

THE PACKAGE

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

John Lowe reveals he is as busy as ever combining his second career as a race-reader with a continued presence on the gallops

Former jockey still keeping a close eye on all the action

WHEN he retired from the saddle in 2000 John Lowe was widely acknowledged as one of the most reliable and durable jockeys of the post-war era and it is those qualities that have stood him in good stead for a busy life now, in which he rides out six days a week as well as working for the Press Association as a race-reader and project co-ordinator.

Growing up in a working-class family from Liverpool, the light-framed Lowe was considered too small to be a labourer so, despite no previous involvement with horses, he ventured south to Newmarket in 1965 for a three-week stay that didn't give the best first impression of racing.

"Three lads got killed and I went back home," Lowe recalls. "But then I thought it wasn't that bad and I started in the easter of 1966 with Jack Watts."

It was Watts who provided Lowe with his first winner in 1968 when Pally's Double won the Great Jubilee, then a valuable handicap at Kempton.

When Watts handed over the reins to his son Bill, who was moving to Yorkshire to train, he urged Lowe to make the move, advice the former rider describes as the best he's received.

Lowe's naturally light weight meant he was a regular in some of the sport's biggest handicaps and his cv includes wins in the Ayr Gold Cup and the Lincoln, as well the 1991

Cambridgeshire on Mellottie, who died last month.

"My only Group 1 win was on Goodbye Shelley for Steve Norton in the Prix Marcel Boussac," says Lowe. "That was the biggest race I won, but I got as much pleasure out of the likes of Mellottie. When he died the other week it was the end of an era."

"We thought he'd win the Cambridgeshire the year

before, but Barry Hills had one [Risen Moon] better handicapped, so we came back the following year."

Lowe's 33-year career ended in 2001, by which time he was already putting some of Sir Henry Cecil's Classic contenders through their paces as a work-rider.

Wince's triumph in the 1,000 Guineas in 1999 was a particularly proud moment for Lowe, who lives just outside Newmarket in Soham.

"She pulled very hard and all Henry said was she's got to stay," he says. "I spent all winter getting her relaxed so it was great seeing her win. I get just as much pleasure readying one in the morning as I did in a race."

Sleepytime and Reams Of Verse were other Classic winners to benefit from the tuition of Lowe, who regrets one horse not fulfilling his potential.

"The best horse I ever rode was Fleetwood for Henry, but he

was a silly bugger," Lowe adds. "He won once as a two-year-old and was working in the spring [of his three-year-old career] and put his foot in a hole and was retired."

"He never got the mares to cover, but he had Ferrari gears."

Lowe now

rides out three lots six days a week for Peter Chapple-Hyam, a role he combines with his work writing close-up comments for the Press Association.

"I wish I had taken a year out when I was riding to do the close-ups," says Lowe. "When you looked back at the replays you would only watch yourself. Now I watch all the riders and have learned so much."

"It took me a while, though. I thought it would be easy, but it wasn't and I learned a lot from the likes of Colin Roberts and Jonathan Neesom."

Racing has been, and still is, a big part of Lowe's life, even at the age of 60. "I still enjoy it," he beams. "I think I've got an affinity with horses and am never happier than when I'm on them."

James Burn



John Lowe (left) still rides out six days a week; above, with Mellottie after their Cambridgeshire success in 1991

I GOTTA HORSE

Dougie Renton on the enjoyment Beckermat, a surprise gift for his wife Donna and two of her friends, has brought to his shopping-mad owners

Connections banking on 'absolute legend' to fund spending spree

FOR a horse plagued by troublesome feet, it's somewhat ironic that Beckermat is owned by the Shopping, Shoes and Champers Partnership, who plan to spend their winnings on a shopping trip to America.

Bought out of Roger Fisher's yard for £16,500 by the late David Chapman for his granddaughter Ruth Carr in May of last year – a price Carr recalls as being "plenty" at the time – Beckermat has been admirably consistent for his new owners.

The nine-year-old was a standing dish in Group and Listed races in his younger days when trained by Fisher, but, now operating at a lower level, he's still showing that the fire blazes in his belly and has finished in the first three in 11 of his last 12 starts.

Under jockey PJ McDonald, his consistency was rewarded with a success last time out at Ayr on September 27, when he had to call on all of his experience and tenacity to see off Ingleby Arch.



Beckermat's owners (from left) Louise McManus, Linda Cunningham and Donna Renton with jockey Phillip Makin

But it was Beckermat's victory at the same course in May that persuaded Dougie Renton to purchase him for his wife Donna and her two friends Linda Cunningham and Louise McManus.

"I own Klynch, who's won four times for me this season, and Ruth recommended Beckermat and said he would provide us with a lot of fun, and he has," says Renton, who owns an oriental rug shop in Scotland.

"A couple of friends and I run small businesses and own horses and we thought it would be a good idea to get the ladies involved, so we decided to surprise them."

"He first ran for them on June 24 at Doncaster. When they turned up at the races and my wife looked in the paper and saw the silks, they couldn't believe it."

"They like to get dressed up and enjoy themselves when they go racing, which is where the name of the partnership comes from, and whatever Beckermat wins for them will go to paying for a shopping

trip to New York."

Unfortunately for Beckermat's connections, none of them were present to welcome him back into the winner's enclosure at Ayr because of work commitments.

"The girls went out to celebrate his win with some champagne, but we will definitely be there for his next race," says Renton.

"He's a bit of a legend really and hopefully he'll win another for them."

Carr adds: "He's been an absolute star. He's had bad feet this year, but my brother Richard, who is our farrier, has done a great job with him."

"He's had poor hoof quality, which we've treated with all sorts of different concoctions, and we had to get him some new shoes sent from America."

And now that Beckermat has found his perfect set of shoes, who's to say he can't win again before his owners jet off on their transatlantic spending spree?

James Pugh