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## FRANK - MY HORSE OF A LIFETIME AND HOW HE SOLD ME THE ARC EQUINE

In 1996 I owned a 3 year old bright red turbo diesel Peugeot 205 car. It had smiled at me every time I passed the forecourt on my way home along the A27 to my flat in Worthing. And then one ordinary Tuesday I pulled my creaky Subaru estate alongside and did a swop. I was in car heaven. Well until the following Tuesday when I visited a notorious Irish dealer in said Peugeot and was seduced by him (thats another story) and a jet black horse with blue eyes called Frank(Sinatra) It was a shame he was unbroken because I landed up with no transport home. By the time I had looked into the dealers big blue eyes and Franks as well I had as good as tossed my ignition keys in the vendors pocket to pay for him. But no fear because the loose jumping experience that was related by two over ambitious, silky tongued Irish counterparts of said dealer, made it sound as if, at last, I had found the horse that was going to jump the Hickstead Derby for me. Sufficed to say I was had, big style, on that supposition. So how did he become my horse of a lifetime? Well on the basis that in a constantly struggling, busy competition and dealing yard, faces appear and disappear with alarming regularity so Frank became the horse of a lifetime by dint of the fact that he stayed with me for the whole of his 19 years in Blighty. And served not only me as my hangover horse and occasional hunter but a bevy of local ladies who, I think the Daily Mail would say were of a "certain age" And news spread fast about his talents. He not only helped women rediscover their pelvic floor muscles, lost after childbirth when Wham were at no 1, trotted up the centre line for would be dressage divas, took hapless horse crazy teenagers around the local hunter trials and trotted in endless circles during one to one lunge therapy sessions so that countless ladies could attempt to keep bosoms and bottoms from going in the wrong direction whilst on board.

Fast forward to a cheery, cherry brandy filled morning out with the East Sussex and Romney Marsh Hunt in 2012. Vaguely overseeing one employee on a four year old, while I tried to control a half crazed appaloosa who was not grasping the fact that clearing a hedge by two feet meant the landing gear was going to be put under immense strain. And Frank taking up the rear with Julie screaming Cockey obscenities with every piece of timber and greenery that he carefully negotiated for her. Despite my slightly anebriated state, I could see as Frank cantered away from one particular tiger trap in deep mud that he was very, very lame. My worst fears were realised by the time we had managed to load him into the trailer: he was not even attempting to weight bear on the offending front leg. A scan three days later confirmed my suspicions and I feared Franks next visit to hounds would not be for recreational reasons. The vets prognosis, whose bedside manner was of the cup half full variety gave him a 9/10 bugged tendon on the severity scale and did nt try to soft soap me with any promises of Frank ever being ridden again.

At this point my cheery employee suggested we try the Arc Equine. I had heard what I believed at the time to be anecdotal success stories but being a nothing ventured, nothing gained type of girl, decided to beg, borrow or steal a machine to try. After all there were all those menopausal women to think about. God knows how I was going to break the bad news to them.

Frank was shipped to the lower barn for 6 weeks box rest( a bit of a case of out of sight out of mind for me) but he wallowed in three feet of wheat straw and ate his own bodyweight in good quality haylage each week. I am deeply indebted to my employee at the time (one Rory Newton Dunn) who diligently applied the Arc Equine to Franks huge bowed tendon every day for five weeks. ( The new Arc Equine could be applied by a drunken monkey but the original machine was a bit Heath Robinson) By the end of the first week he was walking sound around his cow quarters. Surprised but not holding out any hope, I waited, unusually for me, another two weeks before putting him in the school( its ok lameness officianados Frank was not the sort to undo any good work by doing anything crazy like going into a trot!) Well I might have very gently persuaded him to trot, just a few strides. Holy Macaroni! He was only bloody SOUND. Quick, I thought, put him away, before I do any harm. The rest of his recuperation was eneventful. He continued on the Programme 1 and 2 for five weeks and then returned to work soon after with a somewhat mishapen, but cold, hard tendon. He went back to inspiring women of a certain age for another three years with absolutely no ill effects from the catastrophic injury.

Fast forward three years. When I sign off here I am going down to the yard to put the Arc Equine on the maintenance programme for my aging warmblood showjumper. Our joints both creak in musical union these days. So when he has finished with it I'll be popping it on as I eat my supper to ease those aches and pains: the legacy of a life of equestrian related highs and lows. We are both growing old disgracefully and whilst neither of us can aspire to the dizzy heights of the main arena at Hickstead like we used to the Arc Equine allows us to dash round at our local British Showjumping venue and win enough prize money for a decent bottle of red and a few packets of polos!! What more could you ask for ?