

DOPE: THE ENEMY OF THE RACEHORSE

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Since racing first started the unscrupulous have used every means available to win money, either by doping horses to run faster, or slower, than their best.

For this reason horses have always run the risk of being interfered with from within the stable or by intruders. Whereas prior to this century the usual method was a bottle of whisky to help the horse to win, or a bucket of water to make it slow down, modern chemistry has provided far more sophisticated and reliable methods. Therefore apart from the protection of the racehorse in training and on the racecourse, it is equally important that research facilities ensure the detection of the many new drugs being introduced.

When it is remembered that dope testing has been in existence in this country in properly co-ordinated form only for the past 12 years, and that it has only reached the present level of some 5,000 tests a year during the past three years, it will be seen that a tremendous effort in time and money has been spent to protect the sport.

The prevention of doping must always take priority over prevention of other abuses because if it becomes prevalent once again on the scale of 1961/1965, it could damage confidence in British racing and the Bloodstock Industry in Britain.

In 1931 a hot favourite for a two year old race on the July course at Newmarket trailed in last and was obviously very distressed. The boy leading the horse round in the pre-parade ring reported to his trainer that he had seen a man emerge from the trees and fire an air gun. The horse flinched and after the race the mark where the pellet had landed was clearly distinguishable on the horse's quarters. Whether the horse suffered from the shock of impact or whether even in those early days the pellet contained a drug is not known. However a fortnight later the same horse ran and won rather easily at 12/1. On this occasion the trainer was asked to explain the difference in running between the two races. He stated that the horse had been stopped at Newmarket, but that he had not thought it worthwhile reporting! His explanation was accepted.

After World War II there were a number of villains only too willing to make a few dishonest pounds and they were prepared to use all sorts of methods. In October 1946 a leading trainer ran a good handicapper called Aprolon at York. The horse started 5/4 favourite

in a field of seven. When the horse was in the parade ring a man shot some acid at the horse. It was a poor shot and only hit the horse on its quarters. The acid left a mark for all to see but the man disappeared in the crowd. Aprolon who was described by his trainer as a tough horse paid little attention to the assault and won the race by two lengths, it is presumed much to the annoyance of the villains!

In June, 1966, there was another incident in the plantation on the July course at Newmarket. Prophecy, a locally trained horse started 9/4 favourite in a two year old race. He ran very badly and on returning to his stable in Newmarket was found to have a series of small blisters all over his testicles. It was the opinion of the Vet that the blisters looked as if they had been made with an aerosol spray. The horse was obviously in great pain and when I saw him at the request of the trainer some three or four days later, he could hardly put either of his hind legs to the ground. He was never much good again on the flat and was sold to another owner who ran him in steeplechases with some success.

As a result of this incident we have always kept a full-time guard on the plantation during race meetings.

The really bad incidence of doping to lose took place from 1960 until a number of villains taking part were arrested by the Police, and convicted at an Assize Court in 1963, and sentenced to imprisonment.

Their methods were planned carefully. It was essential to their success that they had a really good working knowledge of trainers' yards, including the whereabouts in those yards of horses who were likely to be well fancied runners throughout the season. This meant that a very observant person had to be introduced into a number of trainers' yards without causing suspicion and thereafter brief the team who were going to carry out the operation. To fulfil this mission an attractive Swiss girl impeccably dressed was chosen. She would telephone the trainer concerned and ask quite openly if she could come and see him as she wished to have horses in training with him. She arrived in a chauffeur driven Rolls Royce, and certainly looked genuine enough. Then with great charm she would ask to see the horses, and invariably was given a conducted tour of the yard.

She had a quick and retentive brain and within hours of her visit, the criminals were in possession of the

layout of the yard concerned, and then only had to plan the operation.

At that time trainers were not security minded, and seldom took even normal precautions to safeguard their horses on the night before they were due to run. Consequently the dopers had an easy task and a large number of well backed horses ran unaccountably badly. To those with a good knowledge of the betting ring, these odd results clearly indicated that something was seriously wrong because as always the fluctuations in betting in Tattersall's ring on every racecourse is the barometer of racing.

At that time The Jockey Club did not have a security organisation that was geared to deal with such problems, and so they consulted Scotland Yard. The Commissioner at that time was Sir Joseph Simpson and he detailed Chief Superintendent George Davis to take charge.

The problem which confronted the Police was to obtain evidence that would lead them to the team who were carrying out the doping. Racing is not short of rumours, and they were produced for Davis in large quantities, only to be proved false. The break came at Lewes races when a man who turned out to be a member of the team was interviewed by the Police and found to have some dope in a matchbox in his jacket pocket. He was arrested and it was found that he was working for a manufacturing chemist, where he had access to various drugs, which he supplied to the dopers. From him the Police got their lead and were able to produce sufficient evidence to prosecute the team who had been carrying out the doping.

The Jockey Club then appointed a Committee to study the whole matter of controlling the doping of racehorses and in May 1964, I was selected to take charge of the operation. Luckily for me most of the dopers were in prison at that time and there was a breathing space in which to take stock of the situation. Although I had been racing since I was nine years old, I had no idea of how a doping team worked. Here I had the good fortune to meet George Davis who had by this time left the Police and was working for Securicor.

