

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Steve Dennis finds **Ollie McPhail** introducing youngsters to the delights of the sport

'I cover more miles than I did as a rider'

OLLIE MCPHAIL may not have enjoyed great prominence as a jump jockey but he stands out from the crowd now, being around a foot taller than the hordes of schoolchildren dressed in jockeys' silks that he chaperones around the racecourses of Britain.

McPhail is lead education officer for BHEST (British Horseracing Education & Standards Trust) and manages the Racing To School programme that seeks to introduce youngsters to the delights of the sport. During his time in the saddle he qualified as a plumber through Jets (Jockeys Employment Training Scheme) but has found his true calling as shepherd to a diverse flock.

"I really enjoy it, it's the perfect opportunity to use the experience I gained as a jockey and pass it on to the younger generation," he says.

"The idea is to teach children about racing while they're applying their numeracy skills to the situation – racing's all about numbers. The age range is from nine up to A level students and the vast majority have



Name Ollie McPhail **Age** 36

When at large 1994-2008

Best moment First winner at Cheltenham, riding 33-1 shot Paxford Jack in a novice chase

Other achievements Rode in three Grand Nationals, getting round on Camelot Knight in 2000

never been to a racecourse before, have never even been that close to a horse before.

"It's free for schools and all kinds of children benefit from the Racing To

School programme. We also go to yards and studs and into schools themselves – I do at least three events a week and cover about 120,000 miles a year; that's more than I used to manage as a jockey."

McPhail doesn't miss his riding days at all, says he had a good time as a jockey but knew it was time to move on, and reveals he goes racing more often now than he did during a career that brought him 130 winners. He began working for BHEST during his last couple of years – "Sometimes I did a double shift, helping out with the children in the morning and race-riding in the afternoon" – and called a halt to his career, in one piece, to pursue his new role.

Off the track his admin duties involve all liaison with the schools involved, while on-course he has freelance assistance from former jockeys Robert Bellamy and Jon Pritchard in the south and, on a full-time basis, Carrie Ford in the north.

And as far as recognition goes he's top of the heap, having become a household name to hundreds of grateful schoolchildren. Ask any of them for the name of their favourite jockey and Ollie McPhail comes in well ahead of the likes of Tony McCoy and Frankie Dettori.

"I get such a great buzz from it," says McPhail. Those who've seen the expressions on those excited children at the racecourse will tell him he isn't the only one.

I GOTTA HORSE

Allen Pope tells Peter Thomas about the welcome boost provided by Jakey

Blues clear at last for Chelsea fan

Horse Jakey Wins 1

Owner Allen Pope **Age** 65

Best moment Jakey winning on only his second start after a long and patient build-up. Also Right Step winning last year's City and Suburban and Wise Dennis scoring twice in Dubai

WHEN Allen Pope owned a horse called Wise Dennis, he was already fully aware of the ups and downs of supporting Chelsea FC (after whose impish midfielder the beast was named) and quickly had it confirmed to him that racehorse ownership was a similarly helter-skelter affair.

Dennis (the equine, not the human) had been bought with the proceeds of the exploits of a decent filly named River Belle, winner of the Group 3 Princess Margaret at Ascot in 2003, and he went on to boost the kitty still further by winning twice at Nad Al Sheba five years later.

Pope, however, was too busy suffering from malaria to attend the races in Dubai, so when he states that the last two years have been his worst in racing memory – worse even than the attentions of a savage African mosquito – you just know the 65-year-old must have been having some kind of losing run.



Allen Pope (left) with Jakey after his maiden win at Epsom last month

"The horses have been finishing last, last and last again," says the man who has had shares in horses for 20-odd years and funds his Turf habit by owning a Gatwick-based logistics company that serves Nigeria. "It got so bad that a few weeks ago I had to say to a jockey 'please don't come last' – and I was pleased when he came second last."

So, when Jakey crossed the line clear of his five rivals in the tote-pool Sir David Prosser Maiden Stakes at Epsom a fortnight ago at the rewarding odds of 10-1, he went unbacked by a man who has been known to enjoy a bet in his time.

