

Speech by Mr John Wallinger to 253rd Gimcrack Dinner- Tuesday 10 December 2024

Madam Chairman, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What an auspicious day to make a speech – the shortest afternoon of the year - not yet the shortest day, but from now on we can start to look forward to warm summer evenings!

I should really open by saying that I am a fraud – all I have done is buy into a horse that can, luckily, run a little quicker than some others! The last winner I bred was about 50 years ago. Also, in my mid-80s, my memory is pretty unreliable, but then I never was one to let the truth spoil a good story.

Racing. Currently there is absolutely no visible real government **commitment** to racing. I learned a proper lesson about commitment some 50 years ago. I was in my San Francisco office and went down Silicon Valley to Palo Alto, for the American Electronics Association's annual gathering.

They had a good system. It started with a plenary session, with each technology company (from listed companies through to start-ups) having 1.5 minutes on stage, then a bell rang and the microphone was switched off, so they couldn't hog the stage. (You probably all hope William Derby has set up something similar for me!)

The tech companies competed to convince all the money (the audience - investment banks, brokers, angels, start-up specialists) to come to visit their break-out rooms to find out what really made the company and its management tick. One company, which made a type of cling film for skyscrapers, which kept the heat out or in and various rays in or out – I can't remember the detail, but I do remember the presentation. Involved vs Committed story.

So, we have no government commitment, think levy discussions, and then of course it's all impacted by the lawyers – not my solicitor, but the legislators. Lawyers don't basically do things; they just stop other people doing them. Legally, everything has to be black or white, and I have always believed most everything is somewhere in between. The law makes us all liars. When did you last try to buy something online, and that rotten little box comes up stopping you actually buying it, until you have ticked it to confirm you have read the Terms and Conditions? We all tick it. We're fibbers!

The Disciplinary Panel is now called the Judicial Panel. Does that mean only lawyers should apply? Some of the results they deliver do seem pretty amazing. When is a hit with a whip not a hit?

It was originally to be a re-hearing of the racing incident. It's now a lot slower and a lot more expensive - rather like a taxi, lawyers' meters keep ticking.

When I was on the Disciplinary Panel, we used occasionally to break the rules in favour of Common Sense, which, almost by definition, the law sets out to kill. Ed Dunlop has just had a horse test positive for cocaine. Calls from some of the Regulariat for the testing of lads. Think of the cost and bureaucracy. It's happened before anyway. Cocaine and Apprentice stories.

I'm really making a plea for the application of Common Sense.

And so, happily to York Racecourse.

I have some previous at York. I once owned a lovely horse who ran in the Juddmonte. He had been beaten a very short head in the Prince of Wales at Ascot and had been fourth in the Eclipse. Sadly, he came last but one here, but when we got him back to P T Walwyn's yard he was found to have a good working temperature.

Much more recently, I also owned a toenail in a filly called Achelois, trained by one Andrew Balding. She ran three times at York, the first time coming third in a fillies' handicap, then coming second in the John Smith's Cup, and finally winning the Lyric. So, very happy with York!

On to Cool Hoof Luke, whom you've seen on the film.

I saw a picture of him in the Park Stables mag. He'd been very well bought by Emma and Andrew Balding, so I rang Anna-Lisa to ask if he was sold, and, if not, could I go and see him.

She said fine, he's not sold, so come and look, **but** the team were all very taken by the darts final and Luke Humphries came originally from just up the road from the yard. He is known by the Press as Cool Hand Luke after the excellent 1967 Paul Newman film, and the lads wanted to name the horse after him, and did I mind?

Up I go and I really like him. For me, he had bags of charm; I know nothing really, but I do like to look a horse in the eye. Anyway, the lads called him Cool Hoof Luke. Am I going to upset them by moaning about the name? Of course not. I want them on side.

A Yorkshire aside, why was the darts player called Luke? I read somewhere that his father is a passionate Leeds United supporter and Luke is an acronym for Leeds United Kings of Europe (must have been in the Don Revie days!).

When buying a 2-year-old, a realist hopes for a late-year run on an AW track and maybe win a maiden and even a handicap at three, if you are lucky. That's certainly what I expected.

Anna-Lisa rings me in May (!!) and says 'The trainer wants to run him'. So off he went to Chelmsford City to contest an Oxymoron (a maiden in Essex). Despite failing to get out of the stalls fast, then getting bumped and boxed in and having finally to go round horses, he still wins, beating Brian, who ran in the Mill Reef at Newbury and is rated about 98.

Just thrilling! A bit of peace and quiet now, I thought! Maybe a little conditions race at Salisbury? No way. Anna-Lisa is on the phone again – he (that's Andrew, by the way) wants to run him at Ascot! You could probably hear my jaw hit the floor here in York! So out came the penguin suit and I polished my black toppers and set off to Ascot. Oisin was retained away, so Silvestre de Souza rode him, and, having just cruised to victory on Charyn, leading all the way in the Queen Anne, Andrew's riding instructions to him were, 'Just do the same again'. He bloody near did.

He was drawn in the car park (not a joke at Ascot) – 23 of 23. It was heart-attack country for me, but he was beaten $\frac{3}{4}$ length into 4th behind Rashabar, who went on to be an unlucky

second in the Morny at Deauville, and then came second in the Jean-Luc Lagardere, behind Camille Pissarro, whom you saw in the Gimcrack film, we both beat at Ascot.

The same call again from Mrs B, to say Andrew wants to run him in the Group 2 Vintage at Goodwood. Draw? Yes – 8 of 8, which isn't great over 7f at Goodwood. Oisin had to decide whether to tuck in and suffer, and you really do - I stewarded for many years at Goodwood (one of the four British courses with none of the letters - r,a,c or e, - in their name) and the bad luck stories up the inner are endless - or else you go round the whole field and make the running. He opted for that, but the horse got revved up and over-raced. Oisin beats himself up about that, but 20/20 hindsight is much the easiest way to ride a race.

I was still thrilled, placed in another Group 2. Perhaps he was for real!

Roll on August and Anna-Lisa says we should come to York for the Gimcrack! I always regard that as a Group 1 in all but name, very generously sponsored by Malih Al-Basti. Unfortunately, my wife had a full knee replacement, so I couldn't come up to watch, and had to get young Bannister to sub for me as the owner. Anna-Lisa tells me he behaved himself!

Three of us sitting in front of the TV, my wife, myself and a racing neighbour. Tactics were very different this time, as you will have seen; held up and hoping for a gap, which usually comes. I thought the Godolphin horse, which subsequently won the Middle Park and the Dewhurst, the Cartier 2-y-o of the year, and drawn in the next stall to us, was going to come and get us, but he didn't gain an inch in the last 100 yards.

Lots of noise in my house during the race, but there was absolute silence just after the line, as we were trying to digest what we'd just seen!

He's not been out since the Gimcrack as he did a joint a bit, pulling up after a piece of work ahead of the Mill Reef. Given the time of year, why take on Group 1 horses in what was rapidly becoming terrible ground, although I sense that Andrew would have loved to have seen him in the Mill Reef.

But then, that is what this racing game is all about, isn't it. Hope, anticipation, pain and great joy. It's what we all do it for. And we have the most diverse racing in the world, which is, I guess, why people from all over keep coming here and enjoying it.

I would like to propose the good health of British Racing.

Thank you.