

INTERVIEW JAMIE SPENCER

'Don't like the way I ride? Don't bet on me then'

Lee Mottershead finds the jockey in forthright mood 25 years after his first winner



THIS is Jamie Spencer now. As he greets us at the front door, the former boy wonder appears not enormously different to the Jamie Spencer from back then, all those 25 years ago when he rode his first winner. The image is deceptive. He looks like someone time has barely touched; he sounds like someone who has learned a great deal.

Even Spencer can barely believe a quarter-century has elapsed since the cherub aged 15 steered Huncheon Chance to an easy success at Downpatrick on May 11, 1996. By then he had already been an active jockey for six months, a child willingly robbed of his childhood, laying the foundations for what has been, and remains, a fabulous career.

"I don't know where those 25 years have gone," he says. "I was sat in the weighing room the other day with Rossa Ryan and Callum Shepherd. Neither were alive when I had that first winner."

Much has happened since. Three times Spencer has been crowned champion jockey, once in his native Ireland, twice in Britain, the country in which he has lived for more than half his life. He is a multiple Classic winner who was appointed Aidan O'Brien's stable jockey and then walked out of Ballydoyle. A few years later he retired from the saddle when informed his retainer with Qatar Racing would not be renewed. Following some searching of the soul he backtracked, thus delighting his many fans and giving further cause for the detractors to pour scorn.

In this, his 41st year, he has come back from a major injury that seriously diminished his prowess throughout last season. Having contracted coronavirus, he also spent a fortnight quarantining at his home, a beautiful old rectory, full of trophies and photographs, many of which

feature his three children. He has taught Andrea Atzeni how to make roast potatoes and become ever more angry at the damage he feels is caused to British racing by its business model. Lest there be any doubt, he has also continued to ride winners.

He recalls being booked by trainer Ian Ferguson for the very first one as late as the morning of the race, his mount having won at Downpatrick the night before. It was a task simply executed. There is more to be said about what came before and a racing education in which the headmaster was selected by Champion Hurdle-winning trainer George Spencer.

"You can be fortunate and unfortunate at the same time," says Spencer. "My father died when I was very young but I was lucky in that the one thing he instilled into me was that if I wanted to be a jockey I needed to go to Liam Browne."

"I quickly discovered he was a hard taskmaster. There were maybe 35 horses in the yard. A general stable hand would look after three or four. I was given 11. Each evening he would pick a different horse, remove the rug and run his finger the opposite way along the body. If he found any dust you got booted up the arse. I perfected the art of running forward when his foot was coming."

"He basically imprisoned me into wanting to be a jockey. I got paid £50 a week but had to pay £45 for my digs, so I was left with £5 for myself. I eventually started getting the fiver changed into 20 pences, took them to a phone box and kept ringing trainers, asking for rides."

"I wouldn't have said so at the time, but Liam Browne was hard but fair. He certainly knew how to get the best out of me."

He also knew how to get the most work out of him. Even after Spencer captured the Irish 1,000 Guineas on Tarascon as a 17-year-old apprentice, he remained on a £5 wage.

"There's stuff that happened yesterday I can't remember but things like Tarascon are crystal clear," he says. "I remember being down at the start and Seamus Heffernan giving me his gloves because my filly was sweating up and I didn't have gloves with me. That night I went to Fat Sal's nightclub in Kildare to celebrate. The fella on the door said he had seen me on the telly in the afternoon and

knew I was only 17. I had to do the walk of shame."

He was a kid in those days, a sponge that soaked up advice passed on by weighing room grandees. Now he is a grandee himself, although still over a decade younger than his profession's biggest kid.

"The worst part of anyone retiring is you get moved closer to Frankie in the changing room," says Spencer with a tongue-in-cheek smile. "I started off miles from him but then the Hills sisters retired, then Philip Robinson and a few others followed. My only saving grace is when Franny Norton is riding he sits between me and Frankie. Otherwise, I'm bang smack beside him."

"He's messy and if he's winning he's loud. When Frankie is having a big day I would rather be in Alcatraz. He was horrific after he won the 1,000 Guineas. He started telling us he would ride until he's 65. I didn't even stop to have a shower. I just got into my clothes and left."

