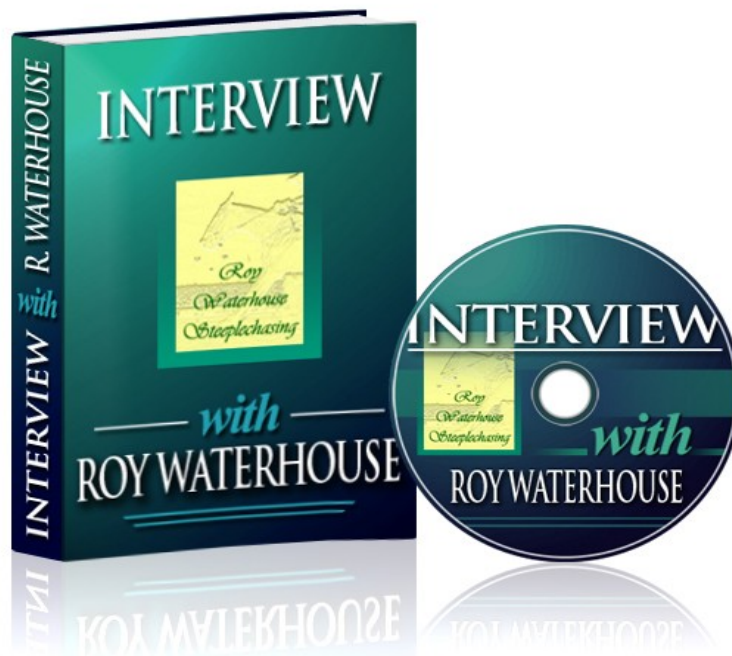




***Grosvenor Racing Club Presents...***



***An Interview With Steeplechasing  
Expert Roy Waterhouse***

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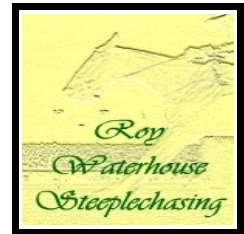
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## ***Who Is Roy Waterhouse?***

Roy Waterhouse is somewhat of a National Hunt racing aficionado, it has to be said.

He has been interested in the sport ever since he was very young, having been hooked by the racing that he first saw on what was then ITV's flagship Saturday afternoon sports program, "World of Sport" - which was presented by the unmistakable [Dickie Davies](#).



And over the coming years his interest in National Hunt racing continued to grow, until such time that he earned the right to be part of [The Sporting Life](#) editorial team, a reward for his depth of knowledge and dedicated research. This was an adventure that would last from 1994 until 1997 and would act as a catalyst for Roy's involvement with racing the future.

## ***His Passion And Endless Knowledge Hits The World Wide Web***

In 2006, Roy decided to launch his now popular website [rwsteeplechasing.co.uk](http://rwsteeplechasing.co.uk) and a visit to the site will show you exactly why it is so popular.

There is currently a plethora of useful and insightful racing information available, from reviews of the latest meetings to race previews in pdf form so that you can download them and print them of.

There is also a guide to the UK's National Hunt racecourses as well as access to Roy's Punter's Blog, or Plog as it is appropriately called.

And as if that was not enough for his readers, Roy has also recorded more than 30 episodes of The National Hunt Podcast, and these can all be accessed for free via iTunes by [clicking here](#).



Roy's National Hunt Podcast guests have featured many well know horse racing personalities, such as respected Scottish based trainer Lucinda Russell (pictured on the far left).

And also David Pipe (pictured on the right), who comes from possibly one of the most famous horse racing families. Father Martin had over 4,000 winners and won the trainer's championship no less than 15 times, an astonishing achievement.



Also on the list of interviewees is popular Boylesports' representative Leon Blanche, who makes regular appearances on At The Races, Channel 4 Racing and Racing UK.



***Silver Birch***

Roy has tipped many winners in his time, but perhaps the one that everyone wishes they had gotten on, was his tipping of Silver Birch in the 2007 Grand National.

Roy had been doing his research leading up to the great race, and had spotted that Silver Birch (ridden by Robbie Power) was available at a whopping 40/1 on the morning of the race.

One of the lucky beneficiaries of this tip was ... none other than Roy's mother, who helped herself to some 40/1!



One of Roy's ambitions is to eventually get to visit all of the National Hunt racecourses in Britain, as well as getting over to some more of the Irish courses.

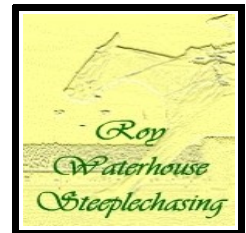
## On With The Interview

Roy is an absolute fountain of National Hunt racing knowledge, and I know you are going to enjoy this, so sit back and enjoy the interview, which took place on 5 February 2009.

