

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE 2020 AGM

Well, here we are having had a season, not the season we planned this time last year but thanks to Amman Valley, Corbiewood, Tir Prince, York and the licence holders 2020 happened. Sadly, there was no grass racing, no Appleby, Musselburgh or Tregaron but the two, three and four-year-olds had their opportunities in the pacing stakes races, the free for allers had their crack at the Crock of Gold and other key races, and our growing team of trotters provided some great sport over a variety of distances.

A big debt of gratitude is owed to the tracks for investing in the future, with live streaming providing the stay-at-home audience with some wonderfully produced programmes, which is a feather in the cap for the tracks and sport, as the point-to-point fraternity have noticed us and, believe it or not, are taking a leaf out of our book and following suit with live streaming, in some cases using the production company employed by York.

Tied in with the live streaming, our sport has been seen and punted on in Australia by the likes of Ladbrokes, a massive step, even if the returns may be minimal initially.

Turning the clock back to the Spring, there was so much uncertainty over what was in store, while we must respect it was difficult for many to train their horses in the prevailing climate, others persevered, gambling on the commencement of racing coming sooner rather than later. Before we got to the track there was work to be done, work we had never encountered in the past - Covid protocols. An amazing team put together the protocols to ensure our racing went ahead within government guidelines, but it also came with a few other obstacles to negotiate such as convincing the Scottish Government and police that racing at Corbiewood should go ahead. Wales encountered the same issues but using our sporting business card racing was able to commence.

July 4th is a special day to our American cousins, in 2020 the racing season got underway at York after three successful qualifying days during June, we had to pinch ourselves when the horses scored up for the first race, it was actually happening, we were away, the wait was over.

Tir Prince, Amman Valley and Corbiewood followed, with racing continuing, extending into November.

Later in the year York bravely went ahead with the annual Camden Stud Sale, this saw some wonderful returns, leaving fans with a feel-good factor.

Recently, Trot Britain and a few licence holders made the trip cross-channel on a buying mission to strengthen the trotting programme, so we can expect to see some exciting recruits in the coming seasons.

Regarding the number of horses in training, it was inevitable the numbers wouldn't compare favourably with previous years. Over 370 horses got to the track, competing in 347 races, 281 paces and 66 trots. The pacers raced for £295,549, whilst the trotters ran for £200,000. In 2019 there were 76 race meetings and in 2020 46 fixtures went ahead - a great effort all things considered.

At the beginning of 2020 the BHRC recruited Heulwen Bulman as Secretary and I would like to go on record as saying Heulwen has been a magnificent addition to the organisation, with an

amazing dedication to duty, working around the clock, offering a personal service with tremendous professionalism.

May I also pay tribute to Hollie Sutcliffe, our Administrator, who this time last year kept our organisation afloat and has been a valuable asset with the day to day running of the office with Heulwen. Hollie and her husband Steve are about to add to their family, consequently she will be leaving the BHRC at the end of the year - we wish her and Steve good luck for the future, sending our gratitude to Hollie for her services.

A special mention must go to Julie, Kayleigh, Mandy, Sarah and Karen for the rejuvenated Calendar, gone are the days of boring notices in black and white format, hello colour and a first class read. Thanks ladies!

This year the BHRC have discussed surrendering the lease on the office as there seems very little point in going to the expense of retaining the building, however the Covid-19 situation has caused a delay in any movement.

We now find ourselves sailing through even more stormy waters, in fact we are in a precarious position.

The new directors and those continuing are all aware of the climate we are working in, its tense, as there is no Director Liability Insurance available to any of us.

Why?

I suppose a combination of events, perhaps procedures in the Rule Book not totally adhered to when inquiring into licence holders' breach of the rules? So, licence holders have to carry the blame as well.

It's not for me to judge, if we are to have a future, we need to draw a line under all of this and attempt to look for a lifeline.

Ask yourself this, no directors no governing body, no governing body then no respected regulated sport recognised by the ITA.

Okay, you can race, do you what you want, with no holds barred.

If you want that, we will all walk now.

What do you want, do you want us to regulate the sport or shall we just sit quietly in the corner, issue you your licences and let you get on with it?

When I set out to become a race caller, never did I think I would need a law degree, but it strikes me everyone in this sport is either related to or knows a good lawyer.

We must not run scared to police the sport but it really is now a case of walking on eggshells.

Threatening behaviour towards officials is unacceptable, this has taken many guises from physical abuse to verbal threats, some recently to one of our directors.

What is wrong with people?

There have been awful situations on the track which should have been policed in a more professional manner but were not, this has to change if we are to have any credibility, if we are to have a future.

The BHRC have been involved in several legal cases in recent years, we now face a very sensitive one concerning the tragic death of Peter Wallace which will be dealt with in the coming months.

There is also the ongoing Trot Britain governance issue with that organisation declaring independence on January 1st, a proposal which doesn't meet with favour with the current BHRC board of directors.

Incidentally, we have been invited to meet with Le Trot in the coming weeks.

Working together? The most overused, biggest joke of all, we are incapable of it.

On the subject of the business, the BHRC can offer many services, many tracks already use the online entry system, basically a centralised uniformed structure of entry should be in use throughout Britain, with declared drivers for every race and draws made in advance of race day.

Incidentally, I think the declaring of drivers in advance seems to have worked this year.

One major issue Heulwen has experienced has been chasing after licence holders to clear their horses, why is this happening????

We are currently looking at a new Handicap system, a working party has worked on the system which will be published on the Website in conjunction with a video explanation, narrated by Steven Powell. We invite all interested parties to look at it and submit their questions over the coming weeks before any vote takes place. The aim is to introduce the system ahead of 2021, subject to gaining overall approval. David John Edwards has kindly offered to manage the system in an effort to save on the costs.

Stewarding will continue to be reviewed, in addition to the Rule Book and there will be particular emphasis on the whip rules.

One person one vote will be revisited after this year's failed attempt at passing the resolution, it is to be hoped we can see this passed in 2021, with perhaps a constituency type model?

On a personal note, I hope we can strengthen the board with ten new candidates with perhaps fresh ideas, to work alongside the current experienced knowledgeable board members.

As ever the BHRC thank all licence holders and harness fans for their support, and it is to be hoped we can try and salvage the governing body, if that is what you want?

Thank you.

Darren Owen