AT HEART, Dettori is still who he always was. The same is true of Spencer. We last met for an interview ten years ago, when his frankness over tea and biscuits almost caused the voice recorder on the table to sizzle. He was brutally honest about those things he got right and where he had erred. "I can give the perception that everything is grand, but inside I can be like an anti-Christ," he said that afternoon, painting himself as someone who kept all but a few individuals at arm's length.

"I'm still pretty much the same," he admits. "Some people are outward-going. I have a small circle of friends who I stick with. I like it that way."

Among those inside the circle are ex-jockeys Paul Moloney and Paul Hourigan, with both of whom he speaks on an almost daily basis. Atzeni, James Doyle and Martin Harley have also forged bonds with a jockey who rather likes the fact that Gazeley, his home now for six years, is not full of racing folk, despite its proximity to Newmarket.

He also appreciates his long-time working relationship with trainer David Simcock, who has had first call on him since he ceased to be employed by Sheikh Fahad and his brothers at the end of 2014. The

ending of that association after a two-year stint was supposed to mark the full stop on Spencer's riding career and herald a new position in the Qatar Racing management team. A fortnight before the switch was set to take place, Spencer decided to defer his retirement.

"All those big riding jobs have peaks and troughs," he says. "Being a retained jockey to an owner is probably the hardest job in racing. Most of the time the trainers you're riding for don't want you. Being stable jockey to a trainer is much simpler but you don't get paid the retainer."

"The management role with Qatar Racing seemed a reasonable idea, and financially it made a lot of sense, but I don't think I could have somebody telling me what to do. Touch wood, I'll never have to work for anybody and I'll be able to do my own stuff for the rest of my life. That's very important to me. It's just the way I'm programmed. It suits me to be my

Jamie Spencer in relaxed mood at home in Gazeley, near Newmarket but at a safe remove from most racing folk

'Being a busy fool is pointless. It's crap racing and crap prize-money, so if I don't have to go, I don't go'





'Once the stalls open I get into jockey mode. I just want to win. I like riding horses. I like going fast'

own boss. When you work for yourself you work twice as hard anyway."

Look at his stats and you might think Spencer had started to take the foot off the pedal. In 2020 he participated in only 120 British races. That, however, was influenced by the fact he began an already truncated campaign belatedly in July, having fractured his hip in April when falling from a two-year-old and landing on concrete. Even when he returned, he had not recovered.

"Last year I wasn't able to ride," he states bluntly. "I didn't feel at all comfortable, hence why I was only really racing two days a week. I was sore all the time. It sometimes felt as though someone was kicking me behind the knee."

"When you have a big injury it can take a lot of time and work to get your balance right again. I've always been fortunate to have good balance, which is why I ride on a long rein, but I lost the luxury good balance gave me. Nothing felt as natural or comfortable. Everything was such an effort. Getting on the horse was an effort. Getting to the start was an effort."

"There were times last year when I wondered if it would ever be right again. Fortunately, I'm a bit stupid, so I wanted to keep going. It has taken a long time to build the muscle back up but everything feels pretty good now. The changing point was only in the middle of February when I went to a place called The Running School in London. They were brilliant and basically reprogrammed my body."

He points to the spot on his right leg from where a metal rod runs from the femur down to the knee, across which is a bolt. The metalwork will be removed much later this year.

"The two days in hospital after surgery were horrible," he admits. "I know I couldn't cope with jail after experiencing those two days. When I was told I could go home, I would have started crying through elation had someone pricked me."

"That injury caused me the most pain I have known. I've broken bones before and just carried on, but I

wouldn't fancy going through that again. I don't know how jump jockeys do it. It hasn't made me want to stop, though. Once the stalls open I get into jockey mode. I just want to win. I like riding horses. I like going fast."

It is a wonderful line, so simple, yet so supremely accurate.

"It's not really work, is it?" he asks, extremely rhetorically. "I do it because I enjoy it, not for monetary reasons. I won a race at Chelmsford the other night and got as much of a kick out of it as any winner I've had. I thought a couple of the decisions I made were the difference between the horse winning and losing."

SPENCER'S critics revel in those moments when they believe his input has caused a moral winner to be an actual loser. The sight of him sitting with apparent nonchalance at the back of a field, as carefree as he looks now, leant against his kitchen island in a blue shirt and slippers, causes their blood to boil. The reality is he knows what he is doing. Far from reality is the belief that this is a one-trick pony, as Spencer showed when making all to claim the 2019 Irish 2,000 Guineas on Phoenix Of Spain (*below*).

