Coaching and advice: the invaluable services of Jets

‘There is a lot of personal sacrifice as a jockey. You need all your mental strength and the transition takes time’

Dale Gibson

‘With Jets I coordinated time off rather than sitting on my arse’

Mark Bradburne

ABOUT 800 jockeys have used the Jockeys Employment and Training Scheme (Jets), the not-for-profit organisation set up in 1995 to help them plan and achieve a secure future. Never before has there been a wide-ranging programme of career advice and new-skills training to assist jockeys in gaining further employment.

Funded in the past by jockeys’ prize-money contributions plus additional funds from the Injured Jockeys Fund, Jets has recently been granted charitable status.

‘I think Jets has legitimised second career choice,’ says general manager Lisa Delany, who recently completed ten years at the helm. ‘Jets had been going successfully for a number of years before I came on board but one of the things I wanted to make was a culture change, to educate younger jockeys coming into the sport to encourage them to look to the future. I think that’s been hugely successful.

Jets offers number of services from career coaching and advice to training in key skills like IT and media broadcasting, how to make job applications and interview technique, plus grants for individual training courses; it also offers potential employers a database of candidates.

‘Every professional athlete faces the same transition, so we try to put a positive spin on the process, to show that it can be achievable,’ adds Delany.

‘We try not to be heavy-handed because career transition is difficult enough as it is but if you retire at 30 or 35, you’ve got 30 years, so obviously it is a very big deal. The change can be much less of a big deal if you plan for it.

Vocational training is expensive, and Jets – which can call on a multitude of successful jockeys past and present – takes up a significant proportion of such financial burden. ‘A jockey with a degree is very much an exception and in some cases they don’t have GCSEs,’ she adds. ‘We can help them with night school courses and college courses and things like that as well – we’ve got more applications than ever now. We get young conditional jockeys doing courses in things like plumbing. They see it as an essential move.

Although Jets has come a long way from its earliest days, it can still get flak in some quarters, as PIA chief executive Paul Struchers explains. ‘Jets sometimes gets criticised for effectively taking jockeys out of the industry,’ he says.

‘That’s pretty easily dismissed though. If you’re growing to stay in racing and if you have no aspirations to become a trainer or anything else – are you supposed to ignore them?’

Former PJA chief executive Michael Caulfield vividly recalls a stigma attached to Jets when it started. ‘I remember the first meeting in the north-east,’ he says. ‘One of the jockeys asked for the curtains to be drawn so no one could see inside in case they thought their bottle had gone! They didn’t want anybody to know they were there and I understood why at the time. But when I look back at my time in racing, I think of Jets as one thing we got right.’

Injury ended the career of Mick Fitzgerald in August 2008. ‘One of the great things about Jets is it makes it allowable for jockeys to think about a career after racing,’ he explains.

‘There used to be the old thing that if you were thinking about what you were going to do when you finished riding, then you weren’t committed to the job.

‘People were almost afraid to say they were planning for the future but now we’re very lucky to have what I feel is certainly one of best education programmes for jockeys coming through, maybe to start them off to media training that I did as part of one of the Jets schemes. I think it’s a massive help.’

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Dale Gibson

CASE STUDY

MARK BRADBURNE

Cheltenham Festival-winning jockey Mark Bradburne, rode out of his career at the age of 35 in December last year to embark on a new life as an electrician, having retrained during two spells on the sidelines through injury.

‘I was lucky because I found something that I wanted to do,’ says Bradburne, who rode more than 350 winners. ‘Basically, I decided to retire before things got too bad rather than somebody making the decision for me. I was getting plenty of rides but I’d got to the stage where the quality wasn’t really what I’d hoped, so I thought it was better to stop than to start retraining to game.

‘With help from Jets I actively coordinated my time off rather than sitting on my arse. I was always a very vocational sort of guy, so this suits me fine.

‘You’ve got to provide for the family,’ he adds. ‘I’ve got two small children and you’ve got to pay the bills. I love my job but there are times when I am stuck up in an attic with all sorts of muck on me that I think I’d rather not be there, but you’ve got to do it.

‘There are two things I miss, though. One is the adrenaline going on me that I think I’d rather not be there, but you’ve got to do it.

‘The second thing is the camaraderie. I used to go to a lot of fun with the boys on the building site but it’s not quite the same as the weight room where you are all going into battle every day.’

A life after racing – recent Jets graduates

Working in racing
Betting industry: Nathan Horrocks; bloodstock agent: Colin Shadbrey; jockeys’ agent: Sam Strong; race planning: Ben Swarbrick; racing education: Ollie McNulty; racing presenter: winner: Jason Weaver

Working in equestrian industry
Farriers: Liam Cooper; equine dentistry: Frazer Houston; horsefed sales: JP McNamara; saddlery: Robert Biddulcombe

Working (or running their own businesses) outside the horse world
Car washing: John Bramhill; electrician: self-employed: Mark Bradburne; estate agency: Rupert Walkey; firefighter: Alan Daly; gaming machines/self-employed: Paul Feehan; professional cook/chef: Gillian Arnold; sports massage therapy & fitness coach/self-employed: Nathan Horrocks; tree surgery: Steven Harrison

Further education/degree level

Compiled by Richard Williams and Daniel Hill

Googling a runner

Rex Whistler 5-40 Wolverhampton

The British artist, designer and illustrator (1905-1944) is perhaps best known for his book illustrations, particularly those that appeared in works by Evelyn Waugh and Walter de la Mare. He also achieved fame for his murals and trompe l’oeil paintings in the baroque tradition. He did many portraits of his close friend Lady Caroline Paget and others in London society such as Cecil Beaton and Edith Sitwell. He produced posters for Shell Petroleum and Radio Times and made drawings for Wedgwood china based on drawings he made of the Devon village of Clovelly.

Easy as 1-2-3

1 Who was the last French-trained winner of Ascot’s Coral Hurdle? 2 What is the name of the £2.5 million half-brother to Authorized? 3 At which Worcestershire point-to-point course is the Lady Dudley Cup run?

Recognise me?

The List

Five facts about Admiral Ros

1. He was elected a steward of the Jockey Club in 1836 and undertook a mission to clean up racing.
2. In 1850 he published The Laws and Practices of the Turf
3. In 1851 he devised the weight-for-age scale.
4. He had a well-known dislike of jockeys, owing to their reputation for cheating, and refused to dine with a jockey at his table.
5. He died in 1877 at the age of 82.

All mixed up

Rearrange the letters to reveal the name of the jockey who this year won the Grand National on Neptune Collonges.

Bald Car Joy (5.5)

Answer on page 82