

# The Sport of Kings

Was he the first pub manager to run for parliament, no. The pub with the most eco-credentials, however impressive, possibly not. That he would be on the podium for the grumpiest and most eccentric there is no doubt. Steve Cotton, landlord of the Poltimore Arms, is legally blind and had been considering trying-out for the GB Paralympic eventing team, despite only learning to ride in the last few years. That is until a passing customer got his mind



racing about other possibilities. Now the Poltimore is not the kind of place you just pass, being on the edge of Exmoor, but once you've found it, you'll just keep coming

back. Sitting in his rocking chair, in front of a life size cardboard cut-out of the queen, with candles lighting the room and a roaring fire every day of the year, the ebullient and free-spirited Steve ensures the real pub tradition is alive with conversation; real conversation with no holding back and no discrimination or recrimination. A fine pint of Exeter Brewery Lighterman is the drink of choice, mostly because it's the only beer on offer. I'm not complaining, as it's always in top form.

Not content with the usual array of classic pub games, Steve took this customers advice and created the first ever pub polo team. Step forward the Yarde Down Polo Club, allegedly formed in 1815 (well that's what is emblazoned across the smart kit?) They say it's the sport of Kings but to most of us polo conjures up images of pink soft brushed cotton casual wear, compact VW cars or those mints with the hole. Not to Steve as he and the team are now hooked, training at Taunton Vale Polo Club at every opportunity. The club chairman Mark enthused that "the introduction of this new cohort had helped keep the club alive and ponies serviced". There are ponies close-by on Exmoor I hear you say, but even Steve wouldn't, would he?

Jed from the club thought they'd seen it all before with people expressing an interest, but "they kept coming back, sometimes 20 of them", so along

with Callum they worked wonders at the training sessions to mold a team and when they said they wanted a tournament, well who could resist? The inaugural game was set for Saturday 31st August at Taunton Vale Polo Club. All those preconceived ideas about polo, well yes there was a vintage cream Landrover, with the back panel dropped down, but no Fortnum and Masons hamper, just a Yeti cool box full of beers and a fun bunch of folk enjoying a Saturday afternoon of sport.

Steve stood there, chain smoking and pondering what had he started.... The referee started the game and a string of ponies began herding like a bunch of kids all chasing blindly after the wooden ball. There was plenty of argy-bargy and the ball was mostly at a standstill, but after a while they settled into a rhythm of sorts. It wasn't long before Taunton Vale scored and the first chukka ended 1-0 although the scoreboard read 1-2, so Yarde Down led due to a handicap system. Let's not get into that. Momentum built in the second chukka with several cantering breaks



from the home team, but most of the action was on the Vale goal-line with the ball rattling between the hooves. Unfortunately, Yarde Down couldn't convert this pressure. The announcer had clearly been nobbled by Steve or bribed in some way with a tin of cider as he extolled the virtues of the YD team and their dominance in the third chukka, then inevitably the Vale levelled the game at 2-2. Remember the handicap - keep up. The Vale stayed out to practice moves; were the nerves getting to them? A lot can happen in a chukka I was told, but the home side pushed home their advantage with the final score ending at 3-2. Despite not managing to score, the entire team pulled together from pub locals did Devon proud.

Burgers, hot dogs and cider were kindly provided by Chivers Potter Associates and Deborah & Tom

from Moorland Arabians as well as the Poltimore Arms. Everyone tucked in appreciatively before heading into the prize-giving and all was over too soon.

Now thoughts turn to international glory with a tour to Majorca already agreed. He's succumbed to the fact that they could do with a sponsor. Maybe the pub and sports enthusiast Sir Jim Radcliffe could pitch in? It's surely better value than a few minutes of a United player's salary. I don't know any polo commentators, but could see a Bjorge Lillelien moment where they are overcome

with pride: Eva Peron, Lionel Messi, Pope Francis, Diego Maradona, Fangio - your boys took one hell of a beating as Steve leads the team to victory in the Campeonato Argentino Abierto de Polo, the leading international club competition played in Argentina.

If you haven't already, then take a trip to the pub, chat, drink some great cask-conditioned ale and if you're feeling brave then sign up to Steve's next hare-brained adventure.

**Andy Heath**

# Beer Tiz



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