

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Steve Dennis catches up with ex-jockey **Richard Thomas**, now an estate agent

Exchanging joy of the Turf for contracts

ONCE upon a time you might have put your house on Richard Thomas, these days he's the one with the right house for you. It may not have been the easiest of transitions from Flat jockey to estate agent, but now Thomas is content to be making his way up the property ladder.

He hung up his silks and breeches at the beginning of last November, and – thanks to the assistance of the indispensable Jockeys Employment & Training Scheme (Jets) – within a week he'd exchanged them for a suit and tie and a new career with estate agency Your Move in Andover. The future is rosy, but the past still occupies his mind.

"Racing gave me up, not the other way round," he says. "If I could I'd go back to being a jockey tomorrow, I would, but I've got three children and a family and I have to be realistic."

"Of course you have to be talented to make it as a jockey, but there's also a lot of luck involved. The two years after I lost my claim were okay – 20-odd winners, which is enough to keep you sane, to make a living – but after that it was a struggle. I was my



Name Richard Thomas **Age** 34

Time active 1997-2013

Best moment Won a Listed race at Chester in 2006 aboard Ripples Maid

Other highlights 149 winners in Britain – "Any time I rode a winner on TV it was a massive buzz"

own biggest critic but you can't go without the horses."

Thomas had a career change in the back of his mind for several years, flirting with the family business of hairdressing by completing a ten-week barbering course – "It just wasn't for me," he admits – before a conversation with his wife Julie sent

him in another direction. By that stage he was more work-rider than race-rider, which nagged at his soul – "I wanted to be a jockey" – and a spell working part-time for his estate agent brother-in-law proved more enjoyable than he expected, seemed to be something he could envisage doing full-time.

"Racing gives you good people skills, enables you to talk to all sorts of people, and Julie said she thought being an estate agent would suit me. One day I bit the bullet, asked for help with my cv from Lisa Delany at Jets, and simply walked round Amesbury, Andover and Salisbury handing out my cv and looking for work. I eventually had two offers, and here I am."

He appreciates the short commute from his home, enjoys the task of getting to grips with the demands of his new role, and has an eye on greater responsibility. The man who rode the first ever 'winner' at Meydan in a trial race is slowly adapting to life after racing.

"I'm a sales consultant, it's all about customer care, I'm always on the phone. I've become the best in the region at booking mortgage appointments, and I want to move on to being a valuation manager."

"I'll always miss racing, always. It's in my blood, and that's why it hasn't been easy to move on. But on a dark, cold, wet morning, I'm happy to be in front of a computer rather than out on the gallops."

I GOTTA HORSE

Peter Green tells Richard Birch about his high hopes for Slim Pickens

Double strike as Newland works magic

Horse Slim Pickens **Wins** 2

Owner Peter Green **Age** 69

Best moment Realising Slim Pickens 'could be the best horse I've owned'

SLIM PICKENS isn't the first horse to have benefited from the golden touch of Richard Newland this summer and he won't be the last.

The Grand National-winning trainer has proved his expertise time and again in recent weeks with the likes of rapid improvers Masterofdeception and Jazz Man, and Peter Green, owner of Slim Pickens, cannot praise him enough.

"Richard is a genius," he says. "And the most incredible thing of all is that to him it's just a hobby. He's got the most wonderful eye to pick out a horse who has potential. I think every horse he's bought recently has won first time out."

One of those first-time-out winners was Slim Pickens, who was bought from Paddy Prendergast in May after drawing a blank in five outings and produced an instant dividend when impressively justifying 11-8 favouritism under Sam Twiston-Davies in a Southwell maiden hurdle.

He followed up at odds of 2-5 seven



Peter Green (left) with his pride and joy Slim Pickens and jockey Sam Twiston-Davies after the six-year-old's victory at Southwell last month

days later at Worcester and Green, now enjoying retirement after a career in the sugar industry, has high hopes the six-year-old can continue his progress off an opening mark of 130 when his attentions are turned to handicaps.

