

Read the text below and answer Questions 1 – 3 on the question paper.

Faced by food and fuel shortages, the post-war public sought relief in sport. In 1947, the Grand National was moved to a Saturday so that everyone could enjoy it. Here, jockey John Hislop gives an account of his own ride on board his horse Kami.

There were fifty-seven of us lined up at the start, like sardines in a tin. As usual, there was much restiveness and scrimmaging¹, with the starter shouting, 'Keep off the gates!'

Then the gate went up and we jumped off, most of us eagerly as if we had only five furlongs to go. Taking into consideration the heavy going after the morning's rain, the initial pace of the field as a whole was such that no horse could hope to maintain it and complete the course.

Kami was squeezed when the field 'broke', but settled into a swinging stride, which was not fast enough to keep anywhere near the solid wall of leaders, and we found ourselves going over the first fence well behind but clear of any interference.

There were two or three other horses lying in the same area as Kami, with a loose horse or two in the vicinity. I went rather a long way round, towards the outside – for two reasons. In the first place the going there was less churned up. Second, I wanted Kami to be completely clear of any bumps or other mishap which would have put a horse of such frail build 'on the floor'.

He was still jumping perfectly. In fact, Kami never put a foot wrong all the way. His swinging, even gait gave me the greatest confidence and the consistency of his jumping – every fence measured off long before he got to it – made me feel certain that wherever he finished he would complete the course.

As we turned into the country for the last circuit, Kami gradually began to overtake the field. Jumping Beecher's for the second time, our hopes of a possible victory became something more than the ambition of every steeplechase rider. There were, I suppose, some six or eight horses – that is, with their riders still on board – in front of me, but most of them were tiring, and as I passed them at least one rider threw me a word of encouragement that means so much in a race of this kind. As we crossed the road with only two more fences to jump I could see Prince Regent in front of me visibly tiring, and, still a good way ahead, the green jacket of Lough Conn and the green and blue of the eventual winner, of whose identity I was as ignorant as, I suppose, were the majority of spectators.

Coming into the last fence but one, there were two loose horses in front of me, and, on the inside, Prince Regent. I realised then that I had no hope of winning, as Kami was tiring; the heavy going had taken its toll on his delicate frame and only his courage and innate stamina kept him going. But he jumped the fence perfectly, and went on towards the last with, I think, Prince Regent about level with us, but very tired.

We landed safely with the long stretch to the winning post spread out before us, both tired, but with Prince Regent beaten for sure. I got out my whip and kept swinging it without ever hitting Kami, and he answered nobly, gradually overhauling Mr Rank's gallant horse to take us into third place.

¹ Restiveness and scrimmaging: impatience and fighting for position

