

## **It's déjà-vu all over again**

**Chris Pitt** *reports on the 2015 Kiplingcotes Derby...*

The result of the 2015 renewal of England's oldest horse race, the Kiplingcotes Derby, was precisely the same as last year: Tracey Corrigan beat her partner Richard Mumford by ten lengths, with the rest beaten miles. But the mere result does not convey the drama of three fallers, with one rider requiring the services of an air ambulance, plus a major plunge on a hastily shortened favourite.

Run as always on the third Thursday of March, Derby day once again attracted a big crowd, certainly as many as last year's and thus just about as big a crowd as had ever thronged the single-track road that leads from the A614 crossroads to the winning post. There is little doubt that Julia Bradbury's 'Countryfile' feature of the race in 2011 has added massively to the event's popularity.

The Outside Bar catering truck, supplied by The Gait Inn at Millington, was soon doing a roaring trade, selling burgers at £3 each with proceeds going to the Kiplingcotes Derby race fund. Almost from the moment they opened for business, the snaking queue rarely numbered less than 30 hungry racegoers.

Originally called the Kiplingcotes Plate, the four-mile race predates its rather more famous counterpart, the Epsom Derby, by 261 years. Starting in the parish of Etton, close to the old Kiplingcotes railway station, and finishes at Londesborough Wold Farm, the course comprises grass verge, ploughed field, tarmac road, rutted track and the disused Enthorpe Railway Bridge, prior to crossing the A614 Market Weighton to Driffield road and finishing down a quarter-mile strip of grass.

The going this year was good, nothing like so challenging conditions that often prevail after a wet winter. That, allied to the race's increased popularity, attracted no less than 22 starters, a 21st century record and only one less than the all-time record.

Ten of the riders had ridden in the race before, including five of last year's first six. The remaining dozen were Kiplingcotes first-timers, most of whom were doing it for fun, to be a participant in such a historic contest.

Among those first-timers taking part for the fun of it were Fiona Davis on Joker, a cob-cross, and Josephine Shepherd on her recent acquisition Beanie, an Arab cross, both of whom had travelled up from Staffordshire and described themselves as "happy hackers" so were unlikely to be involved at the business end of the race.

Similar comments could be applied to a pair of skewbald ponies, four-year-old Blue, the mount of Emma Parkinson, and six-year-old Matilda, running for Bits 4 Horses and partnered

by Jane Walden. Both had journeyed east from Lancashire and were also among the outsiders.

Toby, a feathered-legged piebald, the mount of Stuart Ellis from Bentham, was more local, as was Isla, a seven-year-old hunter/eventer partnered by Sarah Hampshire from North Newbold, representing the White Rose Riding Club. Again, they were not expected to play a part in the closing stages.

Two other local long-shots were Laila, the mount of Lisa Elliott from Selby, and Bounty, ridden by Clare Tyler from Hessle. Meanwhile, the feathered Clydesdale Acaisse was using the Kiplingcotes Derby as an unusual preparatory outing for his main aim, a race for Clydesdales at the Cotley point-to-point fixture in Somerset. His rider, John Hudson, whose late father was a well-known Hull bookmaker, was having his second ride in the race – he finished eighth on The Countess in 2012 – and revealed that Acaisse had hunted 24 times this season with the Pendle & Craven, so at least should have fitness on his side. But Clydesdales do not win the Kiplingcotes Derby these days and his odds of 33/1 reflected his chance.

None of those mentioned above were destined to finish in the first ten but would complete the course safely in their own good time.

Another outsider was Joe, a hunter, ridden by Margaret Curran, who had travelled all the way from Cape Town in South Africa to take part. She had riding blood in her veins, being the daughter of the late Dick Curran, who died last year, one of the very best northern-based jump jockeys of the 1950s and runner-up to Fred Winter in the jockeys' table for the 1952-53 season. His big race winners included the Scottish Grand National on Queen's Taste, the Great Yorkshire Chase on Bramble Tudor, and back-to-back victories in Aintree's Topham Trophy on Culworth.

Hot Fuss, a former point-to-pointer who now hunts with the Middleton, was the mount of Meg Chapman of Bishop Wilton, while cob mare Alice, was ridden by Jane Chivers from Fangfoss, in Yorkshire's East Riding. The latter combination was returning after an 11 year absence, having beaten just one home in 2004. During the intervening period Alice had developed into a TREC champion, a discipline involving a combination of orienteering and long-distance riding.

