

Corrigan wins again as Brexit comes to Kiplingcotes

Chris Pitt reports on the 2017 Kiplingcotes Derby...

Tracey Corrigan from Sawden won her third Kiplingcotes Derby in four years when Bob sauntered home 20 lengths clear of his nearest rival in the 2017 renewal of England's oldest horse race.

Her first Kiplingcotes triumph had come in 2014 on 'Willy', better known as former racehorse and point-to-pointer Willywont He. The following year she won it again on 'Prince', the *nom de guerre* of Killary Bay, a former Charlie Swan inmate on whom Nina Carberry had once won a Limerick bumper, and whom Tracey had later trained to land a 50/1 shock victory in a Catterick hunter chase.

Her mount this time was 'Bob', also known as Calopocus, who in his racing days had finished unplaced in three Irish bumpers for Philip Fenton but had since won a couple of point-to-points. Now a 14-year-old, 'Bob' had twice finished second in the Derby when ridden by Tracey's fiancé, Richard Mumford, but she took over the ride this time as Richard was away on business.

Run as always on the third Thursday of March, Derby day attracted its usual throng of enthusiastic supporters. The popularity of the event has certainly increased since Julia Bradbury's 'Countryfile' feature in 2011. Far more people have heard of it now, hence the presence of a bookmaker, a brace of portable toilets and the Outside Bar catering truck, which was soon doing a roaring trade, selling burgers at £3 each with proceeds going to the Kiplingcotes Derby race fund. The snaking queue rarely numbered less than 30 hungry racegoers.

First run in 1519 and originally called the Kiplingcotes Plate, it predates its more famous Epsom counterpart by 261 years. Indeed, it is remarkably close to celebrating a milestone anniversary, this being the 499th running. The 500 comes up next year, followed the year after by the 500th anniversary of the first time a group of sporting gentlemen raced their horses along the almost four-mile trek from the parish of Etton to the finish on Londesborough Wold. There wouldn't have been a disused railway station – or even a used one, come to that – along the route back then, but the rest of the course would not have been too dissimilar to that which the participants have to negotiate today.

A field of fourteen lined up for this year's race. First to weigh out was Bryan Rawstron from Stape, near Pickering, who paid the £5 entry fee – it used to be £4.25, the increase being blamed fairly and squarely on Brexit – to ride Two Pancakes, who had finished third once from six starts for Declan Carroll in his racing days. Bryan pointed out that he didn't stay beyond seven furlongs on the Flat, so three and a half miles might be stretching his stamina somewhat.

Another early arrival was Liz Shires, making her Kiplingcotes debut on her grey hunter Pinewood Egyptian Prince, a name that would not have permitted by Weatherbys owing to it containing more than the requisite eighteen letters.

They were two of eleven Kiplingcotes first-timers, with only three riders having previous course experience. One of those was, of course, Tracey Corrigan, another being Emma Sanderson on last year's third, Trumpstoo. The third of the trio to have tackled the race before was Becky Oxley on her skewbald cob Pudding, beaten miles when trailing home last of ten finishers twelve months ago.

Two who looked particularly fit were the grey eight-year-old Sterling, the mount of Cassy Room, and Irish sports horse Charlie, a 16-year-old chestnut gelding partnered by Nicky Burrows. Both would be well supported once the betting market was formed.

A trio of Cockerills, whatever the collective noun may be, arrived with their respective hunters, Dave Cockerill on Storm, Graham on Summer, and Helen (wearing distinctive yellow and black quartered racing colours) on Supreme. Enquiries revealed that Summer was the fastest of the three, with Graham thus expected to earn the family bragging rights.

The field was completed by a quartet of cobs: trace-clipped Tetley, the mount of Dawn Syes from Hull, the piebald Oz, ridden by Victoria Lill, Jack (with his distinctive three white socks), partnered by Lisa Soanes, and Bella, with Zoe Winter in the saddle. The latter three riders all hail from Cottingham and, along with their Hull-based compatriot, stated their intention to come home in unison.

On all known form, Bob looked head and shoulders above the rest and was duly installed the even money favourite. But, as is so often the case at Kiplingcotes, 'known form' can be usurped by 'unknown form', here-say and rumour. The on-course bookmaker Chris Johnson wasn't too bothered about the known unknowns, but was keeping a wary eye out for the unknown unknowns.

