

FENWAY

The idea of Fenway first dawned in Spring 2002 but his story really begins in 1976 when my sole horse-loving relative, my aunt Mary, bought a new hunter. Named Seolta, the 15.1 hh grey mare had spent her formative years as the Master's horse with the Ballymacad Foxhounds, hunting over ground in north Meath and Cavan. Mary lived near Kilcock and was a member of both the Meath Foxhounds and the Ward Union.

Mary took as much pleasure in keeping her horse-mad nieces up to date with her hunting exploits as we did in hearing about them. Even though it was in the day of fewer photos, plenty came our way.



**Mary on Seolta,
Fenway's grand-
mother,
1976 and 1978**

Meanwhile, in Donegal we were developing our love of hunting with hands-on experience once or twice a year with the Strabane & Donegal Hunt. Then one day the unbelievable invitation came: would I like to hunt Seolta during the Christmas holidays? Yes!!!!!! The hunt was preceded by a serious schooling session during which I learned to sit tight while Seolta negotiated the monstrous dry ditches that separate the fields of Meath. Give me a fly jump any day. Here we are with our schoolmaster, Donegal Misty, ridden by my cousin Alison. (Misty came from Bonagee sale and negotiated every ditch in Meath and Kildare during a long and distinguished career as the smallest but bravest and most talented pony in the kingdom.)



**Schooling on
Seolta with Alison
on Misty; the
Ward Union meet
at Dorey's Forge,
1981.**

Our first hunt was with the Ward Unions at Dorey's Forge and I'd never had an experience like it. I came a cropper at one of the monstrous ditches but lived to remount and complete the day. The following year I hunted together with Alison with the Meaths. It was a slightly more civilised affair but those ditches hadn't diminished in size.

In the Spring following my second hunt Mary decided to put Seolta in foal in the hopes of breeding a successor that would serve as a family horse for herself and her three young daughters. The Irish draught stallion, **Pride of Shaunlara**, was chosen as a mate and off Seolta went to Suma Stud. In the words of Suma Stud's website: "the Irish Draught was considered by the Authorities to be a dying breed so a massive leap of faith was needed to stand an Irish Draught in Co. Meath, a county noted



Pride of Shaunlara, Fenway's grandfather

for its top class T.B. studs. Pride's first season was spent convincing the locals that we hadn't brought a carthorse to the area."

Pride of Shaunlara was a huge success at stud and was renowned for producing excellent performance horses in all disciplines but he was loved in particular for his great hunting stock: "They were outstanding hunters, nearly too brave and frequently not with the best of brakes but they were always there at the end of the day and ready to go again as soon as they were asked."

Seolta produced a grey filly foal who was registered as "Aravis", known more usually as "**Askagh**" but almost always called just "Foalsie" for all of her 29 years to date. She was an outstanding mare, 15.3 hh, who hunted every winter of her active life, hunter trialled in the shoulder seasons, and showed and 1-day evented in the summers. My aunt and cousins were founder members of the Irish Side Saddle Association and Askagh competed regularly and successfully under side saddle in the show ring. She travelled as far as Newbury for an international show, placing 4th despite wearing a bandage to cover a wound that she picked up on the journey over. She was a genuine all-rounder with a spirit and heart worthy of both her parents.

When the three cousins headed off to college, Mary decided to retire Askagh from active duty and begin her second career as a broodmare. She delivered two foals by Cavalier and one by Don Juan before Mary realised that small scale breeding was no longer a good idea when she had neither the physical strength nor ambition to bring on young horses.

In 2002, for the second time in my life, I received an unexpected and very welcome invitation from Mary: Would I like to breed a foal from The Mare? My life had just brought me through 15 years of urban territory with not a horse in sight. I'd been living in Dublin, then New York and Berlin but had returned to Dublin in 1998. In 2002 we were in the middle of building a house in Rathmullan and planned to move in the summer. Occasionally on visits home I'd ridden a horse if there was one around, but I'd never missed riding over the years. That Easter of 2002 Rachel had a lovely 15.1hh mare called Feather that I rode each day over the weekend when I was home and really enjoyed myself. When Mary asked me the question, it was my experience with Feather that made me instantly reply: Yes!!!!!!.



Prince of Thieves, Fenway's father

So, with a small horse like Feather in mind, Mary and I decided on a Connemara stallion as a suitor. Mary picked out two candidates, a young stallion in Slane and a more established one in Kilcullen. The Slane stallion was grey and since I definitely wanted to breed a not grey horse, the dun **Prince of Thieves** was my choice. He was an RDS supreme champion and subsequently became one of just four stallions to be awarded the new Elite connemara status when it was introduced in 2008. So he had plenty going for him apart from his colour! And at a neat 145cm in height, he was likely to give me the nice small horse I was looking for.

His owner, Denise Norton, took a great delight in the visit of the largest mare "Bart" had ever covered. He ran with his mares for several weeks but special arrangements were made when it was clear Askagh was in season. My uncle Brian helped Denise to enhance a naturally occurring dip in the ground and Askagh was held fast while Bart made the most of his topographical advantage.

After six weeks at stud the mare was scanned in foal and was shipped off to Cavan to spend her confinement with my sister Catherine.

