

life on the hoof

It's a fast-moving world in horseracing, especially when you are clerk of both Chepstow and Bath Racecourses.

Tim Long spent one of his typically busy days with **MIKE BEARDALL**

TIM Long has been around horses all his life. From hunting as a boy to his army career in the Lifeguards Household Cavalry.

Add running a busy equestrian and training business for nine years and you have the perfect blend of background for a racecourse clerk.

Add two racecourses - Chepstow and Bath - and you have a man who, at the age of 41, is steeped in the business of horses and racing every day of the year.

As clerk of both he is at the helm of two of the busiest racecourses in the UK, and holder of the deepest knowledge of every aspect - from the construction and soil make-up of the tracks, to dealing with trainers and racecourse staff.

His daily business includes talking to groundsmen, having an innate understanding of all the facets of their work, and knowing how the weather and track conditions will affect racing.

"While I am heavily





“I’m still using the old fashioned wooden stick method alongside my eye and experience”

Tim Long, Clerk of Course, Chepstow and Bath Racecourses

involved in the day-to-day aspects, I am very aware of the bigger picture,” says Tim.

“Racing is not just a pastime but a business and this sector of the sports industry is a huge employer. Because the bookies and the punters and everyone involved want racing all year round we work hard to keep tracks up to scratch.”

“That is why we are constantly working to improve track conditions, with drainage and equipment that we now use on a day-to-day basis - where once it was hired in, we now have our own kit.”

WE are meeting two days before a special Caribbean-themed evening at Chepstow on the last Friday in July. The weather has been as wet as everywhere and the neighbouring county of Gloucestershire is still flooded. Going is definitely going to be ‘soft’.

Six races are scheduled. More than 8,000 racegoers are expected - and the theme of the evening means people will dress-up, have parties and dance the night away.

For Tim, two days before,

this means looking at the confirmed horses for the races, sent through Weatherbys - the organisation in Wellingborough, Northants, that controls all racing administration across the UK.

At **6.30am** his day begins at Chepstow when he checks the computerised declarations from trainers as to which horses they are racing and in which races.

Then he walks the course for an hour, taking measurements with a Turftrax digital reading ‘stick’ which he has had for three years but which has been trialled by all racecourses for the last nine months to establish a standard measurement of ‘going’.

“I am still using the old-fashioned wooden stick method alongside my eye and experience,” says Tim, “but this gives us a more scientific average figure using a penetration and heave motion to replicate how hooves would hit the ground. After a number of goes we get an average that can be related to the going description, for example the number eight should represent the middle of ‘good’

ground while 16 would be ‘very hard’.”

“Then I feed the information into the system and the going is sent to every trainer.”

At **7.30** Tim is in the office sending off the information by computer.

By **8.30** he is getting calls from trainers asking about the going and the weather conditions forecast for the area over the next two days.

At **10am** Tim is checking that all the various staff are available for the race evening, including doctors, paramedics, nurses, vets, farriers and many more.

“Three doctors have to be in attendance and I have to sign a form declaring that all staff are in place half an hour before the first race,” says Tim. “Otherwise no racing can go ahead.”

Chepstow are head groundsmen Robert Mottram, who has been there for 25 years, and five groundsmen.

“They are very good experienced guys,” says Tim.

“Robert is so experienced he concentrates only on the issues that matter and only raises matters that are important on the track.”

At Bath Andrew Hogston is head groundsmen. He has inherited the role (“strictly on merit”) from his father, who is now retired but still drives the duty doctor round the course on race days. And he, also, took over from his father.

“Three generations of head groundsmen on the same racecourse takes some beating,” says Tim.

At Bath the ground is 800ft above sea level with friable soil over limestone and with



AT Chepstow casual staff have to be brought in for the race evening. Track staff number 25, stewards between 30-35 and security staff up to 20.

Full time ground staff at

its own indigenous grass species. “We try to disturb the course as little as possible to maintain the unique properties we have there,” says Tim.

At **11am** in Chepstow, Tim is planning to leave for Bath

Racecourse in an hour.

He has a second meeting of the morning with Robert Mottram.

