

EDITORIAL

Miss Kate and Mr Kennedy

My father had a red Bedford van and as a kid I went everywhere with him in it. On the afternoon of 22nd November 1963 we had been to Colne in Lancashire to a bike shop to get some sulky wheels repaired. On returning home I opened the gate to our house and a woman who lived nearby said "they've shot Kennedy". It was of course held that everyone knew where they were and what they were doing when they heard that JFK had been assassinated. I was 9 and I can remember it as if it was yesterday. Kennedy was the most charismatic of men and has long been a source of good quotes. His line "think not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" is one of my favourites.

There seems to be in some quarters a "downer" on the BHRC. So this note is not to give you an "upper" but to tell you something about it. Just what does the BHRC do?

As the internationally recognised body for the governance of the sport of harness racing in Britain the core business falls into these categories:

Rule Book

The BHRC in line with a strict set of procedures keeps and maintains a Rule Book. It is the intellectual property of the BHRC, we hold the copyright of it and with express permission allow other Governing bodies to use it, the IHRC being the principal partaker. We do not allow the Wales and Border Counties to use it. It is aligned with the UET rule book as well as those of Canada, North America and Australia/New Zealand. In fact we work very closely with those bodies on our rules. To race outside of rules is termed flapping, a phrase coined I think from whip-pet racing where the lure was a towel "flapped" vigorously by the trainer.

Licensing

The BHRC issues Licences to the differing classes of licence holders who are then subject to the rules of the sport and permitted to participate. Licences can be denied with or without reason, suspended or revoked.

The Stewards of the BHRC together with the "advisory" Regional Stewards and licensed track stewards examine into racing and other matters and by way of hearing followed by decision making, interpret and uphold the rules current at the point of issue. Not many people like rules but without them order becomes disorder and many of us somewhat greyer than we used to be, can remember rules sometimes being administered in a very unruly manner. Of course the very word "unruly" stems from "without rules"! I don't like all the decisions either track or BHRC Stewards make and often voice my opinion. However my place as Chairman is to guide and advise, not dictate.

Racing Dates.

We need to know when and where racing is going to take place. Even the road racing guys need to know that its 5 o'clock Sunday morning at Six Hills or wherever. The allocation of racing dates to ensure good management of the sport is somewhat fundamental to what we do.

Drug Testing

As sport has developed so has the use of substances which are alien to the performer or at levels outside "normal tolerances". This is a sophisticated business...on both sides. Sometimes the desire to win outpaces the desire for sportsmanship or the well being of the individual. The BHRC carries out a controlled drug testing programme and works very closely at the very highest levels worldwide with those organisations at the cutting edge of this sphere of operation. Initiatives from the BHRC have been taken on board internationally, we have learned a lot from our partners and I would contend we have a world class drug testing operation. We will be seeking to bring in rules to

prohibit the use of high levels of Cobalt as well as working on other endogenous substances. There is always room for improvement in this area and we are seeking to improve. However I am always wary of people who say that we do too much integrity testing. On the other side of the coin I remember David Taff banging the drug testing drum and when we have the very first TC02 testing run, his horse tested at a level above the permitted threshold. Very interesting as they say.

Promotion

Once this was not considered core business. But we have embraced it and through IT/Social Media Channels we are making steady progress. Advertising is expensive and the best advertising medium is personal recommendation. However Social Media promotion appears to be effective, but are we receptive as a community? Do we continue and what else can we do. The BHRC has learned a lot from Ceredrotian in this area and we are very grateful to them.

Racing Services

In the Thoroughbred world this is handled by Weatherby's. In our world it is a moving feast but one where the BHRC menu offers excellent fare. The office produces a start sheet, following information from promoters which in simple terms tells you everything you need to know about a race and its participants. It can be used as the race card. It's take up is sporadic. We could go a lot further and the gesture has been made that we offer: Development of racing menu, taking of entries, setting up of races, framing of races, design and electronic delivery of race cards, taking of declarations. The vast majority of this would and could be done electronically. This would save promoters time and money. All they would have to do is pick up the race card from the printer and hand out/collect number cloths. Fifty years ago every horse who raced under Eden Valley rules had a number allocated at the beginning of the year together with a number board. Simple. The offer to promoters is that the BHRC helps them.

Dissemination of Information

Our magazine "the Calendar" is modelled on the Thoroughbred Calendar which just gives information. We have gone down the "Hoofbeats" "Trot" magazines route a bit and welcome articles, but you must be fed up reading what I write! Our website is instant and from writing this editorial to it landing on your mat can easily take three weeks. Should we go exclusively electronic?

But why do we do all this? Is there a better system? Do we need any of it? Suggestions please in writing before the AGM!

But to get back to Miss Kate and Mr Kennedy, Miss Kate heads our business development unit and talked to fellow Directors a few weeks ago about an "Elevator Pitch" an American expression encapsulating what you would tell someone whilst riding in an elevator (lift). One chance to make a good first impression, short sharp, to the point. I describe harness racing as a horse racing sport where the horse trots or paces at speeds just over 30 miles an hour pulling a lightweight cart called a sulky. A niche sport in Britain it is the worlds biggest form of horse racing, its true strength is that almost anyone can do it. I then ask the question would you like to be able to ride a Thoroughbred "up the gallops" if you are at all able bodied there is nothing to stop you training one of our horses. That goes down well, but I accentuate the positive. I don't criticise the sport, I don't dwell on the negatives and I won't be talking much about the racing date applications I have seen this afternoon, 22nd October 2014.

What would be my elevator pitch if asked what is the BHRC? I would say it is a not for profit organisation that governs harness racing having two paid employees, one full time and one part time. It is staffed with unpaid directors (the Council) who claim a contribution to expenses, give heavily of their time and try their best to do a professional job. The Committee is made up of promoters and representatives of supporters clubs all of whom are either involved

with horses or not far removed. All positions are democratically elected. Any licence holder can be involved at any level. They can vote via membership of a Club or Association (if they bother to turn up) and can properly put forward as well as influence rule changes. Not many sports allow participants to suggest amendment or rules. But we do.

So what is a licence holder? I could say they are a breed of die hard enthusiasts, who race not for what they get out of it financially but because they like the horses and the sport. If I was to nominate a “prime example” it would be Peter Addiss. A good bloke, a good horseman and a good supporter of the sport. He is brave enough to buy a horse and have a go. He does not whinge when beaten, nor does he brag when winning. In the words of Rudyard Kipling in the poem “If” he meets “with Triumph and Disaster, and treats those two impostors just the same”. Not a trouble maker but don’t trouble him either. And a man who first and foremost cares for his horses. The current “dope of fashion” (but not within these shores) Cobalt Chloride has to be administered in the measure “enough to stagger but not to kill”. There is no way Peter Addiss would allow anything like that to be administered to his horses. There are many Peter Addiss’s and these people always win through. The harness racing fraternity might be rough and ready compared to the fineries of Thoroughbred racing but do not underestimate them or push them too far.

We have so much to offer. The Peak Resort development of Rupert Carr near Chesterfield is making real headway. There is no reason why we will not have a top class 5/8th mile track in an unbelievable setting, with superb facilities and access in 2018. We have the bloodstock, we have the skill sets within our ranks to train and race these horses. But a vociferous few seem to be lacking in the “can do attitude”. So what can you do for your country? I used to know a girl who liked a few glasses of a red wine called St Emilion. It became known as attitude adjuster. Maybe some of us need a glass or two or maybe we need to wake up, smell the coffee and realise how fortunate we really are.

Gordon Garnett