

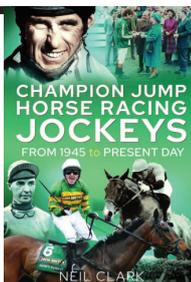
Book Reviews

By John Scanlon

Champion Jump Horse Racing Jockeys From 1945 To Present Day

By Neil Clark

Pen & Sword White Owl - £25



AS REGULAR readers of the Klarion might be aware, I'm not a particular fan of the National Hunt code, so when I was asked to review this new book by journalist and broadcaster Neil Clark I feared that I might find it heavy going.

I'm delighted to say that I found it a most enjoyable read. From the outset I was struck by the fact that in 75 years of National Hunt racing since the end of World War II, there have been only 22 Champion Jockeys.

Drawing on a wealth of reference material, and having interviewed a wide range of those jockeys, their families and friends, trainers and observers of the racing scene, Clark devotes a chapter of the book to each champion. He introduces each chapter with a pithy summary of each jockey, and a suitable quotation; for example, his essay on Josh Gifford is headed 'The Huntingdon Cavalier' and features a brief quote from Terry Biddlecombe paying tribute to the four-time champion.

Although focussed on the riders themselves, anyone who reads this book will learn to appreciate how much National Hunt racing has changed since 1945. The advent of a summer jumping programme, advances in health and safety,

adjustments to the racing calendar due to improved travel infrastructure and changes to the construction of fences are all dealt with here, and reading the book underlines the impression that to become champion jockey these days requires a jockey to be aligned with the small number of trainers, on each side of the Irish Sea, with whom the vast majority of the best horses are now placed.

It's easy to draw parallels between the characters of some of the champions themselves (the focus and determination, perhaps, of Scudamore and McCoy) and to contrast them with the cavaliers (the Biddlecombes and Francomes of this world).

I particularly enjoyed the sections of the book dealing with the champions of the Sixties and early Seventies, as they reminded me so much of following the major jumps fixtures on Saturday afternoon Grandstand, as a filler between Sam Leitch's Football Focus and the classified football results at a quarter to five.

It's also fascinating to follow Clark's thread of which champions were successful in the Grand National (surprisingly few) or in the major races at the Cheltenham Festival.

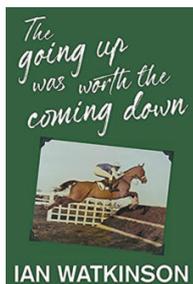
There are some fascinating photographs (both monochrome and in colour), a particular favourite being an action shot of the fearless Tim Brookshaw winning at Carlisle in 1963. There is also a useful appendix and a helpful bibliography for those who want to know more about the sport and its heroes.

At £25, fans of the jumping code are sure to find much to enjoy in this fascinating study of some remarkable jockeys. ■

The Going Up Was Worth The Coming Down

By Ian Watkinson, with Chris Pitt

New Generation Publishing - £25



IN A fascinating book which has borrowed its title from the lyrics of a Kris Kristofferson song, the former jump jockey Ian Watkinson has, with the assistance of his friend, the racing writer Chris Pitt, produced a frank, entertaining and revealing autobiography.

The rider of more than 200 winners, Watkinson plied his trade for more than a decade, enjoying success in the Hennessy Gold Cup and being legged up on some legends of the turf, including Tingle Creek, Alverton, Night Nurse and Sea Pigeon.

Fighting the scales throughout, his career was beset by injuries and he had to hang up his saddle after a crashing fall on Regal Choice at Towcester in March 1979. He discusses the horses, trainers, friends and women he met along the way,

and is brave enough to allow his friends, weighing room colleagues, children and wives to have their say about him.

After a successful spell as a trainer in Australia, he returned to Newmarket where, through his connections in the industry, he forged a role for himself in breaking and pre-training horses and found himself being deployed to ride 'difficult' horses. He also became involved in horse

transport.

The book is peppered with anecdotes which paint Watkinson almost as a larger-than-life character, but it is striking to note the warmth with which he is described by those family and friends.

With Pitt's assistance, Watkinson comes across as brutally honest and reflective in discussing his relationships, breakdowns and personal tragedies, and I particularly enjoyed the affectionate descriptions of this complicated man by his children, Camilla and Max.

I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in National Hunt racing, especially in those dim and distant days before the trinity of Dunwoody, Scudamore and McCoy arrived on the scene. ■