

# PASTURES

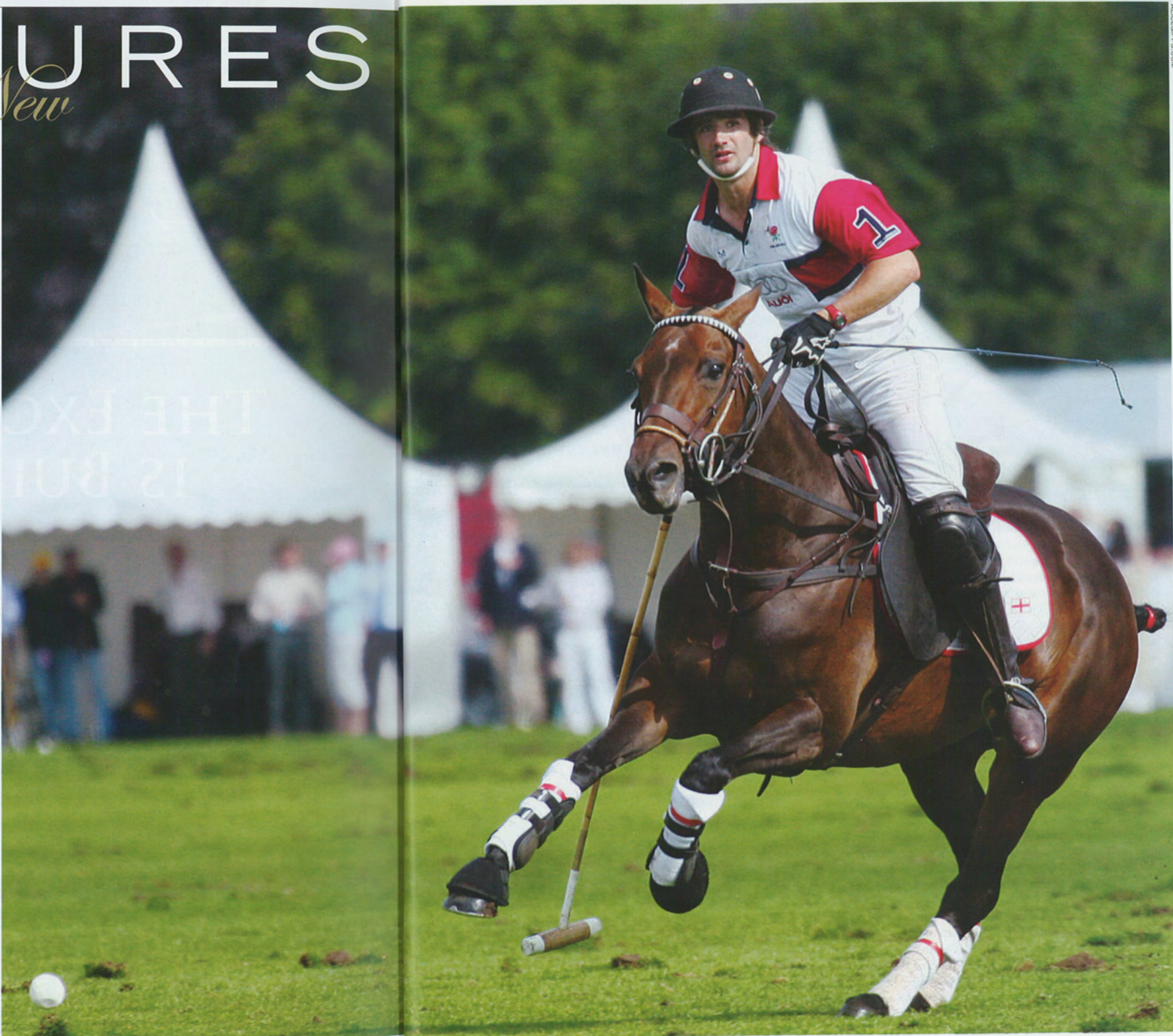
*New*

The Derby is all about winners, but what about the horses that don't make the grade or have run their last race? **Leo Bear** investigates

**AFTER A CELEBRATED CAREER as a racehorse, the best** males will become stallions and the best females broodmares, but the vast majority of racehorses won't. They are still young – many flat-racehorses are younger than four – and while owners will do all they can to find them new homes, it isn't easy. Not long ago, ex-racehorses might have ended up on the meat market or been put down, but now second careers in dressage, showjumping, eventing and polo are giving them a new lease of life. Take for example, former Grand National winner Bindaree who is currently enjoying dressage and eventing, or ex-racehorse Ensign who has a chance at the 2008 Olympics with Pippa Funnell.

Despite the success stories, there is still a huge disparity between the number of horses leaving racing – around 4000 each year – and the demand for them. The charity Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) was launched in April 2000 by Brigadier Andrew Parker Bowles with £2.5 from the Mellon Trust, to increase awareness of the problem and to promote the adaptability of ex-racehorses. It raises funds from all sections of the racing industry to distribute to retraining centres across England (including Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Centre in Lancashire, Greatwood Retired Racehorses Welfare Centre near Marlborough, Moorcroft Racehorse Welfare Centre in West Sussex and more recently HEROS – Homing Ex-Racehorses Organisation Scheme.) Former chairman of RoR, Parker Bowles says: 'We believe that we owe it to racehorses, who have given so much enjoyment, and sometimes financial reward, that their lives should not end with the prospect that they cannot race anymore.'