Sure enough, Bob eventually drifted out to 7/4 and then 2/1 as money came in for Two Pancakes, Charlie and Sterling (all shortening from 6/1 to fives) and Trumpstoo (in to 5/2 from threes). Those, then, were the big five from which the winner would almost certainly come.

Storm and Summer both traded at 10/1, while the third member of the Cockerill team, Supreme, drifted out to 25/1, along with the skewbald Pudding. Another drifter was Pinewood Egyptian Prince, originally put in at 10/1 but soon available at four points longer. The four cobs were all priced at 33/1, which may have been a touch flattering to their chances. The white-socked Jack evidently had his (highly optimistic) supporters and was shortened to 20/1 as a result.

As was ever thus, the horses were called into line shortly before 11.30 and the rules were read out by clerk of the course Susan Hillaby, 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 runners made their way to the start, while the crowd waited eagerly for their return. And waited some more, and then waited a bit longer.

When they eventually came into view, ‘Bob’ was seen to have a clear lead, his race already won when crossing the crossing the A614 Market Weighton to Driffield main road with just the quarter-mile strip of grass ahead of him.

Behind Bob came Trumpstoo, improving on his third-place finish in 2016, followed closely by a loose horse, scattering spectators as he careered along the tarmac road. Inspection of the number cloth revealed it was Two Pancakes.

It seemed an eternity before the next horses appeared, with the veteran Charlie running on to claim third, clear of Sterling in fourth. The Cockerills’ prediction that Graham would be the first of them to finish was borne out when he came home fifth on Summer. Dave would have finished sixth on Storm but was comprehensively outridden in the final hundred yards by Liz Shires, who managed to put Pinewood Egyptian Prince’s head in front of Storm’s almost on the line. A respectful distance back in eighth came the third of the Cockerill squad, Helen on Supreme.

After a long, long wait, Pudding duly completed in his own time, finishing ninth, which just left the Cottingham-Hull quartet on their respective cobs. True to their word, they finished as a team, passing the post with barely a length between them. Had BHA chief handicapper Phil Smith framed the weights for those four, he’d have been chuffed with the result.

In an otherwise uneventful race, it transpired that Two Pancakes and Bryan Rawstron had parted company in the closing stages, in a rutted part of the course near to the A614 road crossing. Two Pancakes was chasing Trumpstoo at the time and, despite the stamina doubts, Bryan was confident his mount would have passed his rival on the final run-in. The fall was described by those who saw it as somewhat spectacular but, happily, the rider emerged without a scratch and only a bit of East Yorkshire mud to show for the experience.

There was almost a more serious drama, however, when ten-time winning jockey Ken Holmes, the Lester Piggott of Kiplingcotes, came within an ace of being knocked over by the loose Two Pancakes as he approached the winning post. The prospect of the most successful Kiplingcotes rider of all time ending up in hospital was narrowly avoided, with just a jarred elbow resulting from the incident.

Having dismounted and given her mount the once-over, Tracey Corrigan was presented with the silver Kiplingcotes Derby trophy, while Emma Sanderson received the runner-up’s prize.

“My plan went to plan,” said Emma. “I should have pushed more at the beginning but I held on to him in a steady rhythm while I got through the worst bits.” Regarding the capsizing of Two Pancakes and his rider, she added “We were running equal in second and third early on and then I overtook him at halfway, so I didn’t see him when he came off.”

The winner led all the way and won easily. “I took it steady,” said Tracey. “I even slowed to a trot at one point, but I broke into a gallop near the end to give the crowd something to cheer. I could have won by a lot more.”

Next year’s renewal is likely to generate far more interest, being the 500th running of Britain’s oldest race. There could be a record number of starters. And perhaps Tracey Corrigan will be trying to win it for the fourth year in five.

The full finishing order was as follows:

1st: Bob (a.k.a. Calopocus) (Tracey Corrigan) 2/1fav

2nd: Trumpstoo (Emma Sanderson) 5/2

3rd: Charlie (Nicky Burrows) 5/1

4 Sterling (Cassy Room), 5 Summer (Graham Cockerill), 6 Pinewood Egyptian Prince (Liz Shires), 7 Storm (Dave Cockerill), 8 Supreme (Helen Cockerill), 9 Pudding (Becky Oxley), 10 Bella (Zoe Winter), 11 Jack (Lisa Soanes), 12 Tetley (Dawn Syes), 13 Oz (Victoria Lill).
Did not finish: Two Pancakes (Bryan Rawstron).

(Unofficial) Distances: 20 lengths, a distance.