

Stoneriggs Mystery

The Champion of Champions

This piece was originally written on 9th September 2017, before Stoneriggs Mystery faced the starter for the final time in the Crock of Gold Final at Tir Prince, and was used again in the June 2020 Calendar after Stoneriggs Mystery was voted "The People's Champion".

As was the plan heading in to the race, he retired from racing straight after the 2017 Crock of Gold Final, where he was stripped of his harness, as is the custom for high profile racehorses, in the winner's circle in front of the crowd.

Champions don't show up to get everything they want; they show up to give everything they have

Alexander den Heijer

Following nominations submitted by harness racing fans to the BHRC, Stoneriggs Mystery was crowned **Champion of Champions** from a shortlist of 10 top class pacers who have graced tracks all over the UK and Ireland across generations. The title was bestowed upon him as he received the highest number of weighted votes (the public was invited to submit their first, second and third choice favourite horses of all time, with points awarded for 1-2-3).

From the first moment that 'Mystery' burst onto the scene way back in 2009, he showed tremendous potential. The 11-year-old son of Village Jasper out of Stoneriggs Quality (herself a product of solid British breeding [*Today's Man-Monkroyd Mystery*]) won his maiden at York in an impressive 1.59.6. Then owned by breeders the Slack family from Appleby, Cumbria, and trained and driven by the champion duo Alexis & Rocker Laidler, Mystery went on to win a Grade 1 at Brough before wrapping up his 3YO season with a victory at Tir Prince in 1.59.5, finishing up unbeaten in his first three lifetime starts.

This electric inception to his career did not go unnoticed and he was subsequently purchased by David Morton from Larbert, Scotland, remaining in the same stable for his second season campaign.



A firm favourite with the stable (Elizabeth O'Neil photos)



STAGBI Breeding - Pedigree

Stoneriggs Mystery

Search

Enter horse name

Stoneriggs Mystery

Bay

Male

2006

England

Breeder: G. Arthur Slack, Appleby, Cumbria, England

Village Jasper 1994	Jate Lobell 1984	No Nukes 1979
	Village Jewel 1985	J R Amy 1970
Stoneriggs Quality 1994	Today's Man 1990	Abercrombie 1975
	Monkroyd Mystery 1981	Sabella Lobell 1980
		Abercrombie 1975
		Silk Stockings USA 1972
		H T Navy 1968
		Monkroyd Girl 1969

Photo courtesy of STAGBI



Winning at Boughrood (*Graham Rees photo*)



Winning at York (*Graham Rees photo*)

GRAHAM REES

Mystery carried on where he left off, winning heat and final at Appleby, before he first tasted defeat when finishing second to Adore Hanover at Ffos Las. He went on to have another 3 wins that year, taking heats of the major handicap finals at Musselburgh and Tregaron and a heat of the 4YO Championship at Corbieewood. Alas, the finals of all 3 eluded him.

In 2011, Mystery climbed to new heights, finishing in the first 3 in every single start that year. This included three wins on the bounce at the start of the season (York, York & Musselburgh, where he again won a heat of The Famous Musselburgh Pace, finishing third in the final).

His first foray into the Free For All ranks came in the Billy Williams Memorial Pace at Tir Prince, and it would become the first of three victories in the event

commemorating the founder of the track. His next win came in the Dark Rum FFA at Corbieewood, and he went on to win again twice at York off long trails in heats of the Daniel Welling Memorial and Dennis Leonard Memorial, finishing third in both finals.

In 2012, he went on a streak of four wins in top company to bag the York Championship Flying FFA, the Musselburgh FFA and arguably most importantly, heat and final of the pinnacle of FFA racing, the Crock of Gold. Not unbeatable, he suffered defeat at Musselburgh the day after his FFA victory and despite winning a heat of the Welsh Classic at Tregaron, was subsequently disqualified in the final. Undeterred, he bounced back to win his second consecutive Billy Williams FFA at Tir Prince and finished off the

season with a victory in the Anchor Inn FFA at York.

Mystery started his fifth season of racing with the same vigour as every previous year, winning firstly at Appleby and then at Pikehall. The cracks began to show however when he finished fourth in the BHRC European Pacing Classic at York and then third in a heat of the Crock of Gold, and he did not perform to his usual high standards in the final on the same night, finishing unplaced and bringing an early end to his season.

They say a change is as good as a rest, and 2014 hailed the beginning of the next chapter of Mystery's long and illustrious career as he moved to the Mick and Sheelagh Lord stables, where he has remained as a firm favourite to the present day. Despite finishing second on his first start of the season at



Tailed off at Appleby (*Elizabeth O'Neil photo*)



Heading home in front after clearing the field (*Elizabeth O'Neil photo*)

Corbiewood, he went on to record victories at York and Boughrood, before returning to Corbiewood for a match race against Astounding (the current track record holder) which was a thoroughly enjoyable head-to-head which drew in the crowds, and despite being the so-called 'invader', Mystery was a popular winner.

The following year, doubts began to creep in again as Mystery started the season with lacklustre performances at Appleby and Wolverhampton where he was unplaced in legs of the Battle of the Big Guns Series. *'Form is temporary, class is permanent'* has never applied more than to this horse, and Mystery put all doubts to bed when storming to victory in the Battle of the Big Guns leg at Tir Prince, a win which kickstarted an unbeaten run of 7 races including further legs of the series at Tir Prince and Tregaron, the Daniel Welling Memorial FFA at York, the Brian Thomas FFA at Aberystwyth and his third Billy Williams FFA at Tir Prince.

