



The Cheltenham Festival: A Centenary History

Robin Oakley

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The Cheltenham Festival is nowadays the biggest event in the racing year – in visitor numbers eclipsing Royal Ascot, the Grand National or the Derby. In 2011 it is a hundred years since the 1911 running of the National Hunt Chase marked the birth of the Festival, providing the perfect occasion for Robin Oakley's new history.

This is a work of both history and celebration – telling the story of how three days of jump racing beneath Cleeve Hill in Cheltenham became a vast sporting event attracting an average of 50,000 spectators per day. Before the War it saw legendary horses like Golden Miller; after the War the Irish invasion began – both horses and spectators; in the Sixties, Arkle, the greatest jumps horse of all time duelling with Mill House in the Gold Cup. In recent years there have been Cheltenham favourites like Desert Orchid, winning a gruelling Gold Cup in the mud, Dawn Run, Best Mate (2 Gold Cups), hurdlers like Istabraq and Persian War, and the grey hero One Man.

But also it is a story of the craic and the characters, like the Irishman who won enough on Istabraq to pay off his mortgage, then lost it again on the Champion Chase, and reflected, “Ach, it was only a small house anyway...” This is a book for both the committed Festival-goer, Guinness in hand, and every armchair racing fan.



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