Those with past form over the course included Amadeus and Sue Taylor, from Thirtleby, in Hull, making their third attempt together, having finished fourth in 2012 and ninth in 2013.

Kiplingcotes veteran Heather Buck from North Wilton, wearing her distinctive colours of pink with a green sash, again partnered Dee, a hunting/dressage horse who finished sixth last year. Heather, who runs Fairfield Stables, was having her eighth ride in the race, her best efforts being a pair of fourth places.

Captain Comanche was making his Kiplingcotes Derby debut but his rider, Katie Croft from Burnham, had won the race at her first attempt on Etton Lad in 2006. Nonetheless, the on-course bookmaker was happy to offer odds of 10-1 about him.

Those, then, were the Quixall Crossets; now to those at single figure odds.

Prima Donna, fifth last year and once again partnered by Angela Chomse from Hightown in West Yorkshire, is by the successful stallion Mark Of Esteem. He never raced, ended up as a dressage horse and was turned out looking fit, having recently enjoyed a couple of days in the hunting fields.

Clowance House, a son of Galileo, had made all to win a Salisbury three-year-old maiden for Roger Charlton in May 2009 and twice finished second over hurdles for Venetia Williams before joining Barry Brennan, for whom he won a Towcester hurdle race in June 2012. He was subsequently purchased at Ascot Sales by Cheshire bookmaker Patrick Chesters and together they had finished a distant third last year when running under the pseudonym of Vinnie. Horse and rider had endured a troublesome journey to Kiplingcotes, the result of a flat tyre and a traffic jam on the M62, but made it in the nick of time for the rider to weigh out and make the entry.

Eleven-year-old Carndonagh, the mount of Charlotte Kemp, was placed in a bumper and over hurdles for Malcolm Jefferson in an earlier life and also finished second in 2011 Newmarket Town Plate, partnered by his former owner Liz Stubbins, who had won the Kiplingcotes Derby on 'Charlie', a.k.a. Rare Presence, in 2007.

The first to weigh in – and therefore allocated the number one saddle cloth – was Sam Osborne from Deepdale, Barton. She was riding a 12-year-old gelding called 'Mr P' but was quick to admit that his real identity was the former steeplechaser Mad Professor. He had won on the Flat and over hurdles before joining John Cornwall, for whom he had run 65 times, partnered throughout by the trainer's son Joe, winning at Southwell and Worcester and making the frame on a further 25 occasions. Mad Professor was having the 99th race of his career but none of what went before would have prepared him for the idiosyncrasies of the race in which he was due to compete.

Tracey Corrigan, successful last year on 'Willy', better known as former racehorse and point-to-pointer Willywont He, this year rode 'Prince', the *nom de guerre* of 11-year-old Killary Bay. Formerly with Charlie Swan and ridden to victory in a Limerick bumper by Nina Carberry in 2009, Killary Bay was subsequently bought by Tracey who trained him to spring a 50/1 shock in a Catterick hunter chase in March 2013, beating the supposed Waley-Cohen "good thing" Rumbavu by seven lengths.

Her other runner was 'Bob', also known as Calopocus, runner-up last year. Now a 12-year-old, he was unplaced in three Irish bumpers in the 2007/08 season when trained by Philip

Fenton. 'Bob' was again ridden by Tracey's fiancé, Richard Mumford, who only learned to ride five years ago but was making a pretty good fist of it.

The mystery horse was Kai, ridden by Jason Carver, who had finished third on Data on his only previous attempt in 2013. He appeared to be somewhat cagey when questioned about the horse's identity, and a sudden rush of big money – big by Kiplingcotes standards, that is – saw racecourse bookmaker Chris Johnson, standing at the Derby for the fourth successive year, slash Kai's odds dramatically to 6-4 favourite.

Joint second favourites in the betting at 3-1 were the Corrigan pair Prince (Killary Bay) and Bob (Calopocus), with Clowance House at 4-1 and Carndonagh at 11-2. Prima Donna was a solid 7-1 chance but there was surprisingly little support for Mad Professor, who opened at 4-1 but drifted to twice those odds.

