

# Bred For Riding

A profile of winning rider and trainer Philip Hobbs  
by Mark Johnston, Equestrian Photographer



In 1977, after leading in a shock 50/1 winner at Cheltenham Racecourse, winning trainer Tony Hobbs proudly told the Racing Press that not only had he bred and trained the winning horse, Copper Bar, but he had also bred and trained the winning jockey, his son Philip! Few would have imagined that one day Philip would be training nearly 100 horses from the family farm or that he would amass £34m in prize money for his owners in a season.

Philip was certainly bred for a riding and training career. His father Tony sent out many winners from the few horses he trained under permit from Sandhill House near Minehead. Philip was educated at King's College, Taunton and then Reading University. His riding career started with show jumping, competing at Hickstead, and then on to be a jockey learning his skills at point to points. Philip was a successful professional jockey riding 160 winners including top class horses such as the locally trained Artifice and subsequent Grand National winner, West Tip. He set up as a trainer in 1985 and his very first runner was a winner.

Philip's wife Sarah is very much involved in the training. An accomplished horsewoman, Sarah is the daughter of Olympic gold medallist Bertie Hill. She has evented, ridden for England in the Junior European threeday event team and as an amateur jockey enjoyed success in point to points on the flat, and under National Hunt rules. Sarah keeps owners full in touch with their horse's progress and regularly accompanies them at the races. Richard White, aka 'Johnson' is Philip's assistant trainer and sees to the organisation of the yard.



Sandhill is set in top quality Crown Estate farmland at Bilbrook near Minehead. As well as being a thriving business, it is very much the Hobbs' family home with daughters Caroline, Katherine and Diana. Surrounding the manor house and its beautiful garden there are assorted gallops, canters, the nearby sandy beach, forestry tracks horse walkers and an equestrian pool all designed to get the horses superbly fit in as many varied ways as possible. Although everything has to be run in a very businesslike and professional way, there is a real sense of contentment and a relaxed atmosphere at the stables.



Wandering around the yard the horses gleam in their coats and thrive in their work; Philip's staff are proud of the horses they look after and are delighted to show them off and answer questions about them. After working the horses, they are turned out in small groups to graze, relax and just enjoy being part of a small herd.

As well as getting horses racing fit, it is essential that Philip chooses the right races for them. He has to judge which races they are likely to have a realistic chance of winning, not placing them out of their depth, building up their confidence and experience towards long-term targets. Typical of this softly, softly approach was Philip's handling of the stable star "What's Up Boys", last season building up his confidence gradually before winning a

£75,000 race at the Grand National meeting in April, one of the stable's three winners at the prestigious meeting.

I suspect that selecting the right race is like a game of poker amongst trainers with each not wanting to show his hand until the last minute. Final entries are made by 10:00am the day before a race. Philip puts the success of the Somerset yards down to friendly rivalry so I can imagine Messrs Hobbs, Nicholls and Pipe bombarding some harassed official with race declaration faxes between 9:56am and 9:59am. By 10:02 Philip comes in for his breakfast smiling.



At present, Philip trains 96 horses with a waiting list. Last season, despite the restrictions of foot and mouth, Philip won 82 races and £744,000 in prize money. The ambition is to break £1,000,000 in a season. I suspect that might go with 100 winners. That would be quite a double.