Nonetheless, he agrees that, in the minds of some, he is akin to a typecast actor.



"I like to believe I can ride any horse any way but people do book me for hold-up horses, difficult horses, ungenue horses," he acknowledges.

"That's just the way it is. Frankie, Ryan Moore or William Buick wouldn't win on some of the ones I get asked to ride."

"This job is a puzzle. Sometimes you get it right, sometimes you don't. I leave myself open to criticism when I drop one out and it doesn't come off, but I'm pretty thick-skinned. I get attacked by keyboard warriors but let them try to do this job. Who cares what they think? It's all opinions. If you don't like the way I ride, don't bet on me or don't book me for a ride."

At the start of each week, you probably would not be able to, anyway.

"I don't want to be racing on Mondays or Tuesdays," he insists.

"Being a busy fool is pointless. It's crap racing and crap prize-money, so if I don't have to go, I don't go."

"My agent, Niall Hannity, knows I only want to be on horses with a real chance of winning. Rides on horses who are just making up the numbers are of zero interest to me. I hate not having a chance. I like to go into a paddock thinking if things go right I can win. That way, I don't get into a negative mindset."

"I'll often text Niall after a race while I still have my helmet on and send him an array of abuse. I don't need to take stupid rides. I don't want to be just a bum on a saddle. I don't need the practice."

With almost 2,500 wins in Britain and Ireland, major victories as far afield as America, Canada and Australia - where he may head for a two-month stint later this year - and even a Cheltenham Festival triumph in the 2002 Champion Bumper, Spencer is entitled to let his record do the talking.

"People get so sucked into racing," he says. "Obviously it's important, but you have to enjoy the other parts of life as well. Look at what happened to Pat Smullen. He gave his life to horseracing and then was robbed of his life. I found that very difficult."

"Life is short. You have to enjoy it because you'll be gone before you know it. Does it feel like 25 years since I rode my first winner? Not at all. It feels more like five years."

"As long as I'm enjoying it and getting a reasonable amount of support I'll carry on, but if someone said tomorrow, 'That's it, you're not allowed to ride any longer,' would I go kicking and screaming? Probably not."

The reason why is obvious. Jamie Spencer in the here and now is thoroughly content.

"I've been fortunate, and I've had the best of it, but I'm realistic," he says. "I know I'm not going to be champion jockey again and the chances of me winning the Derby are a lot slimmer than they were 20 years ago. Obviously I would like to be riding better horses in the good races but you have to be happy with what you've got."

"I've been so lucky. Who gets to do a job for 25 years without feeling they've been at work? At the start, it was seven days a week. Now I'm fortunate and can pick and choose a bit more. I'm a happy guy."

'People have no idea what my life has been like - I've no reason to be ashamed'

Senior writer
Lee Mottershead
speaks to
ITV Racing's
latest star



AS LEONNA MAYOR leads Sir Pascal towards a grassy paddock at his livery yard home in North Yorkshire, the horse suddenly stops at the sight of a large puddle. Like the handsome eventer, Mayor warns she has her own aversion to water.

"I've got a hard exterior - you won't find me crying when we start the interview," she states with a level of confidence that proves misplaced. What follows feels like a form of therapy as one of racing's most promising television performers bares her soul, sheds some tears and reveals a life story that makes her achievements look ever more laudable.

Mayor never quite took off as a Flat jockey, but with a microphone in hand she seems poised to dazzle on the sport's biggest stages. The 30-year-old has been broadcasting for a decade. Initially it was no more than a sideline. Now it is her profession. Among Mayor's many employers are ITV Racing and Sky, for both of which she has received deservedly flattering reviews. When you learn more about her, you realise those reviews and appointments really have been exceptionally hard earned.

Perhaps more than most sports, a person can be propelled far in racing by privilege or family wealth. Mayor had the benefit of neither.

She was raised on a troubled council estate in Stoke, where her father shunned her. She had to wait until her 51st mount to ride a winner but then steered home 30 more in a career that lasted just five years and ended for emotional reasons she has kept to herself until now.

If all that was not enough, she faced criticism over her decision to be pictured wearing underwear in a lads' magazine, while the snide comments have subsequently concerned not just how she looks but also how she sounds, for she now gets berated for her accent.

