

The thrill of owning



Always loved racing, but never dipped a toe into ownership? Nor had Klarion editor GERRY HUNT, but he has now, thanks to a Kingsley Park partnership. And what a time he's having!

IT WAS the electric burst of acceleration just inside the final furlong that did it. Outbreak hit the front and within a matter of strides went four lengths clear.

The heart rate shot up, beads of sweat broke out, and the nerve endings tingled. And that was just me, never mind the horse! For at that moment I experienced a thrill I had never known in the 60-plus years I have been addicted to racing. I was hooked from that day as a cranky toddler when my mother first plonked me in front of an old black-and-white tv set showing grainy pictures from some racing outpost, hoping the rich, honeyed tones of Peter O'Sullivan would lull me to sleep.

Not a chance. The excitement of watching the likes of old Scobie or baby-faced Lester riding a winner was just too much to make way for a snooze. And that same excitement has lasted a lifetime.

Over the years I've been lucky enough to enjoy the sport I love in Britain, Ireland, France, the US and Australia. I've had the pleasure of watching Nijinsky, Shergar and Frankel; I've experienced the high of your fourth horse in a Yankee getting up on the line when the first three have already gone in; and, since being associated with the Klarion, I've shared the joy as yet another Johnston horse romped home.

So how was it that the thrill of a lifetime was generated by Outbreak, a four-year-old gelding in a pretty ordinary one-mile handicap on the all-weather at Lingfield? Well, in all the years I've followed racing I've never been an owner, and so I've never known what it's like to own a winner.

But I know now! For I own Outbreak, and after he hit the front on that memorable day in February, he stayed at the front — all the way to the line. The feeling when he went clear was incredible, and it was something else again when he passed the post. 'Over the moon' and all those other hackneyed old cliches just don't do the moment justice.

And the funny thing is, when I say I 'own' Outbreak, I mean I am one of 20 owners, all of us members of the Kingsley Park 35, Ready to Run partnership of Johnston Racing. So, as joking friends have pointed out, I actually own no more than a quarter of a leg — if that! But as far as I'm concerned, he is mine, and I'm sure that's how each KP35 partner feels too.

At Lingfield, my wife Marie and I watched from the steps of the grandstand with some of my fellow partners, all of us nervous as Outbreak entered the stalls. And then they were off. Drawn widest of the eight runners, jockey Andrea Atzeni carefully edged across to the others and after two furlongs was nicely placed in second.

As they turned for home he moved closer to the leader, and after passing the furlong pole Andrea pressed the button. And that was the magic moment. Outbreak shot clear and within seconds it was all over. We'd won!

We all went wild, waving and cheering as we rushed around to the winner's enclosure to greet our hero; then on to the podium for a presentation; and then to the winners' suite for a champagne celebration and tv re-runs of the race, over and over again. Whatever happens next, nothing can take away that fantastic feeling of being a winning owner.

The experience has made me appreciate there is a world of difference between owning a horse and just watching or backing one. And while I'm sure it must be extra special to be an individual owner, I can say I would never have believed that being in a partnership could be so much fun, and that it would bring such pleasure through making new friends to share the enjoyment of following our horses.

In KP35 we have ownership for a year of the magnificent Outbreak (see opposite page about his latest run) and of Khal, a three-year-old who has yet to live up to his early promise, having finished last in each of his two races for us. But he might yet surprise us. It's that thrill of anticipation, the thought of what just might happen, that fires the imagination and boosts the fun.

We partners now have the whole summer and autumn to enjoy more trips to the track to watch our horses. And who knows? Maybe, just maybe, we might be back in the winner's enclosure once again . . .

• While all shares in KP35 have been taken up, there are a few shares still available in KP34, KP34-Gold, KP36 and KP37-Gold. For further information contact the Johnston Racing office on 01969 622237 or email partners@johnston.racing



Gerry and Marie (third and second right) with Outbreak and fellow partners in KP35