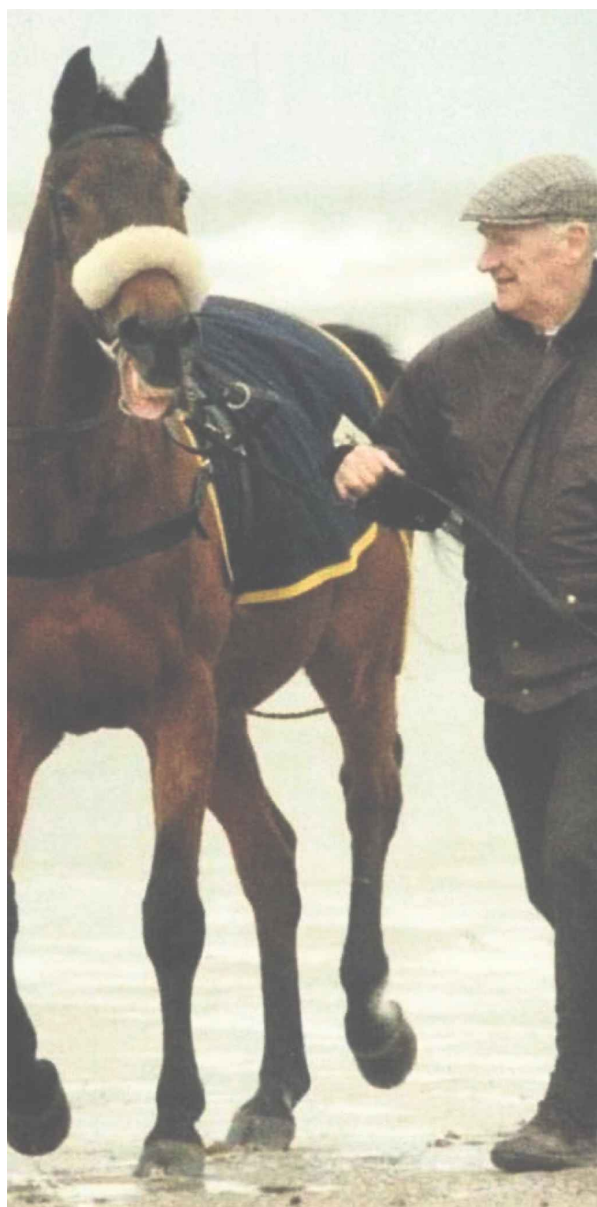


I met mighty Red Rum



Red Rum with Ginger McCain on Southport beach in England in the 1970s. Jo Kerrigan lived there at the time and often saw the horse racing legend there

This week on Throwback Thursday, a reader tells JO KERRIGAN about her treasured memory of seeing legendary horse Red Rum in Cork in 1980

Cork Summer Show 2025 has come and gone, and it was one of those rare occasions when the Clerk of the Weather behaved himself, the sun actually shone, and the crowds poured in.

What memories do you have of this great annual event in our city? Do they stretch back to when it was held at the grand old showgrounds down by the Marina, or when it moved out of the city to its current location near Ballincollig?

In its earlier years, it ran for four days, and brought in competitors from all over the country, and indeed abroad. Gardeners worked at their plants for months beforehand, competitive housewives refined recipes and set their lips grimly as they mixed yet another cake which this year surely would beat that from their greatest rival.

So many people were - and still are - involved and participated in the Summer Show. Tell us what you remember of this much-loved Cork occasion.

Throwback Thursday reader Anita Philpott has shared with us her own treasured childhood memory of a **Cork Summer Show**, recalling her excitement at that time.

"I am absolutely weak with excitement. Red Rum, the famous racehorse who won the Grand National three times, is visiting **Cork Summer Show**! All the Philpotts are thrilled at the opportunity to actually see this legendary horse in the flesh.

"And this is my very first time going to the show, which goes on for four days. Liam and dad are looking at John Deere tractors. Our Massey Ferguson is getting rather rickety and shook. I would prefer a new lorry.

"Dad brings pigs up to Evergreen street, in Cork, and the lorry is rather smelly. However, we are going in the red Cortina today! Happy days!"

Red Rum (May 3, 1965 - October 18, 1995) was, of course, a legend in racing, a champion thoroughbred steeplechaser. He achieved an unmatched historic treble when he won the Grand National in 1973, 1974, and 1977, and also came second in the two intervening years, 1975 and 1976.

He was especially renowned for his jumping ability, having never fallen in 100 races.

The 1973 race in which Red Rum secured his comeback victory from 30 lengths behind is often considered one of the greatest Grand Nationals in history.

And in a 2002 UK poll, Red Rum's historic third triumph in the Grand National was voted one of the greatest sporting moments of all time.

And he came over all the way to **Cork Summer Show**? Well, why wouldn't he? He was after all an Irish horse, bred at Rossenarra stud in Kells, Co Kilkenny, by Martyn McEnery.