Yet although there has been some

hostility to her emergence as a television regular, there has been much more positivity. Mayor has shown herself to be knowledgeable and hard-working. She has also proved savvy, not least when guiding the ITV audience towards Rohaan when he won at Haydock in May as a 33-1 shot.

Her star is in the ascendancy and it is busy. As well as shifts for Sky and ITV, there are other regular jobs, including for William Hill TV, the platform that first offered her an avenue into a different world.

"In the early days I absolutely hated it," says Mayor. "I didn't feel confident and was anxious not to say the wrong thing. That was ten years ago. Now I don't want to turn work down because I'm so grateful for the chances I'm being given. It's not a greed thing. I don't need lots of money. As long as I can pay for him, I'm happy."

The 'him' is a horse who causes her to make repeated 16-mile drives from her home near Leeds. He is the man in her life, the pampered pet on whose back she is becoming proficient at dressage, show jumping and cross-country. Until 2013 her equestrian skills were focused on a different discipline.

"For a long time I really did love being a jockey," says Mayor. "I missed it badly when I stopped, but I knew it was the right thing for me. If you're riding bad horses it's a crap job. You get on the horse knowing you're not going to win, so what's the point? That's how I was feeling and that's not the right mindset. I just didn't love it anymore."

"Kieren Fallon once told me the one thing I had in my favour was horses liked me and naturally ran for me. Perhaps that was half the reason I rode the winners I did and maybe it's a shame I didn't use the skill for longer. "The problem is when you're not winning it makes you disappointed. You start to feel you're not good enough. Then you do win on a horse but get replaced next time."

"At what point does it get easier? I had that question going through my head. From when the alarm went off I was just going through the motions. Now I wake up and look forward to each day."

When previously talking about her decision to leave the weighing room, Mayor has cited the cumulative effect of injuries, including damage caused to an ankle in an October 2012 fall at Kempton, where a filly bucked her off

soon after the stalls opened. There was more to it than that. A key motivation was the loss of her grandmother, Sheila, with whom she lived as a child for three years.

"People said watching me in races was the only thing that made her drag herself out of bed when she was dying of stomach cancer," explains Mayor, wiping tears from her eyes. "I was living in Lambourn and she was back home in Stoke. Nan was adamant she didn't want me to come back. I managed to get home and be with her when she died but I feel like I ought to have been there more."

"I missed important time with her that I should have had. When people ask me why I retired I tell them it was because I got injured. I've never spoken about it before but her death was a massive catalyst for me stopping riding. It took me a really long time to get over the fact she was dead."

SAT on a plastic stool outside Pascal's currently unoccupied box, Mayor explains that those years living with her grandmother represent only one example of an unusual start in life.

"We had a very strange upbringing," she insists. "I know a lot of people say that but mine was really strange. It was rubbish as well."

Mayor is the second oldest of five children. Her siblings are aged 34, 24, 18 and 12.

"The quickest, but still very long, version is my mum, Karen, had my older sister, Tanya, with a guy called Mark, who left her and disappeared

"There are two jockeys who very much believe women should be at the kitchen sink"

off the face of the earth," she explains. "She then had me with my blood father, but they soon split up. Mum then had my brother, Leon, with his dad, Dave, who was horrible. He knocked her about and killed himself during the second lockdown."

"She eventually left him, after which Mark - who by then was the father of two more kids - appeared out of nowhere, asking her to take him back. She agreed but Mark made it obvious he didn't want me or Leon around. We were constantly arguing, so I went to stay with Nan one weekend and ended up living with her."

"Mum and Mark had Mitchell, but when he was six months old Mark killed himself. Mum then met Kevin, my stepdad. He has been the only proper dad any of us has ever had. If I ever get married, I want him to give me away. He took on a woman with four kids and did everything for me. They had Emiliah together when Mum was 41. They're happy and everything is great."

It was not until the age of nine that Mayor met her blood father.

"I reached the point where I was asking, 'Right, where's my dad?' she says.

She discovered where he lived and made contact in person. She initially got to spend time with him and enjoyed it. The clock, however, was soon ticking. "He stopped answering my calls and messages," she says. "I didn't want to keep feeling unwanted, so at the age of 12 or 13 I stopped trying."