Fenway was born on 10th June 2003, a definitely not-grey foal with the brightest white star in Cavan. He was named after the ballpark in Boston where the Boston Redsox play baseball. These days it's the equivalent of calling your horse Anfield.



Askagh and Fenway, 2003



Fenway, 10 months, 2004

Fenway spent his first three years shuttling back and forth between Cavan and Donegal, enjoying whatever grazing was available in either spot. He made his first journey to Donegal at the age of 10 months at Easter, 2004. He objected strenuously to entering the trailer and it took three people an hour and a half to load him. It was the first and only time that he has ever put a hoof wrong in terms of civilised equine behaviour. Catherine isn't renowned for her patience and with departure delayed by 90 minutes, she didn't hang around on the journey to Donegal. She hit the dip that used to be in the road on the straightaway near Ray Bridge at 70 mph and Fenway learned the hard way not to obstruct people's plans. He arrived in Donegal a stressed young man yet walked straight onto the trailer at the very next time of asking.

He spent a lot of his youth with his great pal, Paddy. Also a connemara cross, Paddy was born a year later than Fenway in 2004 and the pair of them enjoyed many a good day together.



Fenway (2) and Paddy (1), summer 2005





In early summer of 2006 Catherine and Rachel broke Fenway as a 3-year old and he began working life with ears pricked and a happy attitude. He was always easy going (to a fault!) and his giant seven-league stride and slightly sway back made him seem like a large boat compared to any of the other animals about the place. Even as a 3-year old it was fairly clear that he wasn't quite going to make the small horse grade. Slow maturing, at seven he was still growing and had reached a solid 16hh – bigger even than his mother, not to talk of his 14.1hh father.

Fenway, 2006, newly broken and back in Rathmullan. This was the day that he headed out for his first proper ride with the whole family. L to R: Conor on Star, Ed, Rachel on Fenway, Libby on Mai, Emma on Kipper and Oisin on Winnie.



Fenway adapted pretty easily to life as a riding horse and worked away quietly until autumn of 2006. He then returned to Cavan to spend a winter in the rushes with Paddy and was ready for serious life in Spring 2007. Things went well initially but by early June he was out of commission for a spell with a nasty respiratory infection and at the beginning of July he went very slightly lame. Both these conditions became the over-riding themes of Fenway's existence and have plagued him constantly ever since.

It took two years to properly identify his allergy to pollen and over a year to correctly diagnose the injury to his suspensory ligament. His work has been constantly interrupted by unsoundness in both wind and limb and he has rarely managed to string together more than three or four months of consistent work. At this stage, in January 2011, by far the majority of his working life has been spent on the sidelines and he's currently half way through a year's sabbatical which will hopefully help him over his recurrent suspensory ligament injury.

Over the years though there have been some real highlights – enough of them to keep me persevering for another while yet. In June 2008, as a 5-year old, we travelled to Stradbally for the Riding Clubs Festival. The Festival was great and we even managed to place 6th in the final of the AP Prix Caprilli, and 6th in the Riding Club Horse class. But it was the the extended journey we made

on the way to Stradbally that was the real highlight. Fenway met both his parents and enjoyed a lively ride with a sprightly and spirited 26-year old Askagh who taught him how to gallop up one of those famous Meath fields.



Fenway, 2008, visiting his mother Askagh in Meath and his father Bart (Prince of Thieves) in Kilcullen en route to Stradbally for the Riding Clubs Festival.



But the highlight of our lives was in 2009 when we finally made it onto the hunting field. Fenway delivered on the dream and crossed all terrain and obstacles with the natural intuition that makes a good Irish hunter the most exhilarating horse of them all. He had finally found what he loved doing and every trace of his well known laziness evaporated the instant he moved off at his first meet.



**Fenway, 2009/10,
hunting at
Maggies (above)
and Peter Smyth's
(centre and
below).**



Everything was looking good for finishing the hunting season and heading for Flowerhill with a healthy and happy horse. But nothing has ever been that simple with Fenway. In mid-March 2010, with just 5 weeks to go to Flowerhill, he re-injured his suspensory ligament (during turn-out, not hunting!) and we went back to the drawing board for another spell of tedious rehab.



Fenway, July 2010, at Border Counties 1-Day Event.

We slowly made it back to full work and since I now knew how to keep his hayfever under control (it's more like asthma for horses), he had no respiratory problems in 2010. We enjoyed a lot of leisurely riding and stopped investing too much effort in serious flatwork. Whatever time I was going to get with Fenway this go around was going to be spent doing things we loved. Once his rehab was finished we managed to get to a few competitions and his cross country round at the Border Counties 1-Day Event in July was a real highlight.

But the good times weren't to last and he went lame again later that month. This time there was to be no 6-month rehab programme — we decided on a year's rest out in the field. He did 6 weeks of rehab to get him to the point where it was safe for him to go out to grass without risking further damage to the ligament.

Time flies by and he already has 6 months of decadent grazing under his belt. He'll be scanned again in July or August and, if everything looks good, will come back into work in time to have him fit for the 2011/2012 hunting season. And if we have any little microscopic bit of luck at all, we'll finally make it to Flowerhill!



On sabbatical, September 2010.