

The Tatling

A winner at Royal Ascot and Glorious Goodwood, three times Nunthorpe runner-up, The Tatling held his head high in the ranks of early 21st century sprinters. Those achievements alone, however, would leave him a mere footnote in a book like this, a near-great, another vanquished foe of the peerless Oasis Dream. But The Tatling's career was to have an extended second act, less glamorous, but equally enthralling. Long after his contemporaries had retired, The Tatling was still to be found schlepping round Britain's racetracks for dwindling pots of prize money. We grew to love him, like we grew to love snooker's Steve Davis or football's Stanley Matthews, as an ageing star, raging against the dying of the light, battling on in ever decreasing circles, not for glory, but because of a deep love for the game. Every time his equally venerable trainer Milton Bradley planned to put him out to grass, he'd grump and want to return to the fray. When, aged 14, he entered the stalls for the final time, it was for a Class 6 Wolverhampton handicap, a world away from the Ascot paddock he once graced. The also-rans he lined up against weren't fit to walk in his hoofprints. Yet here he was, a lowly 16/1, unfancied for even this humbling last assignment. When he short-headed his way to victory, carrying with him a sentimental slab of my own cash, it was a victory not just for veteran trainer, veteran charge and my bank balance, but for the romance of the sport. Sure, Bradley and The Tatling were no Cecil and Frankel. There'll be no films and books written about them. But for me their story was, in its own small way, equally poetic.

Robert James Peacock