

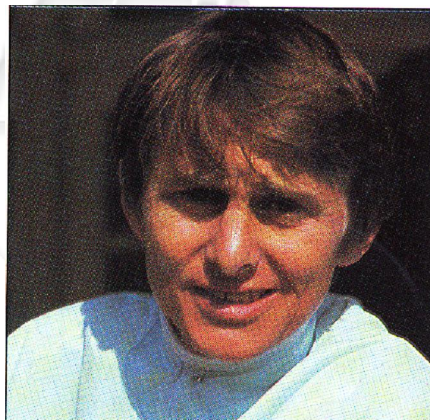
## **SPORTING LEGENDS: WILLIE CARSON**

**SPORT: HORSE RACING**

**COMPETITIVE ERA: 1970 - 1988**

The son of a warehouseman and a waitress, Willie Carson hardly seemed destined for fame and wealth.

He was a small lad and got so fed up with hearing, "Aren't you wee, you ought to be a jockey" that he bought an old chestnut mare from a gipsy troupe for £4. "He often used to fall off but he never cried", recalls Thea McFarlane, who coached him. "I thought he was too small and frail to be a jockey".



Unlike his great rival, Lester Piggott, Carson was not a natural horseman. "Often I thought of giving up", he says. "If someone had come up with a good idea for me, I would have jumped at it. Luckily, they didn't".

At 17, Carson started a gruelling apprenticeship with trainer Gerald Armstrong but didn't ride his first winner home until he was nearly 20. In 1968, Lord Derby, one of the great names in English racing, asked Willie up to become his First Jockey. "I told him to think it over", Lord Derby said. "Willie jokes it took just two seconds".

In 1971, Carson joined the van Cutsem stable, his dream being to win one of the English classics, the Derby, 1000 Guineas, 2000 Guineas, Oaks and St Leger. Next year he did, loping home on High Top in the 2000 Guineas at Newmarket.

By the end of the season, Carson had notched up 132 Winners to clinch the Jockey Championship. He won it again in 1973.

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Willie Carson in full flow!

Four years later, Carson joined Major Dick Hern, who trained horses for the Queen. Wearing Her Majesty's colours, Willie won on Dunfermline in two classics, the Oaks and St Leger.

The best horse Carson has ever ridden was Troy, winner of the 200<sup>th</sup> Derby in 1979, and that season's Irish Derby. The following year, mounted on the little fancied Henbit, Carson won the great Epsom race again. What made his second victory all the more extraordinary was that Henbit broke a leg bone a furlong from home but still managed to record the third fastest time ever.

In 1981, while third in the Yorkshire Oaks, Carson's mount Silken Knot crumpled underneath him. Six horses trampled over him, as he lay motionless with a fractured skull, cracked vertebrae and broken wrist. "It was the worst fall I have ever seen," said the American jockey, Steve Cauthen.

Three months later, Willie was back in the saddle, saying, "I don't remember the accident so how can it affect me?" One happy outcome was Willie's marriage to the nurse who treated him in hospital.

In 1983, Carson was Champion Jockey for the fifth time. Since 1970, he has failed only once to ride 100 winners in a season.

Of all his classic wins, he gained most pleasure from the 1988 St Leger on Minster Son, a colt he himself had bred.

He has won 5 championships, 17 classics in the UK, has 23 centuries and a total of 3,828 wins in the UK, making him the fourth most successful jockey.



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### Scott Burton's Final Thought

Willie Carson defied the odds many times to prove himself as one of the greatest jockeys of recent times.

Whilst being small in stature, he still possessed great strength in order to ride some of the most powerful horses on the racing circuit.

His race timing was also to be commended, and he would never panic during a race, even if he was behind coming into the final furlong.

Like all jockeys, his preferred position was leading from the front, and his ability to do this was unparalleled at times.



Willie Carson's build and height were perfectly suited for horse racing.