**Simon:** OK, well today it gives me great pleasure to welcome National Hunt horse racing enthusiast Roy Waterhouse on the line, and so thanks for being with us Roy.



**Roy:** You're welcome.



**Simon:** So what I'd like to do is just kick-off with the first question which is that of course you specialise in National Hunt as opposed to flat racing, so how did you first become interested in National Hunt racing, and why specifically going over the sticks as opposed to flat racing?



**Roy:** Well I watched my first horse racing on television in about 1976, so I was about 5 years old at the time. It just happened to be on and I just watched it and thought "oh this is fun!", and I thought it was a great spectacle.





I have to admit that I enjoyed sometimes watching the horses falling over in things like novice chases which were great daytime entertainment, still the best daytime entertainment although I'd rather that horses obviously didn't fall as often as they do because everybody hates to see horses and jockeys getting injured.

But I really enjoyed the spectacle of it, I really enjoyed watching it, and I particularly got into the "ITV Seven", on World of Sport, that great program hosted by Dickie Davies on Saturday afternoons.

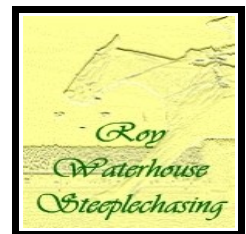
So the ITV Seven would come on and I'd be glued to that, and I remember one afternoon in I think it was 1976 actually, I was watching the ITV Seven, I think the racecourse was Towcester, and my mum and dad decided to turn the tv over. They turned it to BBC One and what was on BBC ... the Grand National!

So, I ended up watching my first Grand National in 1976 but I wanted to watch the ITV Seven at the time!

**Simon:** (Laughs) Gosh, I do remember World of Sport as well, that's not one for the teenagers out there and of course in those days horse racing would have been prominent on both of those channels and how times have changed now.



**Roy:** They have changed. Every bit of horse racing now in Britain and Ireland is now televised on satellite and cable channels, the BBC doesn't televise anywhere near as much racing as it did and they're going to cut back even further.





Channel Four makes a very good fist of it by televising several live races on Saturdays; obviously mostly “Scoop Six” races, The Tote's Saturday bet, but we're in a time now where racing is available to watch on tv if you want it and I think terrestrial coverage isn't the necessity that it once was.

It's there if you want it. Racing, like all sports, isn't everybody's cup of tea, if you want racing in your front room pay your subscription and get Sky in, get Virgin Media in and you can watch it. But if you don't want to go to the expense, I think its a question of make use or watch racing on the terrestrial channels when you can because I think in about 10 to 20 years time, I think it might come off terrestrial tv altogether, as the majority sports, things like football, golf, tennis and formula one take centre stage.

In particular the BBC has shelled out a lot of money to secure the formula one tv rights from ITV, so thats one of the reasons I guess why the BBC is scaling back. Maybe ITV could televise racing? I don't know.

**Simon:**

Well I think you're absolutely right Roy, in as much as cable and satellite television is certainly the future and I think people are far more accustomed to paying their subscription and watching not only sports, but all manner of programs; cookery, DIY, films - you name it, its all available on-line now isn't it?



But there's a part of me that thinks its a shame that potentially in the future it won't be available on terrestrial television, but I guess thats business isn't it?



The satellite companies generate revenue that goes back into the sport, so I guess the only way that the sport will evolve in the future, much the same as Twenty Twenty cricket has, is by going on satellite tv, going global and pumping lots of money back into the sport.

**Roy:**

Well this is it. The trouble with horse racing is its a majority sport only once a year, which is Grand National day. You could argue that you have the Derby as well, but I'm not sure that gets as much interest as the Grand National does.



**Simon:**

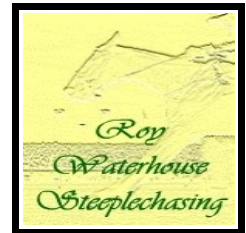
No I think you're right. Most people tend to have a flutter don't they, on the Grand National? Even people that really aren't that interested in horse racing.



There'll be the sweepstakes in the offices around the country and everyone gets geared around their television on that Saturday afternoon to watch everything unfold. And of course its probably one of the most dramatic horse racing events that you'll see isn't it, because of the nature of the fences and the number of the fences, it provides you with those moments that you were talking about Roy, in terms of watching the horses fall and the drama unfold. I know they've reduced the heights of fences in recent years but its still a very, very spectacular race to watch.



**Roy:** Its easier than it was, but its no less of a spectacle and it doesn't mean that you're going to get Grand Nationals where more than half the field is going to complete the course.



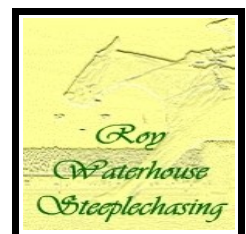
I think there were only nine finishers in 2006 when the going was soft. So when you get soft going or worse – (well do you) remember 2001 when it was really heavy? It rained on the day, it rained the day before and in some people's opinions it as unraceable. And that was the year that only two of them got around at the first attempt, as Red Marauder beat Smarty.