In scenes reminiscent of Kauto Star regaining his Gold Cup title, Mystery went on to win back the Crock of Gold, and when winning the Battle of the Big Guns leg at Corbiewood secured the title as the original 'Big Gun' in winning

the Standardbred Sales Company-sponsored series. Victory in the BHRC European Pacing Classic at York in the September finished off an amazing season with nine top class wins across the country.

Nobody told Mystery that at 10 he should be considering winding down, and he came back for the 2016 season with a bang when winning his first three starts (Tir Prince, Tir Prince & Appleby). Despite hitting a bad patch of form, he returned to winning ways at the Golden Anniversary fixture at Corbiewood when winning his second leg of the Battle of the Big Guns series, which despite his lesser form from the previous year, was enough to secure Mystery back-to-back Big Guns titles. He finished off the season unplaced at Tregaron as the next generation of Free For Allers appeared to be coming to the fore.

Bringing us to the current season, Mystery looked well beaten at Appleby on his first start of the season when faltering at the start of the Battle of the Big Guns leg, finding himself tailed off from the field with almost too much to do. With a lap to go he was still chasing the pack; and then Mick switched on the turbo and down the back straight he was airborne, clearing

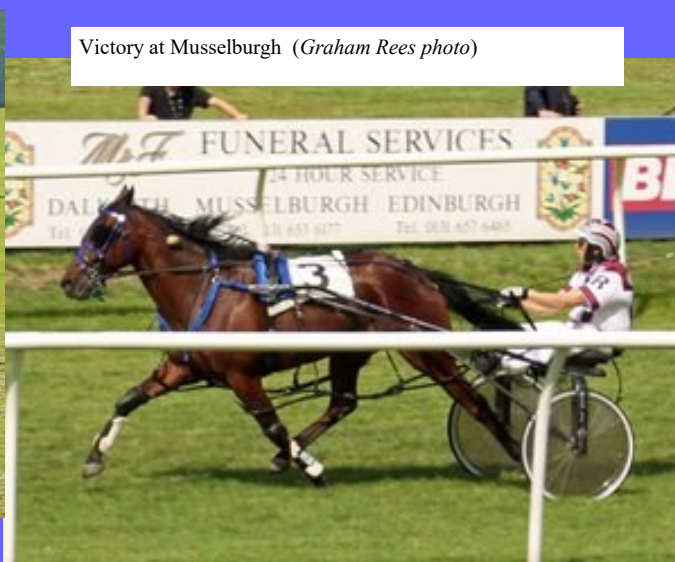
the field and coming home to cheers from a most appreciative crowd: Mystery was back!

Beaten in a thrilling finish into second at Aberystwyth by the star-juvenile-turned-free-for-aller Miraculous, Mystery returned to Tir Prince to win a heat of the Crock of Gold on the 15th July, coming three wide off the last turn to roars from the crowd. Despite three unplaced runs since at Tir Prince, York and Tregaron, tonight he heads into his last Crock of Gold with an outside chance. The fairytale ending to such an impressive career is not outside the realms of possibility, although he will face a field of younger contenders all vying to take the crown, including the aforementioned Miraculous and the superstar Evenwood Sonofagun who is chasing his fifteenth consecutive win.

I have been fortunate enough to witness the majority of Mystery's victories from trackside and I have felt every emotion there is to feel on this journey that he has taken so many of us on. I still recall vividly the sense of pride on that night at Tir Prince in 2015 when, after two below-par performances at Appleby and Wolverhampton, he romped to victory. I was one of the doubters, those who said 'maybe



Winning at Appleby (Graham Rees photo)



Victory at Musselburgh (Graham Rees photo)



Winning a heat of the Tregaron Classic @ Amman Valley in 1.57.9 (*Graham Rees photo*)



Winning at Pikehall (*Graham Rees photo*)



Winning at Aberystwyth (*Graham Rees photo*)

he's done, maybe now is the time to call it a day for the horse who owes nobody anything'. Smarty said to me, 'if he still has anything left, if he is still the Mystery we know, tonight is the night'. And that night was the night. That performance forced a lot of people to eat their words.

I also remember taking great umbrage in Ireland that same season when, before he was beaten by Bath Lane in the FFA, an Irishman who had been out of the sport for a few years asked me what would win the race. I didn't hesitate in saying Mystery, 'he's the best FFA horse in the UK'. After the race, the gentleman approached me, and mockingly said, 'the best you've got huh?'. I was furious. Mystery was never unbeatable, but over the course of so many years he truly was, and is, one of the best horses ever to grace the

track. To insinuate, based on one performance, that he wasn't that good, was an insult which I felt as personally as if he was my own horse.

And that has been the joy of Stoneriggs Mystery. We have all seen him race. We have all cheered for him when he has come home in front, and we have all commiserated with him when he's been beaten. We have all felt our hearts swell with pride when he has overcome the odds to win, and all suffered the disappointment when through his own errors he has lost a race. No champion is infallible, but in the face of defeat he has been picked up, dusted off, and gone back out there to compete. He has been a credit to both stables who have guided him on such a glittering and successful course, winning in every season he has raced from 3

through to 11, and to his owners, David and Wilma Morton, and all of their close friends and family, who have believed in him for all this time. With a record of 1.55.7, UK earnings of £55,442, and 43 wins from 79 starts in the UK, he has done everyone proud.

This is the end of an era. As we move into the Miraculous / Evenwood Sonofagun / Coalford Tetricks era, we must thank Mystery for his years of service to us and our sport. Good horses have been, and good horses will come, but there will only ever be one Stoneriggs Mystery. With his unique style of racing, his determination and heart, he has taken us all on the greatest journey over the last 9 years.

Sarah Thomas

Stoneriggs Mystery