

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

David Baxter catches up with **Ben Hitchcott**, who recently qualified as a farrier

No regrets over calling time early

THERE are various reasons jockeys quit the saddle, be it a losing battle with the scales or frustration at a lack of opportunities.

However, for Ben Hitchcott the decision was taken so he could start his next career as a farrier. Hitchcott was 26 when he made the announcement, shortly after riding Red Moor to victory at Bangor in 2006, but it wasn't on a whim.

"I packed it in six years ago and it had always been on my mind," Hitchcott says. "I didn't want to get to retirement age and not have a back-up plan, and knowing that it takes six years to train to be a farrier I thought if I'm serious I might have to pack riding in a couple of years early.

"My best mate, who I grew up with, shoes horses and he always said he'd train me. It wasn't a particularly hard decision, although I do miss the fun and banter and the excitement of race-riding."

During his time as a jump jockey Hitchcott progressed from being an amateur through to the professional ranks, riding his first winner aboard First Instance at Fontwell in 1999, and



Name Ben Hitchcott **Age** 32

When at large 1997-2006

Biggest moment Winning the Imperial Cup at Sandown aboard Ibal was a decent handicap to win, and being associated with nice horses like Iris's Gift, who I won a few bumpers on

also finishing second to Tom Scudamore in the 2000-01 amateur riders' championship.

As a professional, Hitchcott rode more than 100 winners under rules, with Jonjo O'Neill, Bob Buckler, Diana Grissell and Robin Dickin all employing his services.

Hitchcott has no regrets about calling time as a jockey, although the change of occupation did provide its own challenges.

"The first couple of years were quite

hard as being a jockey is quite a glamorous lifestyle, and then you go back to formal education and being an employee when on your apprenticeship," he says. "But the honeypot at the end was getting the qualification and being my own boss. That was the inspiration."

Becoming a qualified farrier takes time, with a year-long course at college followed by a four-and-a-half-year apprenticeship, but Hitchcott is reaping the rewards, with his fledgling business in Groombridge, near Lingfield, already thriving.

He says: "I've only been my own boss since September and I've got a mixed bag of clients. I look after hunters, dressage, point-to-pointers, and do work for David Phelan, who has a pointing and pre-training yard."

When not busy with the job, Hitchcott likes to go hunting with his own horses, but racing is never too far away, as he's the elder brother of Flat jockey Sam Hitchcott. While Sam is still busy in the saddle, spending the winter in Dubai, the pair talk daily with Ben able to draw on his own experiences as a jockey when required.

"Sam can let off steam to me if he needs to which I like to think helps him," he says.

"It's worked out well, I'm sure we would have been fine riding against each other, but being the older brother part of you does think the younger one should do what I tell him!"



Kevin Sexton: still has work to do on the use of the whip

SCOUTING REPORT

Jessica Lamb assesses the potential of pony racing champ **Kevin Sexton**, who is now with Jessica Harrington

WITH a champion jockey title already in the bag, Kevin Sexton was feeling a bit of pressure when he switched to the big league in April last year having already taken the 2010 northern pony racing and all-Ireland horse crowns.

He rode 75 winners during his time on the circuit and didn't look out of his depth on his first ride at Naas – until about three furlongs out. His mount, the blinkered Lago Indiano, dropped the bridle and was almost simultaneously squeezed back by horses on either side of him. With no drive in him, Sexton used his whip ineffectively and Lago Indiano dawdled to the very rear of the 18-runner field.

The Fahey family, who had taken him on, clearly had words following that ride and five months on, riding Seamus Fahey's Solaras Exhibition, there was drive and no whip as the combination registered a one-and-three-quarter-length victory, which was Sexton's first under rules.

Sexton says: "He won easily enough. It was so straightforward. We sat in behind and when I started pushing him out hands and heels he really picked up. I kept going right until the line. It was really great to get the winner for Seamus as I'd learned most of my trade there. He and his brothers have really helped me."

The 18-year-old hails from Nurney, near the Faheys' base in Monasterevin, County Kildare, and still lives in his home town despite moving on from the Faheys to Jessica Harrington.

He has continued to improve,

Pony graduate progressing at pleasing rate

Name Kevin Sexton **Age** 18
Winners ridden 3 Flat, 2 jumps
Best moment Riding my first winner Solaras Exhibition at Fairyhouse
Best horse ridden Citizenship

chalking up two further wins on the Flat, including on decent hurdler Citizenship at the Killarney festival in July, and two over hurdles in the past three months.

Thanks to his pony racing and Flat experience, Sexton's judge of pace is top class and he always seems to ride his own race regardless of what others are doing around him. If that means losing or gaining places, then so be it.

However, he still has work to do on his use of the whip. When it comes out, it doesn't often get put down and he's less than slick pulling it through from side to side.

He has yet to ride in a chase, but his balance over hurdles suggests the transition will be no issue and his ability to easily claim 7lb off bottom weight of 9st 10lb should provide him with plenty of opportunities over the Christmas period.

I GOTTA HORSE

David Carr speaks to **Tony Bult**, who is finally reaping the rewards of ownership

Sitting pretty thanks to power of Pink

Horse Maggie Pink **Wins** 2

Owner Tony Bult **Age** 68

Previous horses No wins from three horses

Best racing moment Maggie Pink's first win. "On Racing UK you can see me, Mick [Appleby], my son and the lad Jamie going berserk right on the winning line – you'd think we wanted locking up!"

ANY builder knows that nothing worthwhile can be achieved overnight. Any successful job needs plenty of time spent working on the foundations first.

After 48 years in the trade, Tony Bult has acquired the perfect philosophy to deal with the ups and downs – normally downs – of racehorse ownership.

"You have got to persevere, keep trying," he says. "Whatever you do, you don't give up after the first time."

Which is why he is still working in a physically demanding profession at the age of 68, funding a habit he did not dream was possible when growing up in Long Eaton, Derbyshire.

"Watching Mill House and Arkle slugging it out got me into racing," he recalls. "It's the horses who keep me working – if I stopped I don't



Tony Bult with Maggie Pink after her victory at Wolverhampton

think I could afford one."

Previous forays into ownership reaped scant reward but an advert in a local ad mag – the pink edition, hence the name – led to Maggie Pink.

"It was for another horse who didn't look strong enough to me," he recalls. "But he had three foals and she stood out – she looked like a princess in the middle. So I brought her back."

Then followed two years intense home rearing, as Bult remembers: "I was hay feeding right through the year – I used to stand with her as I had a showjumper who would pinch her food."

"With the summers being so dry and the winters so cold, it was probably the worst possible time to bring a foal up in a field so I had to be there for her every day and overnight."

After which trainer Mick Appleby took over. "She was weak," Bult says. "She had a nice cruising speed but

nothing at the end.

"We sent her to a place near Leicester, which has the most brilliant grazing, and in the wet summer she filled her face full of the best grass you could possibly see. It seemed to transform her."

As the filly proved by winning on her comeback at Kempton, where a 20-1 starting price did not mean she went unbacked.

"I had every confidence and I was pleased to see her win, I'll put it that way," Bult says coyly.

"It was brilliant coming back into the winner's enclosure. All those years I'd never had a sniff and all of a sudden I had one that could win."

And win again, as she did at Wolverhampton last month. Not bad for a one-time weakling, whose owner admits: "When Mick first came to look at her in my field, she was with my showjumper and I said: 'Don't laugh at her when you see her'."