Mayor's love of horses was



(From left) Leonna Mayor with her eventer Sir Pascal, on duty for Sky Sports Racing at Chester; interviewing acclaimed chef Michel Roux Jr at Epsom for ITV Racing's coverage

stimulated as a 15-year-old when her mother - "She worked so hard in different jobs to look after us; she would die for any of us" - and grandmother paid for riding lessons before then renting an Arab pony.

It was a welcome diversion from school, many days at which she avoided through truancy triggered by bullying. "Girls are just cows, aren't they?" she asks rhetorically. "I've ended up all right though. Not being

a bully clearly served me well." It would not be the first time she was on the receiving end of unwanted behaviour. Associations with trainers like Phil McEntee, Jamie Osborne and David Nicholls delivered winners and

happy days. Other memories are much less fond.

She remembers a morning when she and another rider were asked to partner a pair of two-year-olds. The young horses refused to leave the yard, causing the trainer to express his displeasure.

"He came into the yard effing and jeffing," recalls Mayor. "He grabbed the sleeve of my coat and literally pulled me off the horse. I walked out there and then. He called me a slut and a rat, ordering me back to the yard."

HE WAS in a minority. As a professional jockey Mayor experienced more good than bad, although not everyone was welcoming.

"There are two jockeys - and thankfully only two - who very much believe women should be at the kitchen sink," she claims. "You could tell that from the way they behaved. Generally speaking though, the attitude of jockeys is very good. They all want each other to do well because they know hard it is."

She was reminded exactly how hard that autumn evening at Kempton when she lay on the ground with a busted ankle. Yet her first question to the paramedic concerned the state of her nose. Mayor is a beautiful woman - one who is blonde again after a dalliance with being a redhead - and that has been frequently noticed.

When much younger she appeared in Argos catalogues. In the spring of 2013 she reached a rather different audience when agreeing to take part in photoshoots for the Daily Star and the now defunct Zoo magazine, on whose pages she posed wearing black underwear, prompting criticism from fellow jockey Kirsty Milczarek, who described her appearance as "a backward step for women in racing".

The tagline used then - "the world's sexiest jockey" - continues to be regurgitated but Mayor is adamant she has no reason to look back with embarrassment.

"I wasn't ever bothered about modelling," she insists. "The Zoo thing only happened because Racing For Change told me they were trying to get a new market interested in racing and Zoo wanted me for a photoshoot."

"I know the reasons I did it and I think they were the right reasons. It didn't do anyone any harm and I

don't regret it. I didn't get my boobs out and never would do that. I hope to have children in the future and there's nothing they could find on the internet I would be ashamed of, nothing at all."

"I think because I'm a girl with a certain image I have to work harder. I still believe people look at someone like me and think, 'There's a bimbo'."

"I find it really offensive when people say I only get work on television because I'm pretty. It's not like I'm just standing there in front of a camera doing nothing. We all know people who have got jobs for the wrong reasons. I've got jobs because I've worked hard, proved myself and made things happen."

She has managed that with such success that ITV Racing bosses last year brought her into the squad, primarily as a pundit. At Epsom in June Mayor received her highest-profile assignment, while she will soon feature in ITV4's coverage of the Sky Bet Sunday Series.

"The Derby was amazing - and unexpected too," she says. "To be trusted to be part of the team on one of ITV's most important days felt amazing. I always thought being a jockey was the best thing I could possibly do but I think I've probably ended up in the perfect job for me. My goal now is to be a presenter - and everybody knows that because I make it quite clear!"

Given the mountain she has climbed, that goal seems eminently attainable. Mayor will likely continue to flourish, which will please her supporters and annoy her detractors. She reads their bars and does not forget them but she will not let them beat her. There are no tears now - just steely determination.

"I've had very good feedback on social media, but it's the unpleasant comments you remember word for word," admits Mayor. "People have said I've got a horrible accent and that my voice could strip paint off walls. What does that even mean?"

"Those people know literally nothing about me. They have no idea what sort of life I've had, which is one reason I wanted to do this interview."

"I had a terrible upbringing. It wasn't my mum's fault but there were all kinds of crap. I don't dwell in the past though. I don't want to be reminded about how bad things used to be. I've had to do it all myself but I've made it work. I now just want to keep moving forward."