When that happens, that was completely bizarre as there was only two horses left by the time they reached second Becher's (Brook). So when that happens, the Grand National course is as difficult as ever. Its still a great spectacle though whatever the going is and there's another great race coming up on the first Saturday of April this year.

**Simon:** That's right. In terms of races, and you must have seen so many races Roy, is there one that sticks out as the most memorable that you've seen?



**Roy:** Well the 2001 Grand National as I mentioned just now, for those reasons, because you just could not believe what was happening as it going around, some horses fell here, some horses fell there.





About a 3rd of the field was brought to a halt at the first Canal Turn when a loose horse ran across. When Red Marauder and Smarty were the only ones still going, a loose horse very nearly wiped the pair out at the 2nd Canal Turn – it ran between them! So end to end drama.

But there's another race that sticks out in my mind and that's the 1996 of steeplechasing's classic, the Cheltenham Gold Cup. The Irish had not won the Gold Cup for ten years, since the great mare Dawn Run collared Wayward Lad coming up the hill, in one of the most famous finishes ever seen at Cheltenham, in 1986. Dawn Run was ridden by Jonjo O'Neill .

The Irish had gone ten years without winning the Gold Cup. They had their best chance, since Dawn Run in the shape of a gelding called Imperial Call, trained by Fergie Sutherland, who served in the army in Korea and unfortunately lost a leg in a landmine accident.



***Imperial Call***

He had trained Royal Ascot winners in the '60s I think I'm right in saying, and only had a few horses left at that stage, and Imperial Call was the best that he'd ever trained. He'd won all his starts that season, apart from his seasonal debut when he fell at the first at Punchestown, and he put in a particularly good run when winning the Hennessy Cognac Gold Cup at Leopardstown, surviving a last fence mistake.



**Roy:**

He went to Cheltenham all guns blazing and travelled very well under Conor O'Dwyer who's the jockey who in opinion, rode the Gold Cup better than anybody else.

He's retired now, but he rode two Gold Cup winners and I think no one was better than Conor O'Dwyer at riding in the Gold Cup. And he put Imperial Call forward, he'd been sitting off the pace but made a move halfway through the final circuit and took the lead at the top of the hill, and maintained it.

He beat off the challenge of One Man, the short priced favourite, everybody remembers One Man. But it was good for racing that One Man had his finest hour when winning the 1998 Queen Mother Champion Chase over 2 miles.



**Conor O'Dwyer**

But to get back to Imperial Call, he stayed on really well from the last because another challenger emerged, Rough Quest, who went on to win that year's Grand National, but Imperial Call found more and the reception that he got was the barmiest, loudest reception ever seen at Cheltenham. It was crazy.

Some people had a banner with the winner's name on it, they were waving tri-colours, they were singing The Banks of My Own Lovely Lee, and they flooded the winner's enclosure; as many people as could fit in, followed Imperial Call into the winner's enclosure he was absolutely hemmed in.



**Roy:** Edward Gillespie, the director at Cheltenham, was trying to keep the crowds away but completely failed to do so – it was a losing battle... and things became so disorganised that when they got around to having the presentation, they had to have it in the Royal Box!

It was a very rushed presentation too, so it was absolutely crazy scenes, really happy scenes and that I think is my most treasured memory. They took over Cheltenham to celebrate Ireland's first Gold Cup winner for ten years, the rest of the meeting ran late and it was a great day.

**Simon:** I mean I have to agree with you Roy in terms of the atmosphere and how the Irish come over and take over the town. I've got a certain affinity with Cheltenham because it's my local course and I've been there quite a few times.



And since 1996 you're right, they'd gone so long without a winner and now every year they come over in their droves and whether they win or not they really enjoy the week, they go home happy.

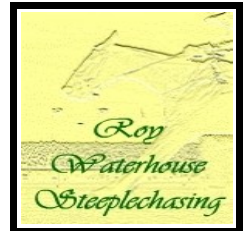
They save all year for this one week in the year, and I'd shudder to think how much Guinness is drunk in the Guinness tent at Prestbury Park that week. Its a fantastic atmosphere and there's just something about Cheltenham, it has that sparkle.

Don't get me wrong, the Grand National is a fantastic race and probably the most famous steeplechase race in the world, but there's something about The Festival and the Gold Cup that will always have a place in my heart.



**Roy:**

Yes, as regards the amount of Guinness, I think whatever unit you used to measure it, I think it would go off the scale wouldn't it?!



The Irish they go over every year, lots of promising horses with major chances, and lots of race-goers and they're always going to come away with a whole hat full of winners, its just a question form the punter's point of view of picking the right ones.