"We generally speak at least twice a day," says Tim.

A couple of phone calls, one to a builder about a leaking stable roof at Bath and another to a rep about a machinery demonstration of a yard sweeper, and some paperwork is signed off.

At **12noon** Tim gets in his car with his active little Patterdale Fell terrier Trooper (17 months old and very lively) to make his way to Bath which takes about 40 minutes.

Around **1pm** at Bath Racecourse Tim meets head groundsman Andrew Hogston and they walk the track. After discussions about various course jobs that need doing, including routine surface treatment, Tim heads for the office to complete the inevitable paperwork.

It is now **2pm**. "This job is all about keeping track of records," says Tim. "My diary is the only document I keep with me at all times, together with my laptop (which, ironically, is in for repair today but

all the information is stored on the course hard drives at both racecourses)."

"We keep all the paperwork separately at each course, but my diary records every movement at both and all the calls I have to make and meetings I have to be at."

At **3pm** he is heading back to Chepstow and by **3.40** is checking declaration cards and doing updates on the course for trainers.

"Clerks need to have the complete trust of trainers and we have to be absolutely honest in every respect," says Tim.

The trainer's bible is the weekly Racing Calendar prepared six weeks in advance by Weatherbys and compiled from an information network known as "tricl". Tim's regular bulletins go into the system.

"Once race meetings are in the Racing Calendar there is no going back," says Tim. "Everyone in the industry looks at the dates and the information is there for all to see."

TIM could not operate without staff. At Chepstow he has

BELOW: Tim with his TurfTrax stick



**Whatever the game,
we know the score.**

INTURF™

People who know turf know INTURF

The Chestnuts • Wilberfoss • York • YO41 5NT
Tel: 01759 321000 • Fax: 01759 380130
Email: info@inturf.co.uk • www.inturf.com

melex ESTABLISHED 1971

GOLF CARTS

New UK Distributor - Lloyd Ltd.

Melex Electrically-powered, golf carts and multi-purpose vehicles, gaining in popularity worldwide. High quality and state-of-the-art technology. Environmentally-friendly passenger, cargo and speciality models. Wide range of optional extras available for a variety of applications.

For enquiries and Sub-Dealer Opportunities contact Simon Holmes on 0191 267 7555
simon.holmes@lloyd.ltd.uk

www.lloyd.ltd.uk

Lloyd Ltd., Ponteland Road, Throckley, NEWCASTLE NE15 9EP
Telephone: **0191 267 7555**

Tim Long FactFile

- Born 41 years ago to builder father who also raised cattle at Braunston near Rugby, Warwickshire.
- Raised with ponies and rode with Pytchley and Warwickshire Hunts.
- Educated at Daventry School.
- After A-levels broke with family tradition of joining the Coldstream Guards and joined the Lifeguards as regular soldier in the Household Cavalry.
- After two years became a senior instructor at the barracks in Knightsbridge, London.
- Met wife Julie, while serving in the cavalry, daughter of a farmer near Bridgwater, Somerset, and left the army after seven years' service.
- Two daughters, Jessica (13) and Charlotte (12), who are both keen riders competing, and winning, events.
- '93-2002: Ran equestrian business training point-to-pointers and hunters near Bridgwater. Carried out pre-training work including breaking, backing and schooling.
- 2003: Joined Chepstow and Bath Racecourses as trainee clerk of course with clerk David Macallister, also then group manager of Northern Racing, the company which owns both courses.
- 2003: Took over as clerk from David, who retired.



Chepstow as seen from the main stand

12 administration staff, controlling everything from the events taking place (conferences, entertainment events, dinners, weddings) to accommodation for staff travelling to stay close to horses at the site.

At Bath there are six administration staff, the difference being that Chepstow has jumping and flat racing. From May to September there are 14 fixtures and from October

to the end of April 16.

Bath, being flat racing only, sees 18 fixtures from mid-April to the end of October.

On an average week Tim spends three days at Chepstow and two at Bath.

"Summer is hectic with some weeks having three fixtures - one at Bath and two at Chepstow," says Tim.

