeon

If you could choose any other career,



Bob in party mood is snapped by Mark while working for him

what would it be? I have never wanted to do anything other than veterinary.

Where do you live and what took you to the area? We live in Sion Mills, Co Tyrone. In 1956 I came to Ireland to act as a locum for T J R (Ronnie) Walls and, after a few years in Ayr, came permanently to work for him and later started my own practice in Newtown Stewart, Co Tyrone. We now live about six miles from the practice.

What was your most exciting racing moment? The Cheltenham Gold Cup in 1970, watching French Tan, owned by Dorothy's brother, trained by Archie Watson in Co Armagh and ridden by Pat Taaffe, just being outstayed up the hill by L'Escargot after the two had jumped the last together. He would also be the best horse with which I have been associated.

And the best MJR horse, if different from above? Maid in Rio – to have a share in a horse rated over 100 is not easy.

What are your racing colours? Colours are cerise, yellow hoop and sleeves, white cap.

What is the best name you have given a horse and why did you choose it? Best name would be Boldcounty, by Never So Bold out of Hants - one of the first Fairyhouse Partnership horses.

The race you would like most to win? The Ayr Gold Cup. The annual six-furlong 'cavalry charge' has always given me a thrill.

What is your favourite holiday destination? Western Canada – Alberta, Vancouver – and our tour in Alaska from Anchorage to Fairbanks was amazing. It provided us with a chance to see some first-class ice hockey.

What is your favourite sport outside racing? Rugby Union. The trip to see the Lions beat South Africa in Cape Town (1997) was special.

Favourite racecourse? Why? Nad al Sheba in Dubai. I have not been to Meydan, yet, but comfort and facilities at Nad al Sheba were fantastic.

Least favourite? Why? Ayr. The facilities and comfort have deteriorated

so much since I was a regular there. **What is the last film you saw and film you would most recommend?** "The Great Gatsby", Baz Luhrmann's 2013 version, starring Leonardo di Caprio as Jay Gatsby.

Last book you read and book you would most recommend? Brian O'Driscoll's autobiography - "The Test."

Favourite TV programme? Anything on sport channels.

What schools did you attend? Ayr Academy and the University of Glasgow.

What were your best, and worst, subjects at School? Worst subject was Latin. The best? As I recall it, I was lucky to pass any at all.

Are you superstitious? No

Lucky number? 7

Favourite singer/band? The Glenn Miller Band – that will put the cat among the pigeons - a lot of people

will never have heard of him!

What kind of car do you drive? Toyota Avensis.

What cd/s do you currently have in your car? Tranquility Gold – Phil Coulter; Great Songs of Our Time – Tom Jones; John Denver's Greatest Hits; Music to Watch the Girls By (Various Artists).

What station is your radio tuned to? Car radio? Like car – showing its age.

What would be your 6 desert island discs and one possession you would like to have on your island? Forget the discs, I'd settle for a bottle of malted Scotch Whisky to open when rescued.

A restaurant you would recommend? 'The Stables' in our local village. Hope they maintain their good standard.

What would you choose as your last meal? Rare steak with all the trimmings.

What is your favourite drink? Gin and tonic.

Who has been the biggest influence on your life? Ian McMillan, FRCVS who was senior assistant in Ayr during my student days and early post-grad years, which in my opinion are the most important years in the life of a veterinary surgeon.

What was the best advice you were ever given? Never look back. It ties in with the motto of Ayr Academy - Respice, Prospice. (Latin for, effectively, "Learn from the past, look to the future".)

Tell us something about yourself that we probably don't know. When I got married I inherited five sisters-in-law and six brothers-in-law! (Bob and his family were also caught up in a car bomb incident in 1972. Thankfully, none of the family was injured, but they were left literally with the clothes they were standing up in after a blast in the local main street.)



Bob and his wife Dorothy with Sweet Romeo after winning at Ayr in 1992