As regards this year's Cheltenham Festival, it looks like their best hope is a horse called Mikael D'Haguenet whose won his last three races over hurdles and done the job very well, so I think the Irish are going to be looking towards him this year as a banker.



And usually the Bumper, the National Hunt flat race has normally got property of Ireland stamped on it, usually one from the Willie Mullins' stable.

There's going to be a whole host of promising Irish challengers. I don't know whether or not they'll win the Gold Cup this year, but they're going to have a strong contingent as always.

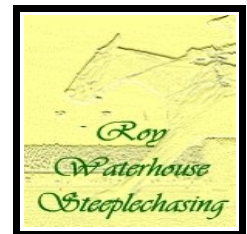


**Simon:** Yes, they always bring over some quality, quality horses and as you say they may not take back the big prize but you can be sure they'll win more than their fair share of races that's for sure.



In terms of all of the race meetings that run throughout the year; Cheltenham, Aintree etc, which if you had a choice of only going to one meeting in the year would you get in your car and drive to see?

**Roy:** Well what an awesome choice that I would have, because I would have to choose between the Cheltenham Festival or the Aintree Grand National meeting if I could only get to one meeting for the whole year.



Cheltenham obviously has the great atmosphere but I'd be a little uncomfortable in the crowds, because Cheltenham has been a victim of its own success and it's a very crowded place to go.

I went there in 1999, that's the last time that I actually went to the Cheltenham Festival, and I had a good time and I backed a couple of winners but it was very crowded, particularly on Gold Cup day and it was quite difficult getting around.

Aintree; well I think the Grand National meeting is going the same way on the Thursday and the Friday; it's already there on the Saturday, where Grand National day must be the most crowded of the calendar, but the Thursday and the Friday of that meeting are gaining in popularity.



**Roy:**

Aintree would probably be an enjoyable meeting to go to and when I was a child when I first got into racing, I actually preferred Aintree to Cheltenham, because at Aintree you had the added novelty of the Grand National course, and there were three races over the course, not just the Grand National, but also the Foxhunters and the Topham Trophy.



Its was thoroughly enjoyable watching Aintree and the novelty value of the place because in those days Aintree only raced for three days a year, but they drew good horses throughout the three days – they always have done ever since it became a jumps only course in 1976. They had a great race for what is now known as the Aintree Hurdle in 1977, when Monksfield and Night Nurse dead-heated. That used to be the race before the Grand National in those days and in my opinion it still should be – they have another race now as the race before the Grand National.

Its a really, really tough choice, but I think that Aintree would just edge it because there is still a little bit of value about going to Aintree; horses go there after Cheltenham so you've got Cheltenham form to work with. Maybe horses that have hidden their light under a bushel have kind of bubbled to the surface at Cheltenham and now you know how good they are and you can do something about it at Aintree. So I think I'd go to Aintree, but its not by much, theres not much in it.



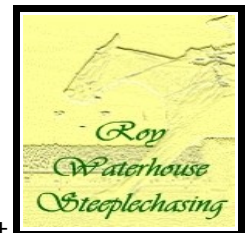
**Simon:** No its a very difficult question to answer isn't it, it really is? I can testify how crowded Cheltenham gets, not just the course, the stands, but the town in general.



We would tend to park about two or three miles away and walk in because the sheer volume of traffic made it a situation where you'd be stuck for quite a while. But interesting to see that Aintree would just edge it.

Again having watched so many races Roy, you must seen the commentators through the generations. Which one do you think would stand out as being the all time best in your opinion?

**Roy:** There's been lots of commentators and broadcasters, some of them are very good, some of them you can take them or leave them.



Back in the day, in the ITV Seven the regular commentators were John Penney and Raleigh Gilbert and they were very good. The late, great Raleigh Gilbert carried on late into the '90s and over the years his style became more relaxed.

He used to call all the top meetings, including the Cheltenham Festival, but the newer breed of commentators, people like Mark Johnson and John Hunt are talking and really getting the words out at a rapid rate – considerably more words per minute than the likes of Penney, Gilbert and Graham Goode used to do, or still do in Graham Goode's case.

I think Raleigh Gilbert would have been my favourite from back then.



**Roy:**

Spinning through to the present day, I think that those two I mentioned, John Hunt and Mark Johnson, well they've actually improved over the years. As they've got a bit older their style is more relaxed and they concentrate a little bit more on accuracy, and only try and build up the atmosphere when its necessary to do so, rather than really cranking up after half a mile or at some stage before half way in the race.

Simon Holt, Channel Four's senior commentator is very good, always very relaxed and its the same sort of thing as the commentators that Johnson and Hunt have made themselves (or have become), but he's always been like that – always more relaxed and a slower delivery of his words, so you know whats happening but you don't get more than you need to.

