

# Cox back in Punchestown picture

WHAT is happening at Punchestown? Last month chairman James Osborne and his deputy Dermot Cox were ousted in what, according to press reports, was a carefully orchestrated coup. They were replaced by accountant Nick Bullman and solicitor John Ross, both little known to most racing people.

Earlier in the year Bullman had prepared a report for his fellow members of the Kildare Hunt Club, the trust which owns the Co Kildare racecourse. This was critical of the course's financial position and suggested that it faced serious cash flow problems.

When the report became public — it was leaked to the *Farmer's Journal* — Osborne answered Bullman's criticisms by saying that he had taken action at the time the report was prepared. He had made changes and as a result there were no longer any cash flow worries.

Bullman has refused to answer questions on the matter or indeed on anything to do with the course. Earlier in the week he said he had no comment to make, adding:



"It's a very sensitive time for the people at Punchestown and I don't want to say anything at the moment."

There are concerns that Punchestown has been taken over by hunting, rather than racing, people. Cox is due to be reappointed, this time by the Irish Horseracing Authority and its Horseracing Ireland successor. It has lent Punchestown a lot of money and is entitled to appoint four directors.

Osborne, partly because he appreciated the interest people have in Punchestown, was always open and upfront about everything. He never dodged a question

and hopefully Cox can persuade the new chairman of the importance of doing the same.

## DNA mating test

THE Kent-based Thoroughbred Genetics Company claims to be able to assess a horse's best distance by DNA testing. It uses either body tissues or nasal swabs. Managing director Steve Harrison adds that the testing is at its most effective when it comes to deciding with which stallion a mare should mate.

By doing DNA tests on the mare and the sire he can identify specific characteristics relating to "trainability", performance and soundness as well as stamina.

He maintains that the DNA analysis will often show very different results to a mating worked out on pedigree and that it will reveal to breeders which characteristics will be passed on to the offspring and which won't.

He has several Irish clients paying between £250 and £450 per horse per test. It will be interesting to see how effective the analysis proves.

## Cool coup

COOLNAGORNA, who made virtually all the running when winning two Cork bumpers for Tom Hogan last month, has been sold to join Jonjo O'Neill at Jackdaws Castle in Gloucestershire.

## Crowd slump

IT LOOKS as if the years of steadily rising attendances are about to come to an end. The total attendance to the end of November was 1.17 million compared to 1.2m a year earlier.

The bookmakers have been doing better and their turnover is £3m up at nearly £122m.

But the Tote is again lagging behind. It had some ambitious growth targets for this year yet turnover is over £500,000 down.

## Pride resumes

DORANS PRIDE, sidelined with a pulled muscle for the past month, will resume cantering this week. Michael Hourigan's vets examined the horse on Wednesday and told him it was safe to resume work but the Patrickswell trainer says that the veteran gelding will not be ready to race until the end of next month or even early February.

## Taxing times

RACING will receive more from off-course betting tax next year despite the recent decision by Finance Minister Charlie McCreevy to slash the rate. Racing got 80% of last year's £46.4m tax and the forecast for 2001 is £53m, giving the industry an extra £5m.



O'Neill: purchases a winner

Michael Clower