RACING POST
Sunday

Kick back with your relaxing weekend read

SHERGAR

THE GREATEST OF ALL DERBY TRIUMPHS



The Big Read

Lee Mottershead looks back to the day when a turf icon rewrote racing history

JIMMY SCOTT, then in the tenth of what would be 40 years as travelling head lad to Sir Michael Stoute, was so impressed with Shergar's work on Racecourse Side that he decided to place a decent ante-post Derby bet. He missed the biggest prices but the returns from his 16-1 wager were still enough to buy a new Mercedes.

Julian Wilson, BBC Television's principal racing presenter, was so taken aback by the April gallop that he made a point of snaffling some of the 33-1 that had been available all winter. The winnings were used to pay for the emerald, sapphire and diamond engagement ring he presented to future wife Alison in London's Ponte Vecchio restaurant on the night of the Derby.

Richard Baerlein, racing correspondent to **Continues page 14**

GERBRY O'NEILL/PAW

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The Observer, had been backing Shergar at 33-1 long before that stunning spring workout.

He continued lumping on the Aga Khan's three-year-old, not least after his ten-length reappearance stroll in Sandown's Guardian Classic Trial. "At 8-1 for the Derby, now is the time to bet like men," Baerlein told his readers. He himself was betting like an exceptionally confident man and used the resulting haul to purchase a house in Sussex. He called it Shergar.

Scott, Wilson and Baerlein all owed a debt of gratitude to the bay horse with the expansive white face who on a sunny afternoon 40 years ago became an icon of the turf.

Shergar did something no horse had done before or has done since. He captured the Derby by ten lengths, setting a winning distance record that still survives, along with his legendary status. This is the story of that day, that Derby and an incredible, unforgettable, tragic thoroughbred.

When Shergar reigned supreme

Shergar may be the most famous racehorse who ever lived. He is, or he was, the poor animal kidnapped by the IRA from the Aga Khan's Ballymany Stud in 1983. No ransom was paid. No trace of Shergar was discovered. The details of his final fate and resting place remain a mystery. What is not in doubt is in the annals of the Derby, and indeed of this sport, Shergar stands tall as a colossus, a creature deserving of reverence. At Epsom, on his day of days, he truly reigned supreme.

So, too, did his rider. Shergar and Walter Swinburn are inextricably linked. He was just 19 years old and making his Derby debut when

'THE DISTANCE HE PUT BETWEEN HIM AND THE OTHER HORSES IN THAT GALLOP BEFORE SANDOWN WAS PHENOMENAL'

partnering the odds-on favourite in the world's most celebrated Flat race. The pressure on Swinburn should have been enormous. He seemingly felt none of it.

The son of top Irish jockey Wally Swinburn was nicknamed The Choirboy and back then really did look like a child. Yet he was old enough, good enough and went on to become one of the weighing room's most respected stars. He would, however, never again be associated with a horse so outrageously talented as Shergar. Hardly anyone ever has, will or could.

We lost Shergar too soon and Swinburn as well. He died at his London home in December 2016 following a terrible accident. Five years earlier he had been back at Epsom as guest of honour for the Derby that marked the 30th anniversary of his remarkable teenage triumph. When there he also reflected on glorious successes aboard Shahrastani and Lamm tarra, but Shergar was the most vivid in his mind, the one most people wanted to ask about. What a tale it was he had to tell.

Lester Piggott was one of his characters. He sat motionless as Shergar won the Irish Derby, making the most of the suspension Swinburn received at Royal Ascot. He had also been on Shergar's back for the son of Great Nephew and Sharmeen's two juvenile outings, a Newbury debut win and a Group 1 second to Beldale Flutter in Doncaster's Futurity. He might well have been in the saddle at Epsom but for Peter Walwyn.

"Walter had ridden quite a few winners for me



Walter Swinburn, welcomed home on Shergar in the unsaddling enclosure after the 1981 Derby, and (inset) with Sir Michael Stoute in 2006

in 1980," recalls Stoute of a jockey whose racing education was completed under a apprentice masters Frenchie Nicholson and Reg Hollinshead.

"He was a very gifted rider. He had a great temperament and the most beautiful hands. I told Walter I would offer him a modest retainer but, bearing in mind he was only 19, he wouldn't have the first choices. PT Walwyn then did him a favour by trying to get him as first jockey at Seven Barrows. I had to bite the bullet and tell him he had better come here."