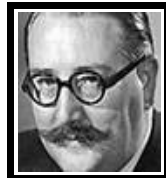


And there's lots of others; the standard of commentating, really, has never been better, but thats because obviously the commentator has got more tools to help him out.

They print race cards in colour, so there's no more sitting up at night with a pack of felt-tipped pens and theres also any amount of television screens, so they're not reliant on just a pair of binoculars.



**Roy:** Not like back in the day, because I read that Raymond Glendenning, this is going way, way back now, when calling a Cheltenham Gold Cup during War time, (which was) being run in thick fog, had to pretend what was happening in order not to give away weather conditions to the enemy who might be listening in on the wireless! (on the radio). So thats not going to happen again!



*Raymond  
Glendenning*

But I think its a really good bunch of commentators. Other broadcasters; I think Nick Luck on Racing UK and sometimes on Channel Four as well would be my favourite, I like his style, he's relaxed, has got a dry sense of humour and so I really like to listen to him.

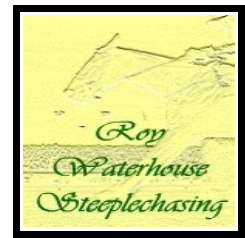
He gets on very well (with other guests) when when he appears on racing UK - regardless of who the pundit is, and so he gets on really well with them and develops a great rapport. The other pundits I like to listen to are Steve Mellish and Eddie Fremantle, I think they're very good. So they'd be my favourites, but I think you can get quite a lot if you listen to Mellish and Fremantle.



**Simon:** Yes, that's a fantastic story as well of Raymond Glendenning calling the Cheltenham race during the War in the fog, that's an absolutely fantastic story Roy. I'd never heard of that one that's really, really good and of course as you say you wouldn't get that nowadays with all of the technology that's at their disposal, but back in the day it must have been a real challenge in more adverse weather to keep track of what was happening.



**Roy:** Indeed. Not that they don't struggle today when it's particularly foggy. Very recently there was a meeting at Newcastle, where the last two races were run in a real pea-souper as the fog descended and the commentator was Darren Owen who's part of the BBC's Grand National team, and he couldn't see the line!



So he could only call the result of the final race when the horses were over the line and they were pulling up just opposite the stands, because the judge had a better view of the line than the commentator did! But at Newcastle, the National Hunt course is set well back, way past the flat track and viewing is distant at the best of times, even on a clear day. That was a bit ridiculous and Darren made the best of it in those circumstances. I guess that commentators don't know any songs (to fill any gaps in coverage), but if they do they're probably told not to sing them.



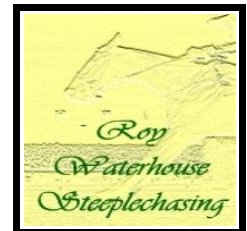


**Simon:** I'm sure they are! (Laughs). Now one of the jockeys that you mentioned briefly was Conor O'Dwyer and the success that he's had at Cheltenham, particularly in Gold Cups.



There are so many greats that have jumped the sticks; (Richard) Dunwoody, AP (Tony) McCoy - who of course still runs, John Francombe, Adrian Maguire.. probably another tough question but who would be your absolute pick of jockeys (of all time here), who would be your number one?

**Roy:** It's very difficult to nail it down to one alone Simon. To talk about AP McCoy, on the day that we're recording this he's now on 2,998 jumps winners in Britain and Ireland; no one is ever going to come anywhere near that.



He's achieved such a phenomenal work rate – I guess its fashionable to latch on to a jockey if you're any owner or a trainer. If you see what a certain rider can do, then you use them and other people watch it and then they (may) use them and you would be very lucky if you've got half the opportunities that Tony McCoy has ever had. But he's taken them and the reason why he's taken them is because obviously he's very, very good.



**AP McCoy**



**Roy:**

In his early days he rode like he wanted it, he wanted success. I remember not being particularly impressed with McCoy the first time I saw him ride – it was at Stratford on a Saturday in September 1994, and he rode a handicap hurdler called Southampton and off the home turn it seemed to me that he steered it into every gap which closed; he went for an opening – the door was suddenly shut, he switched and that was blocked, he switched again and *that* was blocked. He was a 'staying on' second, but I remember not being too impressed that day.

I'm glad that's one first impression that didn't last because punters can trust him, more than virtually any other jockey because he is as complete a package as you'll get.

I think if I had to nominate a favourite, I think Richard Dunwoody would be the overall favourite because Dunwoody in his prime, as well as AP McCoy in the present day, they're very strong in a finish, they're very good and positive at the obstacles, be it hurdles or fences.

You very seldom see what I call negative riding, that is to say when you present a horse to an obstacle and you take a pull and steady the horse in to the fence or the hurdle. A lot of jockeys do that, but although Dunwoody sometimes did that and McCoy sometimes does that, but they do that less than most. They see a stride and they'll go for it.