"I bought Slim Pickens after another horse of mine, Orthodox Lad, broke down," he says. "I wanted a summer jumper and Richard found Slim Pickens. I've had him only for a couple of months and he's already won two races. It's fantastic."

Green believes Slim Pickens has the potential to develop into the best horse he has owned. "I'm very excited by him. He seems to have a fifth gear and I'm sure we haven't seen the best of him yet. Richard and Sam both like him and there's a valuable race at

Market Rasen later in the summer that could suit. That's the plan anyway."

Green, who lives in Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, first took the plunge into racehorse ownership in 2007 when he purchased a half-share in Barton Sun, who was trained by Ferdy Murphy.

Like Slim Pickens, he made a winning debut for the owner when successful in a Sedgefield handicap chase under Graham Lee and Green was hooked.

Green is currently on a riding holiday at a Montana ranch, but he will be back in Britain when Slim Pickens bids for a hat-trick. "Things have gone brilliantly so far," he says. "And hopefully the horse can go on to even bigger and better things. I can't wait to see him run again."



Sam Angell at Epsom on Thursday: "I'm enjoying every minute"

YOUNG GUNS

In our series on people taking their initial steps in racing, Richard Birch talks to stipendiary steward **Sam Angell**

HAVING grown up listening to stories about some of the champions to have come out of the famous Coombelands Racing Stables, such as Dancing Brave and Warning, Sam Angell was always destined for a career in racing.

His father worked for Amanda Perrett at the West Sussex yard and Angell recalls watching the horses on the gallops from a very early age. He worked in the office during his summer holidays when just 13 and then became pupil assistant prior to undertaking a course in equine science and thoroughbred management at Oxford Brookes University, from which he graduated with a first class honours degree.

"I always wanted to be involved in racing and I'm very happy with how things have gone so far," Angell says. "I was lucky enough to be one of three people accepted to join the BHA's stipendiary steward training scheme in May last year and I graduated last month. I'm now a fully fledged stipe and enjoying every minute."

Angell, who still lives in Pulborough, close to Coombelands, particularly loves the variety of his work. "It's mainly southern-based, but I've been to Ayr and Doncaster and you can be sent here, there and everywhere," he says.

"A typical day starts with getting the Racing Post and looking at the daily report of poor performances and so on. You'll make an early assessment of the races you're going to be involved in, look at the early prices, and then aim to be at the track up to three hours before the first race."

Graduate helps to lay down law

Name Sam Angell **Age** 24

Job Stipendiary steward

Best moment Working all five days at Royal Ascot this year – it was amazing

"Everyone has been very helpful at the racecourses. All of the jockeys in the weighing room were very good to the stipes while we were training. People like AP McCoy have been around ever since I was growing up, so it's great to be around them now on a daily basis."

As part of his university course Angell attended a foaling season at Gainsborough Stud and went to the yearling sales with James Delahooke and Peter and Ross Doyle. During his placement year he was pupil assistant to Andrew Balding.

"I got good experience of many things in racing before I joined the BHA," Angell says. "The last 12 months have been great and one of the highlights was being sent to work in Dubai in March as part of a new exchange initiative between the BHA and Emirates Racing Authority."

Q&A 'I love the variety. No day is ever the same'

Best bit about being in racing? The variety. No day is ever the same.

And the worst? All the travelling, particularly when it involves the M25.

Ambition To continue to improve and to go as far as I can. I always wanted to be a trainer, but that isn't an option in the current financial climate. I'm very happy with my career as a stipendiary steward.

What can racing do to attract more youngsters to the sport? Be more flexible with admission prices and lower the price for students. It can be cheaper to go to a football match on a Saturday afternoon, so it's a no-brainer where people will go. Lingfield offered free admission to local residents last Saturday night and the place was packed. People will go if the price is right.