Swinburn became stable jockey to Stoute, an Oaks-winning trainer in 1978 but still aged only 36 for Shergar's three-year-old campaign. He was looking after a horse whose promise had been obvious from early in his time at Beech Hurst Stables.

"From day one he was a natural," says Scott. "He was such a lovely horse to handle. I can't remember him ever doing anything wrong. He was a pussycat."

Cliff Lines, the future trainer who was then Shergar's regular work-rider, speaks with similar affection about the colt who often galloped with

his tongue lolling out. "He was lovely in every way," says Lines. "He had no vices and he enjoyed his work. You never had to ask him to do anything. He just did it while you sat still on him."

There was one particular morning when he did it to astonishing effect. With his normal neat, scurrying action, he signalled he was ready to excel in Sandown's Derby trial. In the mind of Lines, who was on Shergar's back, the gallop was perhaps a month before Sandown. The trainer has a different recollection.

"No, it wasn't that far out," says Stoute, "Maybe by then Cliff had already sussed it out and told his punters."

Maybe he had. He certainly had it sussed after a now fabled Newmarket gallop.

"He finished about 12 lengths in front of the other two horses without coming off the bridle," says Lines. "It was an unbelievable feeling. I can't put it in to words. Everyone started to get excited - especially when after the gallop they got 33-1 for the Derby."

Stoute admits he knew they had "something pretty special" going to Sandown, after which his ten-length romp was backed up by a 12-length tour de force in the Chester Vase.

"By God, when he accelerated he found some speed," says Scott. "I've never seen a horse take

off like Shergar could, both on the racecourse and in his gallops. He was an amazing horse. The distance he put between him and the other horses in that gallop before Sandown was phenomenal. I backed him at 16-1 for the Derby after that. I got a new Mercedes out of him."

Hard as it is to believe, Shergar was still available at 4-1 following the Vase. Come Derby day, his odds had plummeted.

THERE was even a sense of inevitability about what was to come. None of the 18 colts declared against him had anything approaching the favourite's aura. Indeed, the punters' second choice, Shotgun - a rare northern hopeful selected by Piggott - had been beaten in the Dante Stakes, as had third market choice Kalaglow. Their Michael Jarvis-trained York conqueror Beldale Flutter missed the race having got loose at home, collided with outstanding sprinter Moorestyle and sustained injuries when falling on the road. Italian Derby winner Glint Of Gold, owned like the 1971 champion Mill Reef by Paul Mellon, was deemed good enough to be fourth in the betting.

Those watching ITV's Derby day programme saw Shergar's odds dip to 10-11 as the race drew

near. During a commercial break they also saw an advertisement for Ambre Solaire, in which a man with a seductive voice advised: "The only way to get a deeper tan is to stay longer in the sun." With hindsight, it was a bad tip. A better one came when John Oaksey concluded his paddock assessment.

"Sunley Builds, Golden Brigadier, Kings General, Sheer Grit and Krug have all finished at least ten lengths behind this favourite," said Oaksey. "We know he stays a mile and a half, we know he goes around left-hand bends. His jockey is young but, in my view, a brilliantly promising boy. So, it's no surprise number 18, Shergar, is a red-hot favourite."

Looking back to that hot day on the Downs, Stoute sounds now as Oaksey did then.

"We went there pretty confident and just hoping there wouldn't be a problem," he says. There were no problems. Many horses sweated up. Watched over by groom Dickie McCabe, Shergar remained dry. Unlike French challenger Lydian, who refused to enter the stalls, Shergar was calm and serene, just like his jockey.

"I flew over in the morning with my wife Doreen," says Wally Swinburn. "We subsequently discovered Walter went for a sleep after riding work and his landlady had to wake him up. He was so relaxed that day. The

'I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S 40 YEARS AGO. WHERE HAS THE TIME GONE? WALTER WOULD HAVE BEEN 60 THIS YEAR'

confidence just oozed out of him. Michael Stoute and the Aga had given him confidence by allowing him to ride Shergar. Most of all, Walter had so much confidence in his horse."

That may also explain a further dozing episode. "Walter came with me to Epsom, got into the back seat and slept from the moment he left Newmarket until we arrived at the track," says Stoute. He emits one of his booming laughs at the memory. An even better memory was made when the stalls opened for the 202nd Derby.