***Richard  
Dunwoody***



**Roy:**

AP McCoy is very strong in a finish – went through a whip-happy stage but every good jockey goes through that, Dunwoody went through that, Adrian Maguire went through that, but I now can't remember the last time McCoy was had in by the stewards for a whip offence. He's as complete a package as you'd wish to see.

As I say, Conor O'Dwyer I thought was the best for riding in the Cheltenham Gold Cup, but that's the one and only instance that I can think of about a specific jockey for a race, if you see what I mean?

There's been a lot of good Irish jockeys of course, Ruby Walsh is used by Paul Nicholls and has a great job because he gets his pick of rides in Ireland and he rides for the most powerful stable in National Hunt racing (in Britain) in the present day, that of Paul Nicholls.



***Ruby Walsh***

I would not put him in the same league as McCoy and Dunwoody as he can be a little less positive at then obstacles. I'm not saying that he's not a good jockey because there is no doubt that he is, but he's sometimes a little less positive when the chips are down, than you would like to see.

Adrian Maguire was very good at the start (of his career), but seemed to tail of a bit towards the end of his riding career. But there are so many good jockeys that are competing for the opportunities (to ride) but the opportunities just aren't there.



**Roy:**

I think when it comes to the Cheltenham Festival, I think it may be an idea to have certain jockeys on your side, because certain jockeys have ridden more Cheltenham festival winners than other for a reason.



***Robert  
'Choc'  
Thornton***

And Robert Thornton is probably the man to have on your side at the Cheltenham Festival. He's very strong when it comes to getting horses up that Cheltenham hill as you'll see by observing his performances on any of the Festival winners that he's ridden. My Way de Solzen, when he won the World Hurdle, had the noted flat jockey Johnny Murtagh against him on Golden Cross, but it was the strength of Thornton that came through in the end.

And obviously he won the last Champion Hurdle on Katchit, so Robert Thornton at the Cheltenham Festival, and AP McCoy from day to day – they're the jockeys to have on your side.

But there are so many conditional jockeys coming through now, so you can just watch races and decide what you like. If you see a certain jockey win a race and you think to yourself “that was a good ride”, then thats a jockey to get on your side.



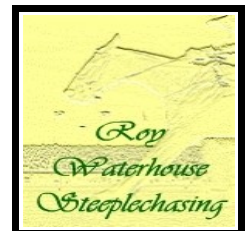
**Simon:** I definitely agree with you Roy, certainly with 'Choc' (Robert) Thornton, of course he's local to Cheltenham, he lived just up the road from me in the Cotswolds, so I think that might give him that extra bit of motivation as its his local course and I guess friends and family will be there and its such a big racecourse that draws in the crowds. So I think thats maybe why he raises his game for that particular course.



Now we've obviously spoken about the jockeys – the guys that arguably would have us believe do all the hard work, but of course there is one other part of that partnership thats fundamental to winning races and thats the horse.

Now again, tough one this I'm sure Roy, but which out of all the great horses that have run would stand out for you?

**Roy:** Well I talked about Imperial Call earlier on and he would be one of them. To go back a bit further, a personal favourite of mine who wouldn't be uppermost in everybody's mind when tackling this particular question, but a horse called Monsieur Le Curé, who won the 1994 Sun Alliance Chase (as it used to be called) at Cheltenham.



I had quite a sizable win on him and spent the money on travellers cheques for an upcoming holiday. He was a good horse, jumped very well and stayed exceptionally well. Unfortunately his career tailed off after the Sun Alliance Chase but he was a good horse.



**Roy:** Best Mate is probably the one who I'm going to think of as the best steeplechaser that I've seen in my era so to speak.



***Best Mate***

Unfortunately I wasn't around when Arkle was, but Best Mate, I did see his three (Cheltenham) Gold Cups. Not as stylish a winner as Arkle was, but if you measure greatness by results and if you thumb through the form books, you'll see that Best Mate has won the Cheltenham Gold Cup on three occasions, that's very difficult to do.

So, even when you watch his races and the style of his wins; perhaps he didn't win like a champion should do as he was more workmanlike in victory, and certainly he was (just that) on the third of his wins, when he only just held off Sir Rembrandt in 2004. But if you measure by results, Best Mate would be about the best.

Spinning forward to the present day, we're looking at Kauto Star I guess as one of the best of his generation after three King George VI Chase wins and one Gold Cup. But if Kauto Star and Denman – both trained by Paul Nicholls, both go to the Cheltenham Gold Cup this year – both in the peak of condition, I would expect Denman to come out on top again.



