

# PRINCE OF WALES STEEPLECHASE DAY AT TORONTO HUNT

Mayfair, November, 1927

By DOUGLAS EPPES

THEY chose wisely, those horse-loving enthusiasts who guide the affairs of the Toronto Hunt Club, when they selected Thorncliffe Park as the venue for the annual sporting event which now is happily known as Prince of Wales Steeplechase Day. An ideal course, this, for gauging the merits of a horse on the flat or 'over the sticks'; picturesque, too, and never more so than on this last Saturday in September when approaching autumn had laid light fingers on the foliage of the great trees that form a restful background to the track proper. So with clever horses, capable horsemen and horsewomen to ride them, and an excellently diversified programme, what more could the true lover of the Sport of Kings desire?

In view of the fact that this strictly amateur meeting clashed with two other racing gatherings it was scarcely to be expected that a large crowd would be on hand, particularly as wagering was banned. But it is safe to assert that every Torontonian who wears or hopes to wear 'pink' in the hunting field, or who interests himself or herself in the activities of the horse, was present, and we noted many an out-of-town sportsman and sportswoman who had motored in for the occasion. The names of the 'official family' which supervised the conduct of the affairs at this one-day rally recalled memories of the Ontario Jockey Club, for among them were Colonel K. R. Marshall, C.M.G., D.S.O., Lt. Col. D. King Smith, Mr. Allen Case, Mr. George W. Beardmore, M.F.H. and Captain D. Paton, M.C., each of whom holds a prominent office at Woodbine Park. For this occasion, these well-known racing enthusiasts were reinforced by Mr. W. J. Northgrave, Mr. Strathearn Hay and Major Clifford Sifton, D.S.O., who acted as stewards; Colonel G. G. Mitchell, who wielded the flag at the starting point; Major Walter L. Rawlinson, M.C. and Mr. Gordon Myles, who presided at the scales, and Mr. J. C. Hall, whose task it was to 'clock' the winners' respective times.

Naturally the Prince of Wales Steeplechase claimed priority of attention, but in addition to this amateur cross-country classic there were two other 'tween-the-flags' events and three flat races not the least interesting of which was the half-mile dash confined to lady jockeys.

Outstanding was the success achieved by the entries of Mr. Frank P. O'Connor, turfman and show-ring enthusiast, whose colors flashed first past the post on three occasions, his Peterboro winning the William Mullock Cup, Manifold the D'Alton McCarthy Memorial, and Rifleman the Prince of Wales. The latter was indeed a surprise victory for the wisecracker had predicted the triumph of Mr. Murray Fleming's Faraway in this widely-known event, while it was confidently expected

that Mr. Frank T. Proctor's Amenol also would finish ahead of Mr. O'Connor's horse.

The conditions of this steeplechase are exacting enough to satisfy the hardest-riding horsemen in the cross-country brigade. All entries must be fully qualified hunters, owned by Canadians, resident in Canada, and the weights range from 160 to 170 pounds. There is a half-bred allowance of fifteen pounds, but on this occasion each of the five contestants was clean-bred. The course is two and one-half miles, which meant that at Thorncliffe Park the field of five had to traverse the infield three times and negotiate no less than twenty-two jumps. The topweights were Rifleman, Wych Elm and Owasco who were asked to shoulder 170 pounds, while Faraway and Amenol were allotted five pounds less.

One cannot say with truth that it was an exciting race for at the outset the two horses which finished first and second—Rifleman and Wych Elm—got out in front and never thereafter were seriously threatened by the other three. Wych Elm has shaken his steel-tipped hoofs on the regular Canadian tracks before and at the last meeting of the Ontario Jockey Club at Woodbine Park he bore the canary and royal blue silks of Mr. George W. Beardmore, the popular M. F. H. of the Toronto Hunt, in the Tally Ho steeplechase. So with this previous racing experience to rely on, no one was surprised when he assumed the lead immediately. Colonel Mitchell despatched the field.

