

## Pastures new

A new initiative at Plumpton Racecourse showcases ex-racing horses who are galloping into fresh careers

WORDS: Jeannine Williamson

**N**oddy munches his hay, breaking off every now and again as admirers stroke his sleek velvety neck and chat to owner Harriet Colderick. All around is the buzz of race day at Plumpton Racecourse where punters place their bets, horses parade in the paddock and there's a thunderous cheer from the stands as the winner gallops past the post.

The handsome six-year-old thoroughbred is completely unfazed by the excitement. He's been there and done that. Under his official name Forest Echo he was on the other side of the stable door last year when he made his racing debut at the racecourse near Lewes.

'He finished eighth out of eight and was 24 lengths behind the seventh horse,' laughs Harriet. 'He didn't stop trying though, bless him, his legs wouldn't take him any faster.'

Although Noddy clearly wasn't cut out for life in the equine fast lane, he's found a winning

new career in dressage competitions, where horses perform movements demonstrating suppleness and athleticism, and the sport of eventing comprising dressage, showjumping and cross country jumping. He's also one of the former racehorses making a guest appearance at every Plumpton meeting in the retrained racehorse stable.

'We have long wanted to do something like this,' explains Dan Thompson, Plumpton's chief executive. 'In the past we've had parades of ex-racehorses, including former Cheltenham Queen Mother Champion Chase winner Sire De Grugy trained by Gary Moore in Sussex, but we purpose built this stable in the summer of 2022.'

'Its sole use is for housing retired racehorses on race days as we really believe in showing everyone that they live a happy and healthy life after their racing careers.'

'It's worked like a charm and all racegoers, from first time visitors to annual members, and even grooms who bring their own horses racing on the day, are keen to say hello and learn about the beautiful animal on show. We even provide Polos so everyone can give the day's resident a well-earned mint treat, which children love doing,' Harriet agrees. >

**left:** Harriet has a special bond with Watergate Bay. Photo: local equestrian

**below:** Harriet eventing with Watergate Bay, the first horse in Plumpton's retrained racehorse stable





**above:**  
Emma Paice's Ballycoe is  
a natural at dressage

**below:**  
Racehorses in action at Plumpton

The 31-year-old event rider from Nutley is both a racing enthusiast and passionate about retraining racehorses. Her family owns racehorses and she used to ride out for Hampshire-based trainer Chris Gordon.

'It all began when our own horses would come to the end of their racing career and I

Fever, or Fever, a twice Cheltenham Festival winner who won 10 out his 21 races and £345,955 in prize money for his former owner, and 17-year-old Watergate Bay, aka Nixon, who was a winner for trainer Paul Nicholls.

'Fever started eventing as a 10-year-old and has been a pleasure to retrain,' says

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started retraining them,' she says. 'Forest Echo was my second occupant of the Plumpton stable.

'He proved too slow for racing but is showing great promise for a successful eventing career. He came third in his first event, has won dressage competitions and came second in his first arena eventing competition, which involves showjumping and cross country on an all-weather surface.'

Harriet's other ex-racehorses that have been to Plumpton are 16-year-old Champagne

Harrier. 'He is now ridden by my groom Georgia Marsland who is enjoying learning the ropes of eventing on him. We love having him in the yard as he is such a character. He is thriving on his active semi retirement, doing a bit of everything and hacking round the Ashdown Forest where we live.

'Watergate Bay is my most successful horse so far and was the very first occupant of the retrained racehorse stable at Plumpton. We bought him from Paul Nicholls and point-to-pointed him for a season. He then had a slight >



DORIS GORDON



**Left:** Forest Echo came last as a racehorse but is a winner at dressage and eventing

tendon injury so I rehabbed him and started retraining him with the plan of doing a few events and then finding him a nice home. However, he proved extremely talented and took to eventing fantastically.'

Clocking up numerous wins in top competitions, in 2018 he was named the Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) Eventing Champion. The RoR is a charity run by the British Horseracing Authority to support the retraining and rehoming of former

other careers such as eventing, dressage, showjumping, polo, hacking out and many other disciplines. It's great there are organisations such as RoR that organise numerous events across the country and give owners something to aim for with their ex-racehorses – including prestigious venues, such as Blenheim and Aintree.

'The retrained racehorse stable is a fantastic initiative. It allows the general public to get up close and interact with an

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racehorses. Nixon recently embarked on his 'third career' as a dressage horse with Harriet and last year they won the Novice RoR Dressage Championships at Blenheim Palace International Horse Trials.

'He's a fabulous horse and a fantastic example of the versatility of the racehorse,' says Harriet. 'Thoroughbred racehorses are so athletic and intelligent, therefore, some are great candidates for retraining for

ex-racehorse and gives them the chance to ask questions about their lives after racing and their retraining.

'What's also nice is you can have superstar racehorses that had fantastically successful careers, like Fever, but also the unsuccessful ones, like Noddy. It shows that it doesn't matter whether they were good at racing or not, they all deserve and have the ability for a second career and a life outside of racing.'

## THE RACEHORSE REHOME QUEEN

Kings Bayonet, now known as Teddy, won six races and more than £55,000 during his career. Now 16, he's Christine Keate's third ex-racehorse. He was a favourite ride of Hayley Turner, the first female jockey to ride 100 winners in a calendar year. Christine, from Seaford, adopted Teddy in 2016 through Hayley's mother who ran a rehoming centre.

Christine is equine veterinary editor, co-owner and director of *The Horse Hub* – an information website for horse owners – and PKW Events, which organises events and education for animal health professionals. She says: 'He loves

going out on hacks, low-level competitions and generally being thoroughly loved and spoiled. Like many ex-racehorses he is a sensitive and gentle horse who loves a one-to-one connection.'

She has also rehomed the racehorse Supercilious, aka Sid, from The Racehorse Sanctuary in Pulborough and fostered another.

'I love the reactivity and sensitivity of the thoroughbred,' adds Christine, who is married to Sussex equine dentist Chris Keate. 'If you have time and patience and are matched with the right one it is a wonderful partnership.'

Another local rider, Emma Paice, 29, from Hartfield, has two ex-racehorses on loan. She has been to the Plumpton stable with Ballycoc, or Bally, aged 14, who won three races during his career, including one at Plumpton. She will be back at Plumpton on Ladies Day, Sunday, May 14, with 24-year-old Laskari.

Emma has been placed in every dressage competition she has entered on Bally, and now plans to event him. She has competed in showjumping classes and evented Laskari. Both horses also enjoy hacking out.

'I have always had horses,' says Emma, a nursing assistant at a small animal veterinary clinic. 'I always thought racehorses are beautiful horses and saw quite a few of them going around top eventing courses, and that interested me. I like a challenge.'

Emma first heard about Laskari after he had been retired from racing and was looking to be rehomed.

'I ended up taking him on in 2018 and that's how it all started,' she says. 'He's a real character, always in your pockets and he follows you around the yard. I'm hoping to event him again this season as although he is 24 he is not ready to retire yet.'

Emma says many people don't realise racehorses can go on to have very different and fulfilling careers. And while these beautiful ex-racehorses may no longer be in the running, they are certainly firm favourites with their new owners and Plumpton racegoers.

'Former racehorses are well handled and have done things from a young age so they are very polite on the ground,' she says. 'I think some people are surprised that they are so amenable, but they are actually very good at adapting. I always try and promote taking on ex-racers, so it's nice to go to Plumpton to talk about them and what they have done.'

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Christine with former champion racehorse Teddy