Captain Comanche was a 10-1 chance, mainly due to him being the mount of former winner Katie Croft, and it was name your price the rest: 14-1 Amadeus, 16-1 Hot Fuss and Joker, 20-1 Dee, 25-1 Laila, Toby and Joe, 33-1 Bounty, Acaisse, Blue, Beanie and Isla, 50-1 Alice, with Matilda the rank outsider at 66-1.

As was ever thus, the horses were called into line shortly before 11.30 and the rules were read out by the clerk of the course, including the stipulation that any rider who "layeth hold of any of the other riders or striketh any of them shall win no prize." Formalities over, the 22 runners made their way to the start.

When they eventually came into view, two horses were well clear of the rest. They were 'Prince' and 'Bob', the Tracey Corrigan duo. Both riders wore combinations of red and black but Tracey's black with red sleeves could be seen leading Richard Mumford's black with a red diabolo. 'Prince' was in front and there he stayed, winning by 10 lengths, the same distance as last year.

It seemed like an eternity before the third horse came into view, Mad Professor, accompanied by the riderless Carndonagh. Then at similarly long intervals came Captain Comanche and Clowance House, then Joe, who belied his 25-1 no-hoper odds to run a stormer for Margaret Curran, making her trip from Cape Town well worthwhile.

Prima Donna, fifth last year, finished seventh this time, followed home by Amadeus, Hot Fuss and Dee. More long gaps before Matilda, Blue and Bounty appeared, but then came three racing close together, namely Beanie, Joker and Isla. Another long gap ensued before Laila went by, then even longer ones before Toby and, at long last, Acaisse trotted home safely. We counted them all out but we didn't count them all back again. There were still two unaccounted for, one of whom being the favourite, Kai.

It transpired that Kai was one of three fallers in an eventful race. He came down when going well in third place about one mile from home. Jason Carver led him back; the horse was fine

but it transpired that the rider had broken his right collarbone. Charlotte Kemp emerged unscathed from her tumble on Carndonagh, who had slipped on a grass verge around two and a half miles into the race. Not so fortunate, however, was Jane Chivers, who had parted company from Alice shortly after the start of the race. Due to the heavily rutted area in which she came down, it was not possible to get a regular ambulance to her, hence an air ambulance was called and flew her to hospital with a suspected pelvic injury.

Tracey Corrigan was duly presented with the silver Kiplingcotes Derby trophy, while Richard Mumford again collected the runner-up's prize.

The story of the race is simply told. 'Prince' and 'Bob' went straight to the front and there they stayed, never seeing another horse. Bob led for three-quarters of the race but then Prince came through on the inside and took over. Racecourse rumours that Tracy was going to "take a pull" and throw the race to let her partner win proved unfounded.

"The two of us were clear the whole way," reported Richard. I led for three-quarters of the way. I didn't have much choice – the horse did more planning than me!"

It was a remarkable performance by Tracey, who revealed that she had been kicked by a horse in October last year, shattering the joints of her right knee so badly that it was thought for a time that the leg might have to be amputated. She was confined to using a wheelchair for four months.

"I've got so much metal and pins keeping it together," she said. "I was going to wear a red band around it because I was terrified of someone bumping into it."

As per last year, four-time winning rider John Thirsk had ridden the racecourse alongside them in a dress rehearsal a few days earlier. "You've got to do your homework," observed Tracey. "Competitions are won at home."

The full finishing order was as follows:

1st: Prince (a.k.a. Killary Bay) (Tracey Corrigan) 3/1

2nd: Bob (a.k.a. Calopocus) (Richard Mumford) 3/1

3rd: Mr P (a.k.a. Mad Professor) (Sam Osborne) 8/1

4 Captain Comanche (Katie Croft), 5 Clowance House (Patrick Chesters), 6 Joe (Margaret Curran), 7 Prima Donna (Angela Chomse), 8 Amadeus (Sue Taylor), 9 Hot Fuss (Meg Chapman), 10 Dee (Heather Buck), 11 Matilda (Jane Walden), 12 Blue (Emma Parkinson), 13 Bounty (Clare Tyler), 14 Beanie (Josephine Shepherd), 15 Joker (Fiona Davis), 16 Isla (Sarah Hampshire), 17 Laila (Lisa Elliott), 18 Toby (Stuart Ellis), 19 Acaisse (John Hudson). Did not finish: Kai (Jason Carver), Carndonagh (Charlotte Kemp), Alice (Jane Chivers).

(Unofficial) Distances: 10 lengths, a distance.

