

THE DERBY - 1949

To Epsom Downs for Derby Day! Although the skies are clouded and a near gale keeps flaming June far away, more than a million Whitsum holidaymakers brave the weather and the Epsom crush to see the 170th running of the world's premier classic - the richest Derby in history.

All Britain seems to be here - if not in body - then in spirit. There are these Derby regulars - the Pearly Kings with their Queens and their Pearly family.

The famous come early. Queen Mary, who has seen more Derbys than many a racing fan - is warmly cheered. The newlywed Princess, Rita Haywerth is there with Aly Khan. Winston Churchill, looking for a CONSERVATIVE win, joins the Queen in the Royal Box. With the King, still convalescing, Princess Elizabeth, happily recovered from her short illness - leads the Royal Party. The Derby Downs find the perennially hopeful British punter - as always - looking for a winner and spending all the housekeeping money.

In the paddock, each fancy is given a last inspection. The one thing everyone agrees on is that this year any one of 20 horses can win. The Strachey boys - Britain's smallest eaters and the Food Minister's favourites - give their mounts a final once-over. As they parade up the course, all eyes are on the favourite - ROYAL FOREST. Champion jockey Gordon Richards finds him quite a handful to manage. There is a last center over the rain-soaked turf and the big moment draws near.

Thirty-two runners - the biggest field this century - move up to the start. With French and American horses battling against top English thoroughbreds, the starter, top-hatted Leslie Firth, finds them as difficult to control as an International Conference.

Now you can throw away the fern books and leave it to the jockeys.

White-banded NIMBUS and Lord Derby's SWALLOW TAIL are fighting it out for the lead. As they near the six furlong post, NIMBUS (No. 13 - the one with the noseband) and SWALLOW TAIL are neck and neck, three lengths ahead of the rest. And that's how it goes all the way. Coming up to Tattenham Corner, it's SWALLOW TAIL first round the bend. NIMBUS is a nose behind - on the rails. What a battle it is between these two horses! Racing neck and neck.

And now SWALLOW TAIL just gets his head in front. Jockey Doug. Smith pushes the blinkered colt out in front, but NIMBUS - with veteran CHARLIE ELLIOTT up - is making his own pace, saving his stamina for the uphill dash to come.

Now it's NIMBUS back in front - but there is another challenger moving up fast. AMOUR DRAKE (the French horse) swerves inside. Can he overtake the leaders?

So close is the finish that for the first time in history, only the camera can sort them out.

Whose Gold Cup? For 90 seconds no-one knows. Then the photo-finish tells the story. The exporting of classic wins is over - NIMBUS (British bred and trained) beats France's AMOUR DRAKE with SWALLOW TAIL third. It's a hat-trick for Charlie Elliott - so confident of winning, he booked a celebration dinner a fortnight before the race. For owner Mrs. Glenister, NIMBUS brought lucky number 13 home in triumph.