

Stable staff Chief Executive's charity bid hangs in the balance

A return to the saddle for National Association of Stable Staff Chief Executive, George McGrath, in aid of the Animal Health Trust at Newmarket on Saturday, 25 June, hangs in the balance after recent heavy rain threatens to scupper the participation of his intended mount, The Third Man.

The five-year-old gelding trained in Newmarket by Henry Spiller is entered in the Betfred "Racing's Biggest Supporter" Handicap on Newcastle's all-weather track tomorrow (Thursday), but will not take part at Newmarket on Saturday if the going is soft.

McGrath said, "It's incredibly frustrating to be waiting on the weather, but typical of the difficulties faced by racing people every day of the week. Just to get a horse to the races is a massive effort and relies on so many different things all coming together at once, and with further rain forecast up until lunchtime on Friday, our chances of getting there are beginning to look very slim."

McGrath, a former apprentice to Ian Balding, would be among ten hopefuls taking part in the AHT Gala Race Day Charity Race, a mile contest run on Newmarket's July Course which precedes a seven race programme featuring the Group 3 John Sunley Memorial Criterion Stakes.

He said, "Riding in the Animal Health Trust charity race would allow me to fulfil two ambitions, firstly to raise more for this truly remarkable charity, which as an animal lover is close to my heart, and secondly to once again have an opportunity to race ride.

"I started my racing career as an apprentice at Ian Balding's and later joined Gordon Richards as a conditional. It was while working for Ian Balding that I had my first ride which was for the Queen and I finished third."

McGrath, who spent most of his time in racing as a travelling head man and has proudly represented stable staff for the past four years, hopes to raise £4,000 for the Suffolk-based charity which is dedicated to fighting disease and injury in animals. Responsibility for getting McGrath and The Third Man through the preliminaries on Saturday will fall to Travelling Head Girl, Danielle Fokkes, who is among those at Henry Spiller's yard who have assisted with McGrath's preparation for the race.

“I would like to thank all those who have supported me so far by pledging money through my Virgin Money Giving page, Henry Spiller who has the faith to put me up and all the team at the yard who have been very welcoming. I just hope that for all concerned we can make it to the races on Saturday.’

Sponsors include Sports Public Relations Consultancy, Sportsguide, whose name will appear on McGrath’s breeches. Managing Director Philip Brannan said, “We are delighted be supporting the AHT and George’s fundraising efforts. George has proved he’s not afraid to put himself back at the sharp end of racing where most of his members spend the majority of their time and I know stable staff up and down the country will be cheering him on.

“We’ve enjoyed considerable success promoting clients through jockey sponsorship, so placing our own name on George’s breeches seems an appropriate way to put a little bit back in.’

Donations can be made by visiting: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/GeorgeMcGrath1>

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