Di Arbuthnot, director of operations at RoR, says it's often down to the trainers to persuade their owners that racehorses can do something other than racing. 'Just because a horse is *bred* to be a racehorse doesn't mean they *are* a racehorse. Racing is just one gear a horse has.' But it's not an easy job getting this message across. There has long been a stigma attached to owning an ex-racehorse. 'Ten years ago, people would have thrown away a horse's passport and said it was anything but a racehorse,' reflects Arbuthnot. But these days the outlook is brighter with the number of people who commercially take on ex-racehorses and train them to do other jobs on the rise. 'It's quite a good market,' agrees Arbuthnot. 'People go to the sales, especially the bottom end ones like Ascot, if they want something to event or showjump, and especially for polo. The polo





Argentina and dragging them halfway across the world. We buy horses at the lower end of the market that are too slow for even the slowest races,' explains Brett.

He clearly gets a kick out of fostering raw talent and one of his most promising investments is an ex-racehorse called Double Agent who has been in training for three years. 'He's a really funny horse. I've seen him race in videos and he was absolutely rubbish. When everybody crossed the line, he was so far behind that they turned the video camera off,' laughs Brett. 'He's built like a... he's very strong; he has great action, a very good temperament and amazing balance. He's quite a character. I think he'll be something quite special.'

Brett has high hopes for six-year-old Double Agent and is keen to play him this season. 'I want to take him out to Argentina. It's nice to know that a horse like Double Agent who was not that good in the sphere of racing could go on to play in the best polo tournament in the world.'

Brett estimates it costs about £4000 per horse per year to get his horses up to international standard, however, initially, the emphasis is on rest and relaxation. 'I think what happens in racing is that very young horses have a lot to deal with. They are fed a lot of food and are put in situations where they are asked to run as fast as they can

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around other horses – some horses can do it and some horses can't. What we do, is get the horses back to a very natural state. They are not fed a lot of protein; we keep them on a diet of grass and hay so they are in a very relaxed state. We have horses that come in and they have a lot of talent but at the same time, they can be quite angry. After being here for a while, they chill out completely.'

The horses do three years with Brett's 'guys' (Javier, Gabriel and Ed Judge, an Australian three-goaler). They go out on a loose rein, are kept out in the fields and learn stick and ball. They are then taken to polo games to get them used to the experience and to gain confidence but they will only 'do the big stuff' – play with Brett – when they are mentally and physically ready, even though naturals can be playing chukkas within two weeks of arriving chez Brett. 'The guys understand horses, they've lived with them all their lives and it makes such a big difference. Ed plays them in their third year, and in their fourth year, they come to me.'

But what if you haven't been around horses your whole life or aren't a seasoned polo player? Should you even consider taking on an ex-racehorse? According to Arbuthnot, yes, absolutely. 'Ex-racehorses can excel in second careers, but can also make for very happy hacking horses. I know plenty of people who have had wonderful experiences with ex-racehorses. The thing to remember is that when a horse first comes out of racing, it needs a substantial chilling period because it's used to being in a big string and going out and flat-out galloping every day. An ex-racehorse might not have ever been out on its own – and it most probably won't ever have been mounted by putting a foot in a stirrup because in the yard everyone legs each other up. It's things like these that most people won't know but the great thing about ex-racehorses is that they've seen it all.' After all, RoR's motto is: trained to run, retrained for fun. ■

For further information visit: [www.ror.org.uk](http://www.ror.org.uk)  
Henry Brett at the Berkshire School of Polo  
[www.berkspolochool.com](http://www.berkspolochool.com) or [www.brettpolo.com](http://www.brettpolo.com)



## SUCCESS STORIES

**CHESNEY** Fort Duchesne ran 24 times, winning once and placed four times. He was bought by David Morley at Ascot in 1986 and David knew the first time he sat on him there was something special about him. Renamed Chesney, he was quietly trained and went on to play 15-goal polo at the Guards Polo Club in 1987. He caught Carlos Garcia's eye and went on to win three Gold Cup finals at Cowdray Park with him in the British Open Championships. He is now happily retired in Gloucestershire and is still known in polo circles as an exceptional pony.

**MILLIEMETER** 'My mum had a girl's day out at the Ascot sales in 2002,' says Emily Curtis, 'and bought me a three-year-old ex-racehorse for a few hundred pounds. I remember thinking "Why!?" After six months of schooling and hacking out, we took her to the BSPPS winter championships. She won that, as well as Leicester County, qualifying for the SEIB Search for a Star final at Horse of the Year. I was so nervous on the big day, winning was a dream come true. I still struggle to believe that I won awards on our bargain bucket! My mum always said I'd get there one day. I would encourage anyone looking for a horse to have an ex-racehorse.'

**DORA** 'I've always ridden thoroughbreds,' says Mary Rimmell. 'I can't understand why people think they are unmanageable. They are so willing and will always try to do their best. I hadn't ridden for seven years when I got Dora, so spent the first couple of years hacking around. I did a pleasure ride in 2002 and since then we've completed 14 rides and achieved nine Grade Ones. Sixty five kilometres with a Grade One is the best I've done so far. Ex-racehorses make marvellous endurance horses but if you are a nervous rider, an ex-racehorse is probably not for you.'