

Thirsk gets the Derby again

Chris Pitt reports on the 2009 Kiplingcotes Derby...

John Thirsk, a joiner from nearby Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, repeated last year's Kiplingcotes Derby success on his 11-year-old mare Maisie, also known as Minster Fair, formerly a winner over hurdles for Alistair Whillans.

But it was only by the narrowest of margins that he beat the 2007 Kiplingcotes winners, Liz Stubbins and Charlie, a.k.a. winning point-to-pointer Rare Presence, in a thrilling climax to Britain's oldest horse race.

Traditionally run on the third Thursday in March ever since its inception in 1519, it takes place in the East Yorkshire Wolds, over a four-mile straight course comprising grass verge, tarmac road, muddy track and the long-abandoned Enthorpe railway bridge.

Nobody knows how many runners will take part until eleven o'clock on the morning of the race, by which time all the riders must have weighed out on a set of 1940s coal miner's scales. This year's renewal attracted 19 runners, comprising a mixture of Thoroughbreds, hunters, cobs and a skewbald pony.

Before they made their way to the start, clerk of the course Susan Hillaby recited the rules, which include the proviso that "any rider that striketh another rider shall win no prize".

With no big screen to relay pictures and no form of commentary, the 300-strong crowd braved the chill mid-March air and waited patiently for someone to shout "Here they come!", then witnessed a tremendous duel over the last quarter mile, with Maisie just edging home by a neck. Another winning point-to-pointer, John Rich, the mount of Sally Ireland, having her first ride in this historic race, led to the A614 Driffeld-Market Weighton road crossing before being overtaken by the first and second but stayed on at one pace to finish third.

Thirsk was presented with the winner's prize of £50. The runner-up received the entrance money of £4.25 per person, amounting this year to £80.75. So, as is often the case at the Kiplingcotes Derby, the winner got the glory plus a trophy and a horse blanket, but the second came away with more money.

The full finishing order was as follows:

1st Maisie (John Thirsk)

2nd Charlie (Liz Stubbins)

3rd John Rich (Sally Ireland)

4 Zak (Heather Buck), 5 Master Flash (Kelly Massey), 6 Bliss (Elise Bradley), 7 General's Lady (Laura Rafferty-Trow), 8 Maisie (Cathy Featherstone), 9 Colleen's Pride (Debbie Stabler), 10 Charlotte (Sharon Porter), 11 Leo (Dorothy Walker), 12 Grace (Norman Barratt), 13 Willow (Phil Walker), 14 Brother Sylveste (David Gough), 15 Foxglove (Kerry Clements), 16 Stella (Katie Mountifield), 17 Tom The Bomb (Holly Crisp), DNF: Rosie (Leslie Evans) unseated rider, DNF: Steelers Dream (Melissa Bean) slipped up.