Our first task was to put all the racecourse stables in the country into a proper state of security. Davis and I, together with Major Val Gorton and the late Brigadier Tony Teacher, The Jockey Club Inspectors of Courses, visited every racecourse during the Summer of 1964. As a result we put a report to The Levy Board who agreed to pay for the improvements. The cost was £350,000. It was also necessary to improve the guarding of the stables and this Contract was given to Securicor, who took up their duties in July 1965, and retained the Contract until the formation of Racecourse Security Services in 1973.

The second problem was to form a good team of investigators who would continually be on the lookout for evidence which would give the Police a fair chance of prosecution. For this it was essential to recruit a highly qualified member of C.I.D., who was due to retire from the Police, and because it was known that the main threat from the dopers was from the London area, a member of the Metropolitan Police.

A visit to the Assistant Commissioner, Crime, Sir Ranulf Bacon at Scotland Yard, produced Detective Chief Superintendent Bob Anderson, then Second in Command of the Flying Squad. He joined in the Spring of 1965 and we got down to work.

Although at the outset it was recognised that temptation exists for stable lads to help in a doping operation the evidence has not in the past supported this. The only known case concerned a stable servant who agreed to point out the loose box of a particular horse at Newmarket, for which he was paid £50. He was approached a second time and again agreed to do this, but in fact he pointed out the wrong box and then a reward was published for the capture of the dopers, wrote a letter giving the dopers away and claiming the reward, which he never received. Subsequently he gave evidence for the prosecution at Lewes Assizes. I have been told by persons sentenced in both trials that as a result of this they have never again suggested to stable lads that they should help them.

The only other case known to us is that of "Bandy Rogers" in which a few stable lads agreed to give their charges an accelerating powder when they were fancied to win. Rogers was thought to be trustworthy by his trainer, but he was offered plenty of money by some unscrupulous men to organise the work. Eventually the Police caught up with Rogers. However he would not give away the names of his employers, and rather than stand trial he committed suicide.

In a more recent case it was the stable servants who, during the course of the investigation, revealed they had seen the trainer's son giving stimulant powders and gave evidence to this effect before the Stewards. We know that in the past the dopers have had a number of stable servants on their payroll as sources of information. Unknowingly these lads have often given away the whereabouts of certain horses in their stable yard. However, dopers have not specifically employed stable servants for the purpose of identification of horses. It would seem virtually impossible to create conditions whereby staffs are not exposed to temptation, no matter what their condition of employment or pay. Providing the stable yard is properly looked after, it is most unlikely that the doper will get into the yard to contact stable servants. He does this where necessary in local pubs and cafes a long way from the yard and where nobody could stop

him doing it. In my lectures to apprentices and stable lads at the main training centres in the country I invariably warn my audience of these facts.

I do not suggest that all stable lads are honest, but that the professional doper will no longer put his personal liberty in jeopardy by trusting a stable lad. In addition to his personal liberty, the doper is risking large sums of money betting in the belief that the stable lad has carried out his part of the bargain.

During the Summer of 1965, we suspected that a team of dopers was at work again, because well backed horses, either first or second favourites in small fields, would run unaccountably badly.

Unfortunately at that time the selection of horses for sampling after a race, was not properly carried out, and a number of horses who were not tested would certainly have proved positive had they been tested. Thus our suspicions were not proved. However towards the end of August 1965, we received reliable information of a possible doping at Lambourn. The information was passed to the police, and on the night of 5th September a team of dopers were caught red handed at a stable in Lambourn. I think that this is the only time that such an operation has been completed successfully. The team were duly tried at Reading Assizes and sentenced to imprisonment.

As a result of this trial we found that no fewer than twenty-eight horses had successfully been doped to lose that Summer. In all cases a simple tranquilliser was used, and was administered orally by physic ball. The timing of the operation and the exact dosage contained in the ball were vital to the dopers. Horses were doped during the hours of darkness and at that time security in trainers' yards was poor. It was essential to the villains that no signs of the dope were visible on the morning after, and that the horse was considered fit enough to

run, thus ensuring that it was included in the betting market. The presence of dope became apparent only when the horse cantered to the starting post. Even then its effect was not necessarily obvious but merely took the edge off the horse's performance.

The Reading trial saw the break up for the second time in four years of a team of villains who were well organised to dope horses to lose, and to benefit from it by betting.

Since 1966 the incidence of doping in this country has been much reduced, with doping to lose almost non-existent, and the proven cases of doping to win rare. In fact in 1975 over 5,000 tests were taken of which only three were positive. None of these could be considered as criminal activities, but rather because some brands of proprietary horse food contained something other than a normal nutrient, and their administration therefore broke the Rules of Racing.

The known rate of testing which takes place at every race meeting, and the rule which bans any form of pre-race medication have proved a deterrent to any person thinking of interfering with a horse. In addition trainers have become really security minded and go to great lengths to ensure that their horses are properly guarded.

The vigilance which has been built up over the past few years must never be relaxed. New drugs are constantly being introduced which makes the necessity for continuing research by our Laboratory essential. There are some who say if the threat has gone, it is unnecessary to spend so much money on anti-doping measures. This argument ignores the fact that if our defences were allowed to drop, the criminal element would again exploit the situation. It is vital that we remain on the alert, for never again must the situation be allowed to revert to the bad old days.