***Denman and  
Kauto Star***



**Roy:**

You cannot yet call Denman a great in my opinion, because he's only won the one Gold Cup. He's won a plethora of other races and he's only (at the time of this interview) been defeated once, since he joined Paul Nicholls from the Irish point to point field, but he needs to keep achieving and doing what he has been doing, In order to be regarded as one of the greats of steeplechasing.

Now he has had his problems, I think he's had a heart problem and he's had his appearance delayed, hopefully at the time that we're recording this interview we're going to see him in a couple of days time running in the Aon Chase at Newbury, and I really want to see him run well, win the race and show us that despite the problems that he's had, he retains all of his ability – and go and win a second Gold Cup.

I hope that they don't run Denman in the Grand National. If he does win his second Gold Cup, I hope that they can put him away. Run him at Aintree yes, but in the Betfair Bowl, which is the Grade Two chase over three miles and a furlong of the Mildmay course, rather than in the Grand National. Then go back to Cheltenham next year to try for a third Gold Cup, but we need to see Denman back on the track first. He has the potential to be regarded as a great, but in the modern era, I'd have to go for Best Mate for the present day and Arkle for the '60s.





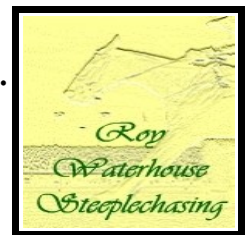
**Simon:** Yes it would be a real shame wouldn't it if Denman's career is either affected or god forbid curtailed, because of such a tragic affliction. So much potential and years ahead of him to fulfill that and it would be a real shame.



I'd heard the same as you Roy, that they're hoping to run him in the Aon Chase and fingers crossed if they do that goes well and that he's back to his best.

Going back to Best Mate as well, again I've got a certain affinity to Best Mate, not only because he did so well at Cheltenham, my local course, but I shared a birthday with him as well, he was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, so despite the fact that he wore Aston Villa colours and I'm a Spurs fan!, (but) sharing a birthday with such a great horse it touched me a little.

**Roy:** I have to say that when it comes to football, I don't support a team and I always want the underdog to win. So in a match between Aston Villa and Dagenham and Redbridge, I'd be rooting for 'The Daggers'.



But a great horse Best Mate was and I hope we'll see another in my lifetime. It could potentially be Denman, but we'll have to wait and see. I do need to put in a word while I think about it for Istabraq, who is the greatest hurdler of the modern era.

He won his three Champion Hurdles and he won them all very well. It should have been four, but the 2001 running was of course abandoned because of that nasty foot and mouth epidemic. So Istabraq, I think no ones come close to him amongst the hurdlers.

Lots of good horses go to the Champion Hurdle and all of them have won it only once. So I think Istabraq, greatest hurdler.

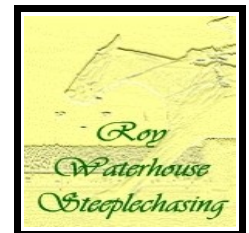


**Simon:** Yes Istabraq. I've not seen one in my lifetime better. Its incredible to think what they do and the speed that they do it and yes the jockeys are highly skilled, but the horse contributes as well and what they are capable of at such high speeds. When you see racing live and you appreciate how quickly they're going, its quite scary isn't it?



*Istabraq*

**Roy:** Could be scary potentially if you're on top and your the jockey and its not jumping very well. I imagine the best thing to see is if you're standing at the last hurdle in a two mile hurdle race, particularly if its been steadily run, they could absolutely winging it as they go to the last.



But I'll tell you what the fastest finish to a jump race that I've ever seen; in 1991 at the Silver Trophy Chase at Cheltenham went down to a straight match between Waterloo Boy, that great two mile chaser and Norton's Coin, who'd won the previous year's Cheltenham Gold Cup.

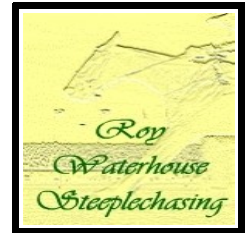
They were absolutely flat out from the last and Norton's Coin just prevailed, and it would have been great if someone had been standing at the last fence or half way up the run in, with one of those speed trap guns that the police use and clocked their speed, because that was one of the fastest finishes thats ever been seen at Cheltenham.



**Simon:** And as you well know Roy, going up that hill can sap the energy out of the best horses, so to maintain a good speed around that course and put in a sterling finish is quite some achievement.



**Roy:** Absolutely. I think I once read Colin Tinker Snr in a Cheltenham preview book about how horses had to go through the pain barrier in order to be successful at Cheltenham – and they do. There's no such thing as an easy race at Cheltenham and that doesn't just apply to the Cheltenham Festival, that applies to **every** race at the track all year round. Even the Hunter Chase meeting.



**Simon:** No thats right. So I'd like to have little bit of fun now Roy – we've mentioned lots and lots of quality horses, and you've clearly seen some great horses ride in your time.



