

Sun and Moon Stables.

'Newmarket racecourse all-weather track: funding approved,' ran the banner headline of The Racing Post.

Frank Greymore, owner of the Sun and Moon Stables and Grand-National winning trainer, waved the paper at his wife Shelia. 'Everyone's a winner.'

His wife frowned. 'So darling, when's the first race?' She waved the accounts she was working on, back at him. 'With all the rain, hay and straw prices have gone through the roof. Our electric and gas bills are extortionate and you can't get any nosebag without paying through the nose. The prime-minister says it's all down to the war in Ukraine. He must think us stupid. Since Brexit the cost of vet's bills have soared astronomically and Europe's hoarding supplies of horse pills; there's none available for love nor money.'

Frank shrugged. 'Global warming and politics are killing us softly. Over half this season's starts have been cancelled; ground too soft. The turf's a quagmire, only fit for hogs to wallow. Even the gallops are waterlogged. Our mounts need exercise to stay in pique health and win prizemoney. It will be the death of them... and us. The sooner this all-weather track is up and running the better.'

Over the next two months Frank and Sheila looked on with an anticipation bordering on obsession with the laying of the track. From their house in the low hills overlooking the course they could just make out the JCBs and tipper trucks. Frank installed his telescope, the one he used to spy on the stable hands out on gallops into their kitchen. Espionage, to odd's the bookmaker; they studied the going. Having several runners in the inaugural, all-weather Solar Eclipse handicap chase, sponsored by their own stable; they had more than a vested interest. The bed of sand, topped by the state of art Polytrack was being laid at what felt to them, a snail's pace.

Two days before the race and calamity hit. Frank put his back out while grooming one of their frisky nags. Confined to bed he made an awful patient for his wife's nursing; constantly pontificating on what should be done.

The day of the race dawned and Shelia who'd slept with the horses, spent the morning currycombing coats to a horse-chestnut shine. She rubbed liniment into fetlocks and plaited manes, so that all their runners stood the Sun and Moon stables proud.

Franks phone neighed. 'Is our punt on?'

'No, call it off; the weather's turned.'

'What! How? It's a flippin all-weather track.'

'Take a look out of the window.'

Frank ignored the intense pain that shot down his spine as he hauled himself out of bed and hobbled to the kitchen.

He grabbed the telescope but was met with a field of snow. Lens cap? No that was off. Curtains? No, they were wide open. He rubbed unbelieving eyes.

Outside lay a proper pea-souper, one you could cut a Polo from.

The track might well be all-weather but there would be no racing today; not in this fog.