

LEGENDS

A true story, by Robin Dawson



Yves Saint-Martin and Lester Piggott at Chantilly in June of 1976, flanked by the trilby-wearing author.

This was the Tiercé, on French Derby day, and Saint-Martin masterfully made all the running to hold on by a nose from his great rival, Piggott. This image is one of the fondest memories of my time spent in France.

That day, my father Gerald, who was the Jockey Club's senior Stipendiary Steward in England (who was not allowed to bet) came over to Chantilly with my mother for the weekend. And, on a busman's holiday, as he would have said, he wagered 100FF win/place on the winner, Zamp, who obliged at 20/1 !

What I will always remember is, my colleague at Écurie Tikkoo, Noel Boston, one of racing's real characters, placed a much larger bet on the winner and parlayed all of his winnings onto Youth, the 6/4 favourite in the next race, the Prix de Jockey Club (The French Derby) that Youth duly won.

So excited was Noel that he immediately headed to the bar and ordered Champagne, only to discover that he could not find his PMU betting tickets! I was, by then, back at the stables with Zamp, but I gathered that my very practical mother saved the day, by suggesting that Noel re-trace his footsteps to the window where he had made his bet...and there, lying on the ground all scrumpled-up, were the tickets!

It goes without saying that this set off great celebrations that continued on late into the night. And my last memory was of my dear father having a nightcap at 2.00am the next morning with some ancient and extremely inebriated members of the French resistance in the bar of the Hotel du Chateau, where my parents were staying, who felt they needed to toast Les Anglais !

