

## **Woteva wins the Derby**

**Chris Pitt** *reports on the 2013 Kiplingcotes Derby...*

In stark contrast to the foggy conditions of twelve months ago, bright sunshine greeted a huge crowd that had made their way to Londesborough Wold on the traditional third Thursday of March for the annual running of the Kiplingcotes Derby, England's oldest horse race.

Sunny it may have been but there was still a bracing chill in the air, thus confirming that March 21st – the latest date the race can ever be run – was far from being the harbinger of spring, this year at least. The long drawn-out winter of rain and snow had rendered the ground conditions just about the most testing in recent memory. But none of that could deter the Kiplingcotes faithful, plus a host of first time visitors.

There is little doubt that Julia Bradbury's feature about the race on BBC's 'Countryfile' in 2011 made a huge difference in making people aware of its existence. Last year's crowd was bigger than usual, despite the fog, but this year's sunshine brought as large a crowd as had ever thronged the single-track road that leads to the winning post, estimated at between 800 and 1,000 strong.

With public parking having been prohibited on the grass verges for health and safety reasons, a free shuttle bus had been provided from nearby Market Weighton.

The catering truck was soon doing a roaring trade in burgers, sausage sandwiches, soup and tea, with all profits going to the Kiplingcotes race fund. And for the first time, a pair of portaloos was a much appreciated addition.

Last year had seen the presence of Doncaster bookmaker Chris Johnson, the first time a bookie had attended for over 60 years. Despite having shown a loss, Johnson was back again to try and recoup his money and attracted plenty of business from those who fancied a wager.

Another of last year's innovations was the wearing of number cloths – borrowed from the previous weekend's Holderness Hunt point-to-point at Dalton Park – thus making identification easy for those not sufficiently well acquainted with the riders' colours.

First run in 1519 and originally called the Kiplingcotes Plate, the four-mile race starts in the parish of Etton, close to the old Kiplingcotes railway station, and finishes at Londesborough Wold Farm. The course comprises grass verge, ploughed field, tarmac road, muddy track and the disused Enthorpe railway bridge, prior to crossing the A614 Market Weighton to Driffield road and finishing down a quarter-mile strip of grass.

John Thirsk, who had landed four of the last five runnings, did not have a mount this year – although he was in attendance as a race steward – while 2011 winner Sally Ireland was also

an absentee. That meant there was certain to be a new name added to the list of winning riders. Indeed, only two of the thirteen competitors had had previous Derby experience, the other eleven being Kiplingcotes first-timers.

They included those who were doing it for the fun, such as veteran Michael Hetherton, who was realising a “*long-held ambition*” and planning to hunt round in his own time on Trooper. Of similar vein was Stephen Wilburn on his 19-year-old hunter Ryan.

At the other end of the equine age scale, five-year-old thoroughbred May, boasting a US sprint-bred pedigree, was the mount of John Pearce, who had finished sixth last year on a horse named Dai.

Sue Taylor was reunited with Amadeus, fourth last year and the only horse to have run in the race before. Rosie James, wearing a hunting jacket and blue velvet cap, was hoping for a “*nice ride*” on her all-purpose horse Rory. Susan Archer – “*horse has no speed, rider is unfit*” – had similar aspirations on the 12-year-old hunter Connie Bear. Another looking for a safe round with no pretensions of winning was Alison Garner, riding Libby for charity on behalf of The Heart Foundation.

Those, then, were the long-shots, but there were half a dozen horses with realistic credentials. Three were described by their riders as hunters, but they were fast hunters and looked as if they meant business. The whimsically-named Eeyore had travelled from Stamford, in Lincolnshire, with his rider Geoff Bridges, who commented that he hadn’t come all that way just for the ride.

Itsy, a 12-year-old dressage-cum- hunter trial horse, was the mount of Aline Peat, who believed they could go well.

Data could be given a chance, if only by the fact that his jockey, Jason Carver, was the only one fully bedecked in racing silks, his ‘blue, yellow seams and sleeves, hooped cap’ colours standing out as the horses and riders assembled at the start.

There were three former racehorses in the line-up, two of them maidens. Seven-year-old Jingoism, by Belmont Stakes winner Empire Maker, raced nine times for Brian Ellison in Flat maidens, bumpers and a novice hurdle without once reaching the first three. He was partnered by Katie Hobbs.

Fourteen-year-old chestnut gelding Austin, who raced under the name of Invitado, is a son of Be My Guest and ran 18 times on the Flat and over hurdles. During his career he’d been ridden by such racing luminaries as Kieren Fallon, Graham Lee, Mick Fitzgerald and Richard Johnson, yet the best he could muster was a third place finish at Market Rasen in September 2003. Having been absent from the racecourse for nigh on a decade, he was making his racing comeback, partnered by Peter Dhillon.