Pope, originally from Clapham but more than 45 years with his clan in the Epsom area, fondly recalls a wholesale punt on a horse of his called Desert Reign on the same track in 2004, but the success of Jakey held

even greater satisfaction for the owner, as he watched it in the company of his six-year-old grandson, after whom the three-year-old son of Cape Cross is named.

"The rest of the family were watching from elsewhere, but Jakey and I were down by the winning post," he explains, "as I wanted to have a chat with the jockey, Richard Hughes, before he dashed off, to see what he thought."

"His first run at Kempton suggested he had a bit of zip about him and we were always hoping he was just a late developer, because for me it's always about the future."

"He may have one more race this year, on the soft going he likes, and we'll put him away after that as a progressive four-year-old for next year. We're always looking for a better tomorrow."



Gary Halpin: two winners from his first four rides

SCOUTING REPORT

Ronan Groome talks to **Gary Halpin**, establishing himself after a dream start was followed by a fallow spell

GARY HALPIN can remember everything about his first winner. Master Melody for his boss Kevin Prendergast at Dundalk in the middle of December, nearly two years ago.

He did exactly what he was told – drop in about fourth or fifth and don't go too soon. Those tactics led him to the front at the furlong pole with only one other challenger – an Aidan O'Brien-trained favourite, ridden by Joseph O'Brien.

It was what Des Scahill would call a 'ding-dong battle' inside the final furlong, but Master Melody dug in and stuck his head in front five strides from the line. It was only when a few jockeys congratulated Halpin on the way in that he realised what had happened.

He didn't have to wait long for his second winner. Two weeks in fact. Same horse, same course, same tactics. Two winners from four rides; a dream start.

But the life of an apprentice jockey is never a smooth journey and Halpin came down to earth with a hefty bump. He went into the 2012 Flat season in anticipation of a breakthrough, but he came out with a 0-33 record. "It was hugely disappointing," says the County Dublin native. "I was going up to Dundalk nearly every Friday night but couldn't get on a winner. After such a great start it was hard to take."

But Halpin remained patient, kept working hard and has made a minor impact this season with five winners on the board. The first of the five was aboard Maude Adams at the Curragh in April and it was an important one, the first winner of the season for Prendergast.

The second came just five days later

'I want to keep going and improving'

Name Gary Halpin **Age** 19
Total wins 7

Best moment Riding Maude Adams to win at the Curragh. To win at a Classic track was massive for me. It was also the first winner of the season for Mr Prendergast, which was important

Best horse ridden I rode La Collina in work before she won the Phoenix Stakes as a two-year-old. I've also ridden Dunboyne Express and Starbright, who would be fairly high up there as well

when Halpin was back at Dundalk to partner Indiana Charmer for Tracey Collins. Halpin describes it as a simple ride but it deserves more praise than that. He set a steady pace and kept enough in reserve to hold off all challengers in the straight. It was a canny ride for a 7lb claimer and one that got his name out there again.

"I just kept working hard and stayed patient. Mr Prendergast has been very good to me. He kept giving me chances and I owe a lot to him for that. It's a great yard to be at, with owners like Lady O'Reilly, Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum and Mr Vasicek.

"I'm happy with the way the season has gone. I just want to keep going and keep improving now."

Q&A 'You're always looking for that big handicap winner'

How did you get into the sport? We always had horses at home so that was my first experience. I spent a bit of time at John Geoghegan's yard before going to RACE [Racing Academy and Centre of Excellence] at the Curragh.

What are your ambitions for the season? I don't set goals or anything, I just want to ride as many winners as possible. Of course you're always looking for that big handicap winner that gets you noticed, like Colin Keane winning the Topaz Mile at Galway this year. If I could ride a winner like that next season I'd be delighted.

What are your strengths? I'd like to think I'm quite strong for an apprentice.

What are your weaknesses? Like any 7lb claimer, I need to get more tidy and neat in the finish. That would be the main aspect I'd like to improve on.

Which jockeys do you admire most? Declan McDonogh – the way he's so strong and tidy in the finish, he's deadly to watch.