

CHATROOM

The best of your emails and texts

▶▶ Thank you Peter Bowen

As a part-owner in Irish Wolf, who suffered a fatal fall last week at Fakenham, I would like to thank all the staff at Peter Bowen's yard, especially his lass, Emma, for all the love, hard work and dedication they put into his too short, but successful, career which gave me and the other owners tremendous fun and a pride in a horse that we will all miss but never forget.

Adrian Hill

▶▶ Carry on Yeats

Great news that, all being well, Yeats is being kept in training next year. His victory in the Prix Royal-Oak on Sunday was proof that he remains capable of mixing it at the top level. Here's to a fourth Gold Cup victory.

Alice, Bedford

▶▶ Time to work together

With more drama from the levy negotiations, isn't it time that a new way of funding racing was found? I know everyone finds it difficult to work together in racing, but it's about time they did. The levy is an anachronism in 21st century sport.

Maurice, Northallerton

▶▶ Doyen of photographers

What a magnificent picture of Pendil on page five of today's Post. Ed Byrne is a great photographer, and long may he continue taking such iconic photos. He is the doyen of the trade.

Alexander, Henley

▶▶ Bounty from McLaughlin

Tom McLaughlin's best ride since he came back? Bounty Reef, 16-1 at Redcar. A life saver in this house.

Jackpot Rog

▶▶ New all-weather track

It's a pity that trainer Scott Mason has to up his roots to get closer to the all-weather tracks. Why can't there be an all-weather in Yorkshire, which is close to the A1, for instance? I'm confident it would do good business and cut travelling costs for many.

Graham Smith

▶▶ All the best to Somnus

Happy retirement to Somnus. He had a superb career.

Dominic, Sheffield

Text your instant reaction to events to RPCOM followed by a space and your comments in less than 160 characters to 84080 (RoI 53305). Texts cost 25p (RoI 30c). Email in no more than 40 words to editor@racingpost.co.uk, putting CHAT in the subject field.

BIRTHDAYS

Bill Smith 60 rider of *Comedy Of Errors & Diamond Edge*; **Con Horgan 63** trainer of *Western Dancer & Risk Master*;

Ralph Ziadie 70 trainer of *Sir Bear & Silver Wagon*; **Jamie Goldstein 30** rider of *Prominent Profile & King's Road*; **Michael Marshall 41** rider of *Insular & Hoy*; **Nigel Rich 63** former steward of the Hong Kong Jockey Club; **Heather**

Alwen 64 owner of *Bold Yeoman & Yeoman Broker*; **Monica Hackett 66** owner of *Natal*; **Kirsty Boutflower 40** former Newmarket trainer; **Bob Carson 56** *Lambourn* permit-holder; **James Wood 56** owner with *Peter Chapple-Hyam*; **Mike Cattermole 47** *Channel 4* commentator; **Angus McNae 42** TV racing presenter

Please notify birthday greetings to us at least one week before publication

EYEWITNESS

FROM THIS

How a former professional footballer is bringing a healing touch to horses



Peter Thomas talks to **Jonathan Hunt** about his unconventional career switch

WHERE did it all go wrong for Jonathan Hunt? As a former professional footballer whose career ended in chronic injury somewhere between Wimbledon and Peterborough, he had the world at his feet. With the appropriate careers advisory counselling, he could have let himself go, ballooned to a booze-added 18st and enjoyed many years of running a dingy pub in north London before finally succumbing to osteoarthritis of the hip and ending his days in sheltered accommodation.

Instead, the one-time Premiership star of Derby County fame ended up on the slippery slope that led to a miracle cure for his damaged spine, a resurrection of his playing career and qualification as Britain's only practitioner in a progressive branch of neuromuscular treatment for racehorses.

His footballing comeback may have taken him only as far as St Albans, in the foothills of Blue Square South, but he's sound in mind and body these days and relishing the opportunity to extend a lifelong enthusiasm for racing into a mission to offer to rickety horses the same kind of healing that turned his life around.

Where once the much-travelled pro looked to be consigned to a retirement spent in pain and depression, now he can be found in the Epsom yard of the talented trainer Jim Boyle, passing on the benefits of Equine Hanna Somatics to a decent but rather pottery individual named Alfie Tupper. It's not the kind of therapy that offers an overnight fix, but Alfie is a happier and slightly quicker horse now, a three-times winner since the treatment began, and Boyle, himself a qualified vet and part-owner of the beast, is happy with the progress being made.

All this positive feeling is a far cry from the day when Hunt, in a training session with the Dons, made a tackle that left him with a back and pelvis injury that would end his career. He signed for the Posh but would never play another professional game.

At the age of 29, he was on the football scrapheap. "For about a year I tried to get fit again," he recalls, "but the pain was just getting worse the harder I tried. It was a daunting thought that I'd have it for the rest of

my life. When it was at its worst, I was in agony every day."

Two years after his retirement, Hunt decided that being depressed and in pain in the sun would be better than doing it in the rain, so he went to stay with friends in Thailand, who recommended a session with a lady called Cynthia, which turned out to be not what you're thinking it might have been, but rather a first contact with a therapy that relieved his pain completely. Within three months, he was in California learning somatics; within three years, he was treating humans and now he is applying the same techniques to horses.

It's been a whirlwind conversion to

the work and thought of the rather obscure American philosopher and writer Thomas Hanna, whose study of the concept of freedom led him to conclude that people in industrialised nations suffered the kind of postural distortion and resultant pain and misery that deprived them of much of their liberty.

"I was very sceptical," admits Hunt, "but where all the doctors had told me I would need surgery, somatics was the only approach I found that told me why I was in so much pain and then treated it. I went away with the exercises Cynthia gave me, and there has been no regression at all."

As a kid, the youngster from Camden in north London was a regular at Newmarket races with his dad. While at Derby, he ran the Rams Racing Club, enticing colleagues into a syndicate that owned four horses, all winners, including Moonlight Song, who scored three times for them.

"The horses fascinated me," says Hunt, "and I'd always thought I'd like to get involved in the racing industry when I finished playing. The owning and the betting soon took second

Jonathan Hunt in his football days when playing for Wimbledon

'I'm just working with his brain and

AS HE runs his hand gently down the spine of Alfie Tupper, Jonathan Hunt looks nothing like an ex-footballer. The fingers, long and sensitive, bring to mind a concert pianist rather than a former Barnet and Southend United midfielder. He betrays his roots when he declares that he's "110 per cent more relaxed" since discovering somatics, but it's clear that Alfie is feeling very much the

same way and is definitely not as sick as a parrot.

The five-year-old gelding stands quietly in his box as Hunt assesses him. Alfie is edgy. He tends to be slightly bent over his off-fore knee, slightly quicker in his movements on the other side, can't stand square, keeps his legs too tight together and won't put his off-hind hoof flat on the ground. In a race, he'll often carry his head high. These may not sound

earth-shattering symptoms, but they apparently reflect involuntary muscle responses to daily stresses and strains, that in turn adversely affect his posture, state of mind and wellbeing.

Hunt begins to work on each leg in turn, and quickly Alfie takes the initiative, lifting his feet at the slightest bidding and allowing his limbs to be moved in various arcs and ranges. As the session continues, the movements become

smoother and easier and the hooves come down to earth more slowly and with greater control.

Hunt explains: "Muscles become contracted in life because of different stresses arising from our routines. For us, that might be sitting in a chair for hours on end or playing football. For a horse, it might be standing in a box all day. It's unnatural, it's stressful, their muscles habituate to that routine and they become good at certain

