

Thanks for all those memories Trigger!

Straight Talking

WHEN I wrote a tribute to Double Trigger on our website, I was slightly concerned as to whether or not I would get some adverse reaction to saying that I was 'neither shocked nor particularly saddened by the news that he was gone'. I cannot help but remember how Charlie was misquoted by the American media and his reaction misinterpreted by the public when Permian died tragically at Arlington in August 2017.

But there was nothing tragic about Double Trigger's death. He was 29 years old and he died suddenly and without suffering. It was an opportunity for us all to be reminded of his wonderful racing career and the long, healthy and productive life he had afterwards at stud: the life that we dream of for every colt we bring into training.



By Mark Johnston



Ron Huggins

He was a truly remarkable horse that gave me, Deirdre, and his owners more wonderful memories than we could get from a host of other top-class horses. From the day at Goff's sales when Ron Huggins came to me and said: "I've seen a horse. I'm going to buy him and call him 'Trigger'", to the day when he bowed out at Doncaster with his groom, Geordie Charlton – who never normally went racing with

Trigger because he wasn't big enough or strong enough to handle the boisterous big horse – in floods of tears, Trigger gave us a roller-coaster ride.

Jason Weaver, in his tribute, said that Trigger did "one good piece of work" before his debut at Redcar, but I think Jason was mistaken. I don't really remember any good home work and certainly not before his first run. Ron often talks of a good piece of work with Mister Baileys in the spring of 1994 but, if that wasn't a figment of Ron's imagination, it could only be that

Mister Baileys had worked appallingly, because Double Trigger saved all his effort for the track.

Immediately before that first run there was talk of gelding him or even changing his career, perhaps sending him to Ron's sister, who bred and trained Eventers, if not to the circus. We weren't at Redcar. Even Ron opted that day to come with us to Ascot where we had stable stars Mister Baileys, Quick Ransom and Marina Park all running.

What a day that was, in hindsight. Marina Park finished second in the G3 Diomed, Mister Baileys won the G2 Royal Lodge and I came back into the Owners' and Trainers' bar after Quick Ransom finished third in a very valuable handicap, to find Ron Huggins and Richard Huckerby sitting with a bottle of champagne. "He won by 20 lengths", said Ron. He actually won by only 10 lengths, but he did break the track record in the process despite being eased long before the line.

The other great memories would fill a book, and maybe should: Jason Weaver walking the track at Turin in a downpour



Double Trigger, left, beats full brother Double Eclipse in the 1995 Goodwood Cup

with a brolly and his trousers rolled up to his knees; Ron's 'picnic' (drink only) in the car park at Ascot with the Gold Cup on top of the car; the Chinese restaurant which was fully booked but quickly set up a table in the entrance hall when Norma Huggins went in with the Ascot Gold Cup; Peter O'Sullivan's commentary for that first Goodwood Cup, when he beat his full brother, Double Eclipse, into second place, which still brings a

lump to my throat; and, of course, that last Goodwood Cup, when Darryll Holland nursed him back into the race when he looked thoroughly beaten at the top of the straight, and crowds ran to welcome him back into the winner's enclosure.

There were dark days too but, thankfully, the memory of those fades through the decades and we are left with the fun, the excitement and the immense feeling of pride.

Incentivise the owners

ICAN'T really see any negative side to John Scanlon's suggestion in *Off the Bridle* (p.25) for a British Racing Hall of Fame but, frankly, I can't see that these things do a great deal for the sport. Yes, positive stories are worth telling and, particularly if it was aimed principally at our equine heroes, it might do some good for, what seems to be the BHA's biggest concern, the public perception of the sport.

But I think we can do so much more to market and create interest in our sport.

I must reiterate my call for a really

meaningful owners' championship to give the marketing gurus their 'narrative' for the sport. It could do so much more than 'Champions' days, where the champions don't come or, if they do, risk defeat due to less-than-ideal, seasonal conditions. Or the unthinkable 'championship' racing that excludes champions altogether.

Meaningful

As I have said on countless previous occasions, the difference between a

meaningful owners' championship and those for jockeys, trainers, etc. would be that the owners could invest more if they really cared about winning. And, as we all know that owners are the one group who certainly aren't in horseracing for the money, this would not have to be expensive. What it would take would be a change of attitude by those who participate in and follow the sport to recognise the importance of owners as being second only to the horses themselves.

REMEMBERING HARI

IT WAS quite a shock to hear of Hari Singh Bhati's death and it is still quite difficult to come to terms with. It is some comfort to us all that Hari died while back home in India with his wife and family. What it would have been like for them if it had happened while he was here at work doesn't bear thinking about. It is a reminder of the sacrifice that these young men make when they leave friends and family behind to come and work in Britain. In the 12 years that Hari worked with us, he will have averaged less than two months of each year back at home.

We desperately need skilled workers such as Hari in British racing and we are all hoping that changes to immigration rules will allow more to come once Brexit is

complete but, to me, there is something quite cruel and immoral about a system that allows them to come, but forces them to leave their immediate family back home. When Hari and others like him were given 'permanent right to remain', they had to demonstrate a good command of the English language and pass a test to show that they could display a certain level of 'Britishness', but we do not allow them to bring their family and so they must remain firmly Indian and they know they can never settle here. Unfortunately, I think it is probably too much to hope that new rules will be different.

Deirdre and I visited India in November but we did not go to Jodhpur, in Rajasthan, where Hari and the vast majority of the Indian riders who come to Johnston Racing are from. We have vowed to go back and visit that area. I hope, when we do, we will be able to meet Hari's wife and family for the first time.