It was a trip back to the old sod for the horse, and we're sure he enjoyed every moment in his homeland, breathing that familiar air of his foalhood.

However, disaster was hovering for young Anita Philpott at that particular Summer Show.

"We eventually get to the showgrounds at around 1pm. And guess what, we have missed the whole parade with Red Rum! The tears are stinging my eyes and beginning to roll down my cheeks.

"Dad is horrified. 'Don't worry, we will pop into the stables and say hello to him. You can have a private viewing'. Oh, isn't my dad just brilliant!

"I have six sugar cubes I nicked from the

kitchen. They are a bit crumbly in my jeans pocket, but no matter what, I will hold my hand out flat and Red Rum can lick the sugar off my hand. (I had, in fact, taken 12 sugar cubes, but I ate six coming up in the car.)

"My dad and I go to the stable area of the Show Grounds. We find Red Rum, no security whatsoever, and we hop into the stable. He is so beautiful.

"He nuzzles my hand and I rub his silky neck. I love to rub the opposite way to the hair pattern so he can get a real rub.

"Along comes a rather tall, well-dressed man. Dad nearly genuflects, and instinctively puts out his arm to shake the newcomer's hand.

"The man is a bit perturbed. 'You are not supposed to be in here'. Then he spots me, and I immediately start babbling to him about my love of Red Rum. I explain that we missed the parade.

"Dad starts chatting, and between the jigs and the reels they talk for easily half an hour. Dad's knowledge and history of the race horse is pretty impressive. He was also a very successful point-to-point jockey himself in the mid-1940s, so they have a lot in common.

"Eventually, Ginger McCain (for it was no other than that famous trainer) reaches into the inside pocket of his tweed jacket, goes down on one knee to me, and says 'It was so lovely to meet you'. He hands me a pound note and a postcard of Red Rum with McCain's autograph on it.

"I am so thrilled and I can't wait to visit granddad's grave and tell him about it. I tell Ginger McCain how granddad would have loved to have met Red Rum. I give Red Rum a final kiss and pat and off we go. A lovely gentleman is Ginger McCain."

That's a remarkable memory to cherish, Anita. But her memories of that Summer Show continue.

"After that excitement, I can hardly stay in the real world, but shopping comes next, and that revives me quickly.

"My favourite shop in Cork (apart from the pet stores) is the joke shop. You can buy whoopee cushions, and Wrigley's Spearmint fake chewing gum packets. That's the one where you can take a fake gum silver rectangle out and then a trap comes down on your finger! I also love the red fish paper. You can ask it questions like 'Will you marry a rich man?' It curls up yes to every question, which I am dodgy about. Anyway, the joke shop rocks.

"They always set up a booth at the **Cork Summer Show** and bring all their merchandise there. These guys actually travel to all the country town agricultural shows too.

"I also love the fake cigarettes that look so real and glow up at the end. They are mega-realistic and Lilah Fitzpatrick, my mom's pal, gave me one of her old cigarette holders so I can pretend to be a grand lady from the 1930s movies!

"Not strictly acceptable by today's standards of course, but back then we never thought of things like that!

Anita continues: "And eventually, sadly, the day is over. We all pile into the car and head off home over Naas and back to Kanturk."

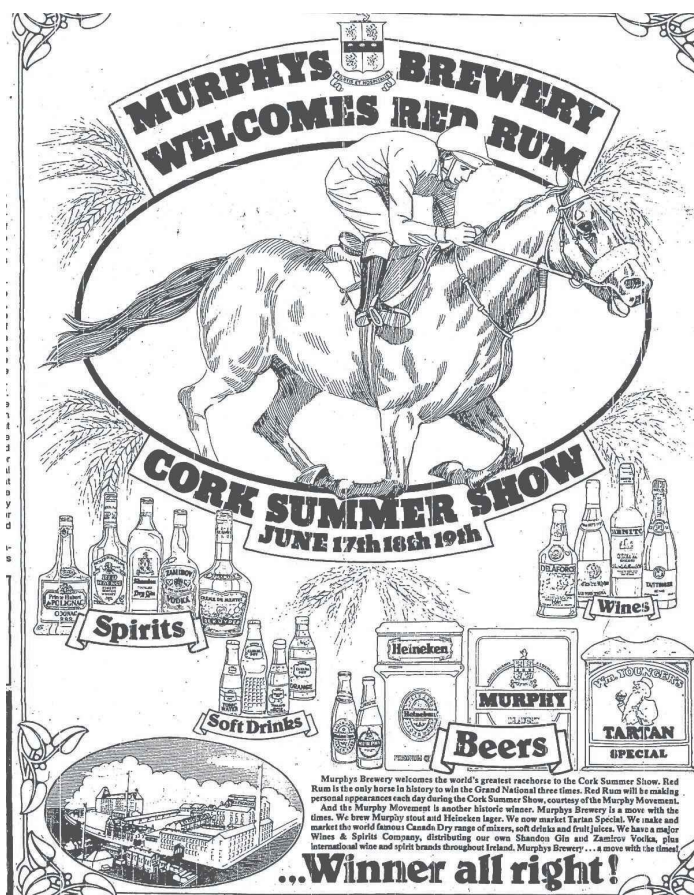
"Myself and my brother Dan compare all our shopping. Dan has a bag full of stink bombs, Mam has warned him twice that there will be blue murder if he lets any off in the car.