"Bath is unique as a flat course, having no irrigation because of being 800 feet

above sea level. With the friable soil over limestone and its own indigenous species of grass, it's a different management technique that is not so invasive so we don't lose that excellent quality."

"Chepstow is completely different being on clay loam. We have been doing drainage work over the last 18 months and Speedcut Contractors of Oxford are here at the moment putting in gravel and sand slits from the last fence to the road crossing."

"From the end

of December to March is usually very wet here and we have our work cut out keeping the course drained. That is why we have our own small verti-drainer, something racecourses would not have done years ago - but now we are getting in the kit ourselves."

At 4pm Tim goes out to the track to talk to Paul Francis of Speedcut to see how drainage progress is going.

"They should be finished by the weekend," says Tim, but the weather has been appalling over the last few weeks and they have had to call a halt several times because of heavy rain."

The weather is, naturally, a major factor in Tim's life. But apart from the localised forecasts he knows exactly what is going on at each course - even from his home at Over Stowey near Bridgwater, Somerset, about an hour away by road.

"The weather stations we have feed everything into computers," says Tim, "and I get information via the satellite so I know exactly how much rain has fallen on each course and what the local conditions are."

"Technology has really transformed things for us and we can be more in control of what action to take."

The groundstaff at Chepstow used to do all their mowing with gang mowers but that is now changing to out-front mowers on compact



ABOVE: Tim Long chats to Paul Francis of Speedcut Contractors about the drainage at Chepstow Racecourse

“Technology has really transformed things for us and we can be more in control of what action to take”

Tim Long, Clerk of Course, Chepstow and Bath Racecourses

tractors with blowers on the back to spread the cuttings. At different times of the year they also collect the cuttings using a Trilo sweeper.

“We also have rakes, slitters, power harrows, rotovators and triple ride-ons for landscaped areas,” says Tim.

“The machinery in our armoury these days is a massive move forward.”

Bath still uses gang mowers but next year is getting a front-mounted mower and will use a combination of the two because of the different course conditions.

They only got a new tractor two years ago, replacing one that was 25 years old. Bath also has a John Deere Gator with a new pick-up, various other bits of equipment and a Kubota ride-on.

At 4.30 Tim is checking all the horses who are due to arrive the next day and allocating boxes and accommodation for stable staff. He has to ensure that all boxes are disinfected and meet strict criteria laid down by the horseracing authorities.

“We are a very close-knit team in this industry,” says Tim. “We all rely on each other and all the details have to be right.”

At 5.30 Tim has a final chat with some of the admin staff and a final talk, on the

phone, with Robert, the head groundsman.

Then he decides to head home to wife Julie, a former stables owner who now runs her own catering business with her sister-in-law, and daughters Jessica (13) and Charlotte (12), both keen riders.

“Jessica is keen on eventing and Charlotte likes jumping

and pony racing. They are both very good and mad keen and Charlotte has won seven races,” says Tim, beaming.

“A lot of people say they don't envy me my job, but I love it. With my farming background and my love for horses I have the perfect job.”

“I like walking the tracks, assessing the conditions, talking to the staff and generally

everything this job is about.”

“There are the quiet times when I am on my own - but I have little Trooper to keep me company.”

And, right on cue, Trooper belts after a couple of pony club riders chasing alongside the track during their school holiday camp at Chepstow.

“Never a dull moment,” says Tim.



The finishing post at Chepstow

Running British horseracing

WEATHERBYS' role in providing administrative services to the British Racing industry is fundamental.

The key services are covered under their contract with the British Horseracing Authority and this contract specifies the day-to-day work which must be undertaken to ensure the smooth running of the sport throughout Britain.

They process all registrations of ownership, of colours, of horse names and horses in training. Weatherbys also receive all race entries and declarations and allocate the weights to be carried in all races - plus they hold the central file of handicap ratings.

Weatherbys receive all jockey bookings, and, following final race declaration, conduct

the stalls draw, race divisions and any necessary eliminations.

They issue the final, official lists of runners and riders and receive and disseminate the going reports for all British racecourses.

All racecourse fixtures are



reported in the weekly Racing Calendar, prepared six weeks in advance