

# J K Shipton

27th October 1932 – 14th August 2013

*Very sadly, John ('JK') Shipton died as the Annual Report was going to print. A full Obituary will be printed in next year's Annual Report, but it seemed only fitting to include this loose-leaf tribute to him in the mailing.*

JK first came to St Moritz in 1938/9 as a young boy. His parents were regular visitors, always staying at the Suvretta House, and they inculcated JK with his deep and life-long love of St Moritz, the Engadine and of course, the Cresta.

He first started riding in 1955, but really hit his stride in the mid-1960s, winning the Fairchild's MacCarthy in 1966 and again in 1983. JK won his Colours in fine style in the Grand National in 1968, doing so in spite of very little sleep the night before; he had left the office party, caught the last flight to



*JK on the Sunny Bar Terrace*

Zurich and a taxi to St Moritz, arriving minutes before the race. Obviously, the adrenaline was still pumping! It was the Harland, though, which he made his own, winning it each year between 1969 and 1972, and then again in 1986 and 1987. The triumph in 1986 was doubly sweet, as his son William ('Bill') won the Lord Trenchard and the Auty Speed Cup in the Inter-Services event on the same day, and the prizes were handed out by Robin Todhunter (then the oldest SL rider on the Run at the age of 83), who had given Kay away at their wedding. His fastest Top time (in February 1985) was 59.14 and his fastest Junction time was 45.91 (February 1987). It was not till 1995 that he hung up his boots, with a respectable 50.10 from Junction, 40 years after he first started riding the Cresta.

JK was a tall and imposing man with great charm and geniality. He loved telling jokes, but was often so struck by anticipatory amusement that the punch line would be wheezed out between chortles. It didn't matter if you didn't catch the punchline – his laughter was so helplessly infectious it was impossible not to chortle with him. His bulk, though, could be quite intimidating – it was difficult to say 'no' to JK if he was standing over you, smiling gently and reasonably, supremely confident that you would agree to whatever it was he was asking you to do! He and Kay were brilliant at cajoling, encouraging and entertaining people.



*Winning the Fairchilds MacCarthy in 1983*

John became President of the Club in the season after the Centenary and immediately instituted a raft of far-sighted changes. He realised that running the Club was becoming too demanding to be managed, as it had been in the past, by a small coterie of people headed by the President and Secretary. The Finance sub-Committee existed; he formalised this and also introduced the Run, Riding and Safety sub-Committee to examine and police all aspects of riding and run-building, and also the House sub-Committee to look after the Clubhouse. He began a review of the Club Rules, the Racing Rules and the SL Memorandum, and brought them all up to date. Riding hours were extended so that the Run opened at 8 a.m. (not 8.30) on Practice Days, and closed at 12.30 p.m. instead of noon. This greatly increased the number of rides possible, from just over 8,000 in 83/84 to nearly 10,000 in 1990/91.

He rejuvenated the Seniors Race in 1986 by having Prizegiving at the Seniors Dinner after the race. He organised this for the next four years, encouraging riders to return to the Run in the certain knowledge that they would find plenty of friends, before decreeing that the host should change every year. This was such a successful initiative that the age of eligibility had to be raised in 2001 because the fields became so large.

The computerisation of Tower and the London office continued apace under his leadership with the introduction of split time reports, handicapping statistics, race results. It has to be said that sometimes the earlier riding programs caused the Tower Team terrible angst, and Digby resolutely refused to have anything to do with them, sticking firmly to pen, paper and the fax machine, but the Membership eagerly embraced every improvement and even Digby appreciated the swift production of result sheets, circulated at the Sunny Bar at lunchtime, thanks to the photocopier that JK insisted be rented for the Kulm office.

It is possible that none of these innovations sound particularly exciting or dramatic, but the effort needed to effect them required a combination of attention to detail and a keen sense of how best to get things done, together with a high degree of political nous and lots and lots of hard work. JK possessed all four of these essential qualities. He was formidable in his own right, but with Kay by his side, he was unstoppable. They were a fantastic double act. As Christian Fischbacher said at the AGM in 1991 when JK retired from the Presidency, "He added a new dimension to the management of the Run. He tapped the best brains of the active riders and gradually improved each area of the Club.... Add to this all the other extra-curricular activities – the Golf matches, the London Ball, the Seniors' Dinners and many other areas, with all of which the President was directly or intimately concerned, there was no doubt that the Club owed John Shipton, and his wife Kay, a very great vote of thanks."



*JK on the Run*