"I have a bag full of joke toys and my treasured signed picture of Red Rum. Oh,



Tomorrow in Life: New restaurant opens on old Ballycotton Cush site

at Cork Summer Show



An advert for the visit of Red Rum to the Cork Summer Show in June, 1980 - Murphy's Brewery organised the visit



Brian Fletcher riding Red Rum to victory in the Grand National at Aintree, Liverpool, in 1973 - the horse won it three times in total

happy days at **Cork Summer Show!**"

This heartwarming tale had me heading straight for the internet to find what year that was when the legendary steeplechaser made an appearance at our show. That's funny, no hits at all. Check further, wider. Nope, nothing. How strange.

Back to Anita. Can you remember what year it was, exactly? Our heroine goes into action immediately: "Hold on, I will ask my racing buddies. He was ridden through the showgrounds by the famous jockey from Castletownroche (later a highly successful trainer) Jonjo O'Neill. I think it was 1978 or '79."

"Oh, Red Rum was a massive draw. They were selling notecards, diaries, etc. on the day. Unfortunately, we sold our family home in later years, and my bedroom was cleared out while I was in the States, so unfortunately all my mementos went too. Grr! But I promise you it is a true story!"

We didn't doubt it, Anita, we assured her, but she was head-down on a mission to find the facts now.

"I rang an organiser of the **Cork Summer Show**, but they just asked me 'Who was Red Rum?' Well! They did say they would forward my query to the show's historian, however."

"Then I looked in back catalogues on the Cork Show website, but they only had the list of the competitions.

“I have six sugar cubes I nicked from the kitchen... he nuzzles into my hand.”

"I do think the Golden Vale creamery in Charleville might have paid for him to come, so perhaps that would not be recorded in catalogues?"

Anita even tried to make contact with Jonjo O'Neill, who she follows on Facebook. Unfortunately, he is at Ascot at the moment but I am sure he will get back to me when he returns."

Another acquaintance she could try was Eddie, who she describes as a wonderful vet in Kanturk.

"He would have been there that day in Cork. You would always have a lot of vets there for the show. My mum thinks it might have been 1980."

"The funny thing was that I could not find a word on the internet that he had ever been to Cork, and then discovered that Eddie the vet had in fact missed the show that year. GRRR!

"Even the AI chat box was a big fat 'No' on Red Rum coming to Cork. Then my head went 'Maybe dad set it up?' I know I threw a right wobbler when we missed the parade. I would not put it past him, lol! But surely I couldn't have dreamed meeting that horse and his trainer?"

Dogged Anita next put an appeal out on the Cork City Golden Days group on Facebook, "and, would you believe it, within 20 minutes, two people came back with the needed confirmation of my story! Gosh, what a relief!"

Joan Desmond replied to her: "I certainly remember Red Rum's parade at the Cork Show, as I am a huge fan. He came into the ring to parade to an appreciative crowd."

"I remember the announcer listing the number of Red Rum's race wins (not just the National) and my father saying, 'He's a good horse so'."

"I took pictures (long since disappeared) and got Ginger McCain's autograph. I can't remember the year exactly, possibly 1979 or '80?"

And Theresa Byrne helpfully confirmed not only the exact year but the exact dates: "Red Rum was at the **Cork Summer Show** from June 17-19, 1980."

Well thank you both, girls, for bringing your own memories to back up Anita's delightful story of a long-ago magical day and a magical encounter. It makes all the difference when

others share their memories with you and confirm that it wasn't just your imagination playing tricks. It really did happen!

This writer had an interest in that story too, since I often met Red Rum exercising on the long beach at Southport in Lancashire when living there back in the late 1970s. I took the photo here of Red Rum on that beach.

Unlike many racehorses, who tend to be jumpy and nervous, he was the most genial and friendly of equines, always willing to be stroked and made much of.

Red Rum naturally was a popular visitor to summer shows over in the UK, and would stand patiently while crowds gathered round to see and touch the legend for themselves.

I particularly remember admiring the way the sleek skin of his hindquarters had been combed into lozenges which caught the sun, and wondering how long it took to achieve that result.

"Isn't that amazing?," responded Anita delightedly to my musings. "That photo is from Southport beach! So you saw him there? He really did capture everyone's heart. I will never forget meeting him."

Have you got golden memories to share? Send them to us right now! Email jokerrigan1@gmail.com, or leave a message on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/echolive-cork.