

Motherway and co discover they have the answer blowing in the wind



Jessica Lamb on a famous victory for a mare whose nature was a match for the conditions

HAD Fairyhouse been a port, yesterday the ships would have been harbour-bound. Across the track the wind swirled, driving a blackbird off its course and hats into the parade ring. It was not a day for sailors, birds or best-dressed ladies.

The day before, runners had struggled to jump out of the gluey ground; yesterday they wobbled in the air and fought for breath while trying to find their hooves. No, it was certainly not a day for the faint-hearted, and to win the Powers Whiskey Irish Grand National was going to take a steed of the steeliest nature.

"Agy, agy, agy, oo, oo, oo," chanted a small ginger boy standing on a wall as Agus A Vic passed him in the parade ring. 'Agy' didn't turn a hair.

Only Telenor was worried. Maybe he knew he would crash out at the tenth? If he did then he should have told Operation Houdini, whom he unseated, and Moskova, whom he virtually brought down.

The same could be said for Double Dizzy – poor little Hangover had no chance when that giant fell at his feet

seven out – and Saddlers Storm, who should have warned David Casey.

Some of these incidents could have been avoided had the jockeys been able to hear each other. But through the raging gusts little was seen, let alone heard, as the dust stung your eyes, even in the stands.

In these most treacherous conditions it was hard to see any horse coming back when they set sail for Ballyhack the second time.

This is where it really got hairy and, oddly, where Bluesea Cracker got going. A bone-shaking mistake turned the mare on and Andrew McNamara had only to ask once turning into the straight for his gutsy mount to take the lead.

Doing the lightest weight his lanky frame is capable of, McNamara was weak with hunger and dropped his stick after Bluesea Cracker ambled over the last. "I thought I'd cost us," he said, "but she quickened up without me."

The scenes that followed were of dazed and confused men. Owner-breeder Sean Murphy, the Note The Link syndicate leader James O'Sullivan and trainer James Motherway were in disbelief.

"What a feeling," Motherway said, visibly choking back emotion. "If you had told me at the beginning of the week that I would one day train an Irish National winner, I'd have laughed."

Even after three miles five furlongs Bluesea Cracker was still giddy, bouncing around the winner's circle, menacingly evading groom Michelle Cresswell's firm hand.

In a small stable, there are small



Jockey Andrew McNamara shows off his prize as Taoiseach Brian Cowen (left) presents winning trainer James Motherway with his trophy after Bluesea Cracker's victory in the Irish Grand National

teams, and Motherway, who has suffered badly from the economical downturn, was full of praise for his.

"They work so hard, always striving to get the best out of every horse and have put up with a lot this past year," said the proud trainer. "We have half the horses we'd usually have and it's been tough." But when the going gets tough the tough get going, and Bluesea Cracker is nothing but.

Snatching at the bit as she walked out, she was well aware of the occasion, certain of her stature and had a mad look in her eye. Opinion among connections is that the safest place to be is on her back.

Aptly named, she is crackers.

Not long after being born she broke out of a field and headed towards the blue sea, thus effectively naming herself. She seems the sort to make up her own mind about most things. Motherway is the same. Though laid back, he is sure of himself and coped with yesterday's media scrum like a professional National winner.

THE spotlight a victory like this throws on a rising star like him is priceless. He's a man who keeps half on the track and half in point-to-points, always on the lookout for a good buyer. Despite this, yesterday's

triumph was his first over fences of 2010. It'll hardly be his last.

As the storm picked up, Motherway disappeared into a night of celebration with his seven-strong Cork-bound posse while the point-to-pointers came back from the Gigginstown House Stud Bumper.

A glimpse side-on at the victor and I could have sworn it was Denman. He had that dappled, liver chestnut neck and big, squarish head.

It wasn't. It was the Philip Fenton-trained Last Instalment. I'd spotted Desert Orchid and One Man look-alikes leading the National parade earlier, but in the end there was only one champion on show yesterday.

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