But the horse with the most outstanding claims was surely Woteva, a seven-year-old Kyllachy mare who Nigel Tinkler had brought back to action after two years off to win at Newcastle last May and post placed efforts at Beverley and Nottingham. Woteva was the mount of Carolyn Bales, who works at Tinkler's Malton stable. The form looked strong and Woteva was installed as the 7/4 favourite, although it wasn't long before her odds contracted to 5/4. The presence of Tinkler himself and a good number of his stable staff told its own story.

In reality, Woteva should have been long odds-on because she came home alone, winning by what used to be known – until the advent of computerised distances – as a distance. Her winning margin was made easier by the departure of front-running Itsy, who still held a slight lead when slipping up with a little over two furlongs to run, but the result was never really in doubt in the race's latter stages.

May crossed the A614 in second place but tired late on as first Eeyore and then Data passed him in the last half furlong. Eeyore took second prize, five lengths ahead of Data, with May two lengths further back in fourth.

After a long gap, a quartet of horses came into view, with Jingo taking fifth place ahead of Rory, Austin and Trooper. Following another long gap the trio of Amadeus, Connie Bear and Libby came in, leaving only the well tailed off Ryan to appear some time later.

Happily, Itsy and Aline Peat emerged pretty much unscathed from their tumble. The horse suffered slight grazing above her right eye and off-fore but was treated on the spot by the vet.

Winning rider Carolyn Bales, 34, received the £50 first prize and was presented with the silver Kiplingcotes Derby trophy and an embroidered horse rug courtesy of race sponsors The Ship Inn. Afterwards she told reporters how she had won the race.

*"It was a challenging course with ruts and puddles," she said. "I can't believe I've won, they set off so quickly and were about 30 lengths in front of me but I took a different route from everyone else.*

*"It's nothing like riding on a racecourse. If you were 30 lengths behind you wouldn't make it up whereas here you can do if you go the right route. Everyone went for the ruts but I went for the field where it was better ground.*

*"The leaders went that fast early that they were tiring near the end. I knew the right way to go and the horse carried me the rest of the way. The other horse (Itsy) was in front but was tiring when she fell. I was just going past it at the time."*

Runner-up Geoff Bridges said Eeyore had *"tried hard but didn't have a lot left.*

*"I didn't think we'd come second, that's for sure," he said. "The leaders got the jump on us at the start. The third-placed horse (Data) was just behind me all the way. After the first road*

*crossing we started picking them off and once we got onto the track itself, those that had gone flying off at the start didn't have anything left. Ploughing through that mud is hard work."*

Fourth-placed John Pearce regretted that the thoroughbred he intended to ride was unable to run due to a chest infection but he'd made up his mind to give it a go with May. *"We've got to keep these traditions alive,"* he said. *"A great amount of effort goes into putting events like this on and we need to support them."*

Rosie James regretted not having made more use of Rory in the early part of the race. *"He had more left in the tank than I thought he would,"* she reflected.

Paul Dhillon was up there early on Austin but found the distance too far for his horse. *"I learned a lot about him today and he learned a lot about me,"* he commented. *"I wouldn't put him through that again now that I know what it's like but we'd never competed in any sort of race together before and for us it was a big, big step."*

Susan Archer, tenth on Connie Bear, was one rider for whom the testing conditions posed no threat. *"A lot of people said the going was horrendous but, by my standards as a hunter, it was fine."*

Despite falling in the closing stages, Aileen Peat said that she would be back to try again next year.

Disturbingly, rising health and safety costs threaten the race's very existence. Reports suggest its future is uncertain because money needs to be found to cover items such as signage, liability insurance and the hiring of race stewards.

Whereas Humberside Police used to control the busy A614 road traffic free of charge, cutbacks mean that they no longer attend, and they have requested that the race organisers work with the council to improve traffic and crowd management, stewarding and marshalling, in order to ensure public safety.

This year they had to use traffic lights and a private security company. Fortunately, they were prepared to do it for advertising purposes but if they request payment next time the bill will be £1,300, meaning that staging the race could cost £2,000.

Nonetheless, clerk of the course Susan Hillaby remains optimistic, saying she had received many offers of support, and every effort would be made to keep the race going, although she would welcome new sponsors coming forward.

The rules of the Kiplingcotes Derby state that if it is not run one year, it may never be run again. The race is now within sight of its 500th anniversary and it can only be hoped that it survives to celebrate this impressive milestone.

The full finishing order was as follows:

1st: Woteva (Carolyn Bales) 5/4 favourite

2nd: Eeyore (Geoff Bridges) 4/1

3rd: Data (Jason Carver) 5/1

4 May (John Pearce), 5 Jingo (Katie Hobbs), 6 Rory (Rosie James), 7 Austin (Peter Dhillon), 8 Trooper (Michael Hetherington), 9 Amadeus (Sue Taylor), 10 Connie Bear (Susan Archer), 11 Libby (Alison Garner), 12. Ryan (Stephen Wilburn). Did not finish: Itsy (Aline Peat) fell

(Unofficial) Distances: winner won by a 'distance'; 5 lengths; 2 lengths; long gap then 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> finished close up; further long gap then 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> finished close up; then very long gap before final finisher (tailed off).