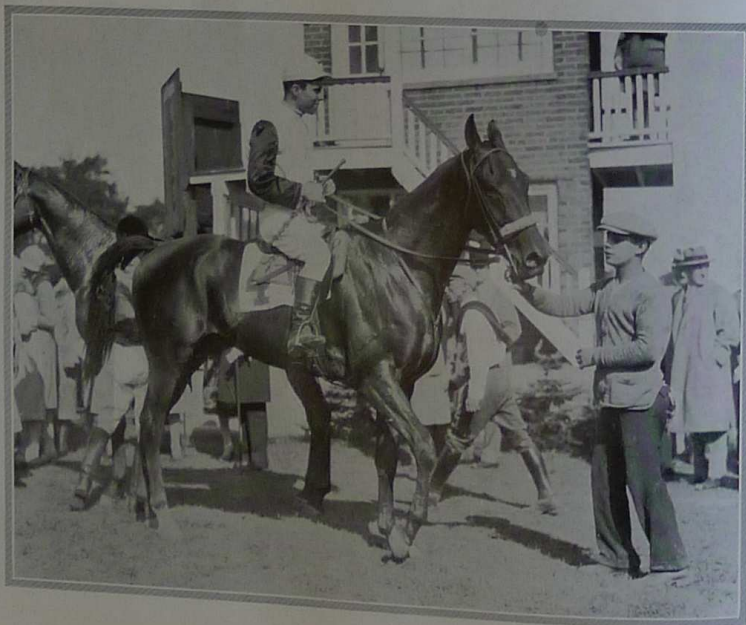
Mr. Anthony L. Smith handled Mr. Beardmore's fencer and allowed him to run at an exceptionally fast clip for the first mile and a half. Meanwhile, always within striking distance, young Mr. Howard Johnston kept Rifleman behind the flying leader, biding his time until he was ready to call on his mount. The rest of the field was strung out, with Faraway acting as rear guard. The second turn of the field saw Owasco pull up lame, but otherwise the positions of the other four runners remained unchanged.

Then, with the goal a little more than half a mile distant, Rifleman began to quicken his stride and in a short time was at the flanks of the leader. Wych Elm fought gallantly to retain his lead, but his early efforts told, and he dropped back a beaten horse with three jumps still to be cleared. Once Rifleman had passed Mr. Beardmore's horse it was only a question as to how much he would win by, for he was running strongly, well within himself, and fencing with marked cleverness. Wisely, his young rider did not push him, bringing home the O'Connor-owned Mr. Frank T. Proctor, riding his own entry, Amenol, was third. As for Faraway, he was always a distant trailer. However, give him another year's sojourn in this country and he will probably prove a hard horse to beat over a similar course.

Honor where honor is due, and to Mr. Howard Johnston belongs a goodly share of the victory, or he rode a patient race, not always an easy thing to do when one is astride of a strong and willing horse. Let also a word be said of Mr. Frank Proctor who rode his first steeplechase upwards of two-score years ago, and who on this occasion showed that he has lost nothing of that skill which has placed him in the foremost flight of this continent's amateur cross-country pilots. Following the triumph of his horse, Mr. O'Connor was presented with a replica of the Prince of Wales Cup, the presentation being made by Mr. George Beardmore in the judges' stand.

The D'Alton McCarthy Memorial handicap, which has a history extending over nearly three decades, proved to be a hollow victory for Manifold, which, as already noted, sported the white and black silks of Mr. O'Connor. Mr. Strathearn Hay's Fanatic was withdrawn from this mile 'chase, robbing it of a good deal of interest, for this Brookdale-bred gelding had proved his ability over the Thorncliffe Park course last year

when he won the Prince of Wales Cup. That left two other starters besides Manifold—Mr. W. L. Christie's Black Fox and Mr. Fred English's Red Indian. Manifold had not looked through a racing bridle since he won the Tally Ho steeplechase at Woodbine Park spring gathering, but he appeared all the better for his summer vacation and fenced with characteristic cleverness. His opposition faded from the picture when Red Indian lost his rider and Black Fox [See also page 45]



Rifleman, winner of the Prince of Wales cup, the blue riband event of the Canadian amateur steeplechasing world, Mr. Howard Johnston rode Rifleman, which is owned by Mr. Frank P. O'Connor, Toronto turfman and show ring enthusiast