The hairs still stand on the back of the neck when you watch what Shergar did that day at Epsom. It was simple, ruthless and beautiful.

As the runners reached the highest point of their journey, Swinburn had his mount in the ideal position. Shergar was cruising in third while Riberetto and Silver Season vied for the lead. As they swept down the hill, the Derby was quickly transformed. It was a scene more akin to a jumps race. Gaps appeared from one beaten rival to the next, the field completely strung out.

From the grandstands Shergar's distinctive white face must have been easy to spot as he took Tattenham Corner three berths off the fence. On leaving the bend, he went for home and the jugular. In just a few strides a ridiculously wide advantage was created, most helpfully for BBC radio commentator Peter Bromley, whose global audience might otherwise have been let down given he had left his race-reading spectacles in a Chobham hotel room. They were not needed.

"Shergar's going for the guns," Bromley declared. "He's gone four, five, six, seven, eight lengths clear. Two furlongs out, the Derby is a procession." Then, as the freak of nature out in front approached the furlong pole, the running rail to his left packed deep with people, Bromley announced in his distinctive booming tones: "There's only one horse in it. You need a telescope to see the rest!"

A telescope might have aided the late John

Matthias, who thought he had won aboard Glint Of Gold, so far clear was Shergar. As the distant second tailed towards the line, Swinburn looked right and left before giving the marvel beneath him a mighty pat down the neck. There were still nine strides between them and Derby glory. The race had long since been won, possibly as far back as that April gallop on Racecourse Side.

"I was just a passenger on a very good horse," Swinburn told ITV's Derek Thompson before the Aga Khan took the reins and led his first Derby winner in to Epsom's hallowed winner's circle. Surrounding the horse were McCabe, Scott and Lines. The trainer was there as well, soon confirming that the Irish Derby and King George would come next. Shergar won them both with acres to spare.

"To be honest, he did what we had expected, so it was actually a relief when it was all over," says Stoute, who in his post-race television interview joked that he gave Swinburn a bollocking for the premature patting.

"It has been the most marvelously predicably Derby I've ever seen," said Oaksey as racegoers leaned over the rail to stroke Shergar's nose. "They used to say, 'Eclipse first, the rest nowhere,'" he continued. "I wouldn't really have been all that surprised had the judge lost his head and called it a distance because it was truthfully Shergar first, the rest nowhere."

He had been on his own for so long, as he was for a worrying amount of time when getting loose one morning in the build-up to the King George, finally coming to a halt in Henry Cecil's Warren Place yard. That was an unexpected development, as was his subsequent defeat at Doncaster, where he could manage only fourth in the St Leger.

"I wasn't happy with his skin that day," says Scott. "I knew the horse well and his coat just wasn't the same. It didn't look right to me. I remember thinking if he was ever going to get beat, it was going to be at Doncaster."

IT WAS a sad end to Shergar's racing career. Worse, much worse, was to come. Yet his magnificence demands we remember him for the day when under a baby-faced jockey he became the most celebrated of all Derby winners.

Asked now what made him so good, Stoute runs off a long list of attributes. "First of all, temperament," he says. "He was a very good-tempered horse with the most wonderful attitude. He had beautiful, clean limbs that never gave us a problem. He was a really balanced athlete and he had serious gears. He was even a lovely person. Shergar was the complete racehorse."

His jockey was also very special. "Immediately afterwards you would have thought he had just won a nursery at Warwick," says Wally Swinburn. "He knew the importance of the race but he wasn't getting carried away. He was as natural as could be."

A historic double might have been completed three days later. Swinburn was due to ride Blue Wind in the Oaks only for Piggott to find his way on to her back. The man who missed out will always regret that. It was just a race, though, not a son.

"Walter was clear that he never rode another horse like Shergar," says Swinburn. "It was a remarkable Derby won by a remarkable horse, there's no doubt about that. I just can't believe it's 40 years ago. Where has the time gone? Walter would have been 60 this year."

When he was 19 and close to entering immortality aboard Shergar, his father handed him what in the Catholic church is called a miraculous medal. It was a gift from his mother and was presented by Wally to Walter at Epsom during an ITV interview with Brough Scott.

"Walter wore it until the end of his days," says Doreen, her voice understandably filled with emotion.

Forty years ago, Shergar and Swinburn, a perfect union that will stay forever young, shared their greatest day.