So If we could take maybe four or five horses and combine them into what would be the perfect National Hunt horse, given the various characteristics; speed, agility, endurance – which ones do you think would go into the mix?

**Roy:** I think Istabraq at his peak, because when he jumped his hurdles he absolutely nailed it. Rooster Booster as well I'm going to flag up here, because (although) Rooster Booster won only the one Champion Hurdle, but (he) had a terrific hurdling style .





He would sometimes get in very close and very nimbly flick his legs over the hurdle in a sharp movement, without losing any ground. If he got them spot on he got them right, but if he got in close he would just flick over and essentially leave the hurdle standing, and not lose any ground.



So I think for a two hurdler I'd like to see them travel, hurdle well jumping like Rooster Booster used to and stay on well when the jockey asks for an effort and stay on all the way to the line – and put his head down and right like every punter likes to see!

The ideal steeplechaser would be someone who again travels well. You hear and read a lot about horses getting into a rhythm, travelling well and not ridden along half way like some lazy steeplechasers, like you see at places like Newton Abbott in the Summer, but holding their position and when they jump hitting the height of the fence.

Wherever they come up from, whether they meet it on the stride, go on a normal stride or go long or get in tight to the fence, I like to see them get the height of the fence, and not hit it on the way up. Then, as with hurdlers, when the jockey asks the question I like to see the horses stay on well to the line.



**Roy:** So there it is. Maybe I've explained it in a few too many words than is necessary there, but I like to see a horse travel well, jump well and when the jockey asks the question at the end, for the horse to find more all the way to the finish line. They're the basics that you like to see, travelling , jumping and a good finishing effort, regardless of whether its a two mile hurdler or a four mile steeplechaser.

**Simon:** Yes, and I think particularly from a punter's point of view Roy, we all like to see horses really making an effort. No one likes to see the possibility that a horse is being slightly held back, dare I say it, and I think you've identified that perfectly in terms of the horses that would offer that.



And Rooster Booster, I'd almost forgotten about that one, thats certainly one that would blaze over the fences in it's day.

I've got to say Roy its been really fun, (because) getting a specialist National Hunt perspective on racing, and I think everyone would agree listening, your knowledge is right up there with anyone thats studied this sport for many, many years . Its been really good fun, and I've learned a great deal as well.

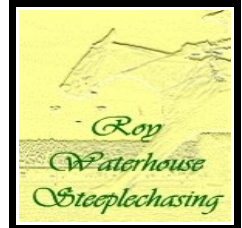
So Roy has a website as well that specialises in National Hunt racing and I'll give the address on the line now Roy and I let you explain a little bit about the website.

If you could visit [www.rwsteeplechasing.co.uk](http://www.rwsteeplechasing.co.uk) and Roy, would you like to explain to everybody a bit about what your website is about?



**Roy:**

Yes certainly. Its dedicated to National Hunt racing in Britain and Ireland. As you say its [www.rwsteepchasing.co.uk](http://www.rwsteepchasing.co.uk) so thats where you find it, and during the peak National Hunt season which we're into now at the time of recording (this interview), you'll see race previews in pdf format – not every race thats run, but selected races, those that I can get a feel for when I'm studying and there are reviews of race meetings that I've been to.



There's something that I call **Plog**, which is an abbreviation of **Punter's Blog** and its ramblings by me about racing aspects and all manner of stuff. Take on the tracks, is my interpretation of British race tracks and their characteristics and where you find them and how you get to them.

There's [the notebook section](#), in which you'll find details of my jockey to watch and trainer to watch for this National Hunt season; (plus) horses to follow and races to follow and there's also a links page so there's a lot on it and I know I would say this wouldn't I(?!), but I do think it is well worth visiting.

**Simon:**

I would absolutely endorse that as well Roy, I've had a look throughout the site – its absolutely packed full of lots of information, as much information as you could wish to see. So that address again is [www.rwsteepchasing.co.uk](http://www.rwsteepchasing.co.uk).

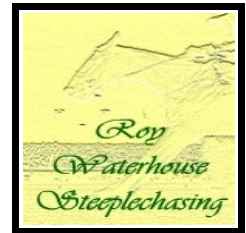


Definitely worth a visit and a lot of information there that you'll find very, very useful indeed.



Well thank you very much Roy. I've got to say its been an absolute pleasure speaking with you today, thank you very, very much for your time and hopefully we'll catch up again soon.

**Roy:** Ok, thanks very much indeed Simon, its been a pleasure talking to you, its been great so thank you very much.



**Simon:** Ok, thanks very much Roy.



Phew! I know that was a long interview, but I'm sure you'll all agree that Roy knows his stuff!

I hope you all have enjoyed this interview and we hope to be doing more of these with horse racing experts over the coming months, so please look out for these.

For details on these, you can follow us at:

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