

TOAST TO THE 254TH GIMCRACK DINNER: MARTIN TEDHAM (OWNER)

My President, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen...

"How on earth did I get here?!"

When Declan rang me to confirm he'd declared Lifeplan for the Al Basti Equiworld Gimcrack Stakes on Friday, he confidently told me he would win the race.

What he forgot to mention was that the Owner of the winner is expected to give the opening speech at this dinner. Poor communication, Declan. VERY poor communication.

Now, while the win itself wasn't a surprise... this speech most certainly was.

As I looked down the list of previous speakers — Sir Alex Ferguson, William Haggas, The Honourable Harry Herbert, The Lord Grimthorpe... to name a few — I very quickly realised something.

I was the only person on the list I had never heard of

I grew up in a small town called "The Muckle Toon," better known as Langholm in Dumfries and Galloway. One of six children, the expectation was simple: you went into the cotton weaving industry.

Horse racing felt a million miles away.

But we did have our own competitive sport — pigeon racing.

With my older brother Albert, we were actually quite successful.

No training fees, no jockeys, stewards were great, and so was the prize money ... well... about the same as some Class 2 handicaps. But long-term, pigeon racing was not for me. By a combination of hard work and a lot of luck, I found myself owing businesses in the South.

Suddenly, the Sport of Kings was in my reach.

My first horse came from the Horses in Training Sales at Newmarket.

I had only gone there to meet a good friend of mine, Steve Ryan for a drink.

I was drawn in and bitten by the bug.

The jumping game appealed to me. Over the years I had enjoyed some great success. Including the victory of Sky Pirate winning the Johnny Henderson Grand Annual at the Cheltenham Festival in 2021.

But I never forgot my roots... or my family. And that is how Lifeplan came to win the Gimcrack.

Many years ago, my brother Albert was diagnosed with diabetes, which changed his life dramatically. While he became almost a hermit, he found joy in watching racing on the TV and having a daily flutter. At the start of 2024, he was rushed into hospital and we all feared the worst.

Somehow, he battled through the night. The next morning, I decided we would buy a couple of Flat horses — something to give Albert purpose, something he had always dreamed of.

The first call went to Declan:

"Find a horse for Albert. Take him on the journey. Give him something to look forward to."

Albert would receive weekly calls from Declan on how this young horse was progressing to take him on the owners journey you get with yearling.

And it worked. Albert had something to live for again. BUT! As a family we are a very competitive

And I did not want Albert to have it all his own way. So I contacted Alan King — a true Scot — and asked him to buy me another horse.

My sole aim was to beat Albert's horse. That was the plan. So Albert actually had two horses to follow now — Lifeplan and Spyce.

While the meaning behind Lifeplan is obvious, "Spyce" is named after a very good Italian restaurant in Wiltshire where Mr King and I have spent many a happy hour... or six.

Strangely, both horses turned out identical — colts, no markings, nothing to tell them apart except our dreams... Both, Declan and Alan gave us a positive reports, it looked like we had 2 horses with potential.

Lifeplan made his racecourse debut in a Novice at Thirsk and made a winning start at 5/1 — imagine the joy that gave Albert.

So, both horses found themselves at York on that Friday, in August.

Lifeplan in the Al Basti Equiworld Gimcrack Stakes, Spyce making his debut in the British Stallion Stud EBF maiden stakes later on in the card.

Thirty-six of us travelled to York races, including Albert with high expectations.

Kingy had told me Spyce was the most expensive horse he had ever bought and he was working well and whatever he achieved that day, he would improve.

Declan, had already told me and Albert that Lifeplan would win the Gimcrack Stakes.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Lifeplan duly delivered and gave my family the greatest day we've ever had. Not even Roger Hart mentioning this speech in the winner's enclosure could spoil it.

Family members who had never been racing before were in tears;

ITV, Racing TV and even Arabic TV wanted to speak to me.

Lifeplan had won the Group 2 Gimcrack Stakes.

I didn't think the day could get any better.

But then Spyce made an incredible debut to finish second just under a length behind the Aidan O'Brien trained winner with odds of 28/1 — splitting horses owned by Magnier, Tabor & Smith and Wathnan Racing. Not a bad afternoon's work, for a horse still learning his job

Leaving York in very high spirits we headed to Cheltenham to throw a party to end all parties. Sky Pirate won at Cheltenham Festival with Covid restrictions, but there were no restrictions this time.

We partied till dawn. My motto: "Win or lose, we'll be on the booze." So that, ladies and gentlemen, is how I ended up here today. Lifeplan will return next season.

Spyce has since won his maiden at Yarmouth and finished fourth in the Group 3 Zetland at Newmarket.

Honestly... What a year. Should I retire now?

With a strike rate of 60%, I'm doing better than Coolmore and Godolphin —

The good news is that both horses will be back next year along with Albert and me.

I still dream that Spyce might one day beat Lifeplan... although that looks unlikely.

The main thing is that Albert is living his dream in this wonderful sport of ours, at least one dream has been realized and his health is much better.

Our pigeon-racing days are behind us forever

There you are, to Alan King I say:

“No, we didn’t require subtitles to understand this speech.”

To William and the entire team here at York, thank you for giving my family the best day ever.

Everything at York is top class — the racing, the prize money, the owners’ experience.

To your sponsors, thank you for your support.

I also want to thank the stable staff up and down the country — the backbone of our industry.

As a yard sponsor, I see firsthand how hard they work.

I’m delighted that Chloe Black, the groom responsible for Lifeplan, is here this evening.

And finally, thank you to my jockey, Zak Wheatley, also here tonight.

I know what this win meant to him.

Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you now to raise your glasses...

to the health of British Racing —

and to Lifeplan, winner of the Al Basti Equiworld Gimcrack Stakes.