

# A Star is Born

Written by Elizabeth Armstrong, Equine Artist  
[www.elizabetharmstrong.co.uk](http://www.elizabetharmstrong.co.uk)

I recently had the privilege of visiting Henrietta Knight's and Terry Biddecome's training establishment, West Lockinge Farm, to meet their twice winner of the Cheltenham Gold Cup, superstar, Best Mate just before his run in the Cheltenham Gold Cup this year. Best Mate equalled the

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famous Arkle's record at Cheltenham by winning the Gold Cup in three consecutive wins this year at the Cheltenham Festival. I was warmly greeted by Jackie Jenner, the patient and dedicated stable lass of Best Mate. The careful training was outlined to me included many things over and above the usual call of duty for a National Hunt Racehorse. Best Mate's training includes dressage, loose schooling, canter work and a very careful hands on approach by a dedicated team of people. Loose schooling is key in the preparation as this allows the horses to develop



their own judgement of fences and to develop a natural balance. Best Mate most certainly has benefited from this training method as jumping is one of his very strong talents.

Best Mate along with all the other horses in the yard are fed every morning at 5.00am by Henrietta herself. She feels this is essential as it allows her to observe the wellbeing of all the horses in the yard. Her hands on approach and meticulous planning have allowed her to understand the horses, enabling her to 'tweak' and change

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plans as and when necessary to suit the ever changing needs of the top class horses in her care.

Superstition plays a great part in Henrietta's game plan – certain flowers have to bloom at the right time every year, she wears the same suit, pearls and hat at the Cheltenham Gold Cup, and her husband Terry wears the same trilby hat. She has a regimented routine at the racecourse which she follows through meticulously. Best Mate's jockey Jim Culloty wears the Aston Villa colours of pale blue and burgundy. Best Mate's owner, Jim Lewis is an avid Aston Villa fan. Notably his support group at the race meeting were attired in the same colours.

In my capacity as an invited equestrian artist to Cheltenham, I had the privilege of combining my meeting of Best Mate 'at home' with the 'buzz' of his winning the Gold Cup at this year's festival. It was an extraordinary moment in history. My paintings reflect the sheer passion and talent of this amazing equine. As an artist, it is imperative to capture the moment. One can truly only do this by being there. I most certainly will be back next year to witness his attempt at beating all records by winning a fourth Gold Cup. In a recent interview Henrietta said 'he was born to be great and we have just nurtured that talent for everyone to enjoy'.

