

Top tipster finds going rough

by John Coates

AT ODDS of 16-1, Lucy's Gold in the 2.45 at Lingfield looked a good bet. The Friday lunch-time punter pushed £200 across the betting shop counter.

The day before, the manager at William Hill had happily taken a £300 bet. Now he looked reluctant to take £200. He rang his head office. "Sorry", he said, "we can only give you the starting price on this one."

By the time the race started, the odds had shortened to 9-2, reflecting the large sums gamblers were suddenly prepared to stake on a previously unfancied horse.

Lucy's Gold was "hot" because it was backed by one of the country's top professional tipsters and gamblers. The bookies were scared of being stung.

By offering the starting price only, William Hill had time to lay money on Lucy's Gold at the racetrack, thereby shortening the odds and reducing their financial exposure.

The man scaring the bookies was Bob Rothman, a Price Waterhouse-trained former accountant who claims to make as much as £500,000 a year by talking to the trainers, studying form and picking up racing yard gossip. Bookmakers no longer accept bets of any substantial size from him.

So to make a living, Mr Rothman, 39, sells his knowledge to a network of clients who not only pay him for racing tips but also put his bets on for him. With more than 40 clients, he can stake large sums of money on a race.

But the bookies are catching up; he says they are out to destroy his network by refusing to take bets on certain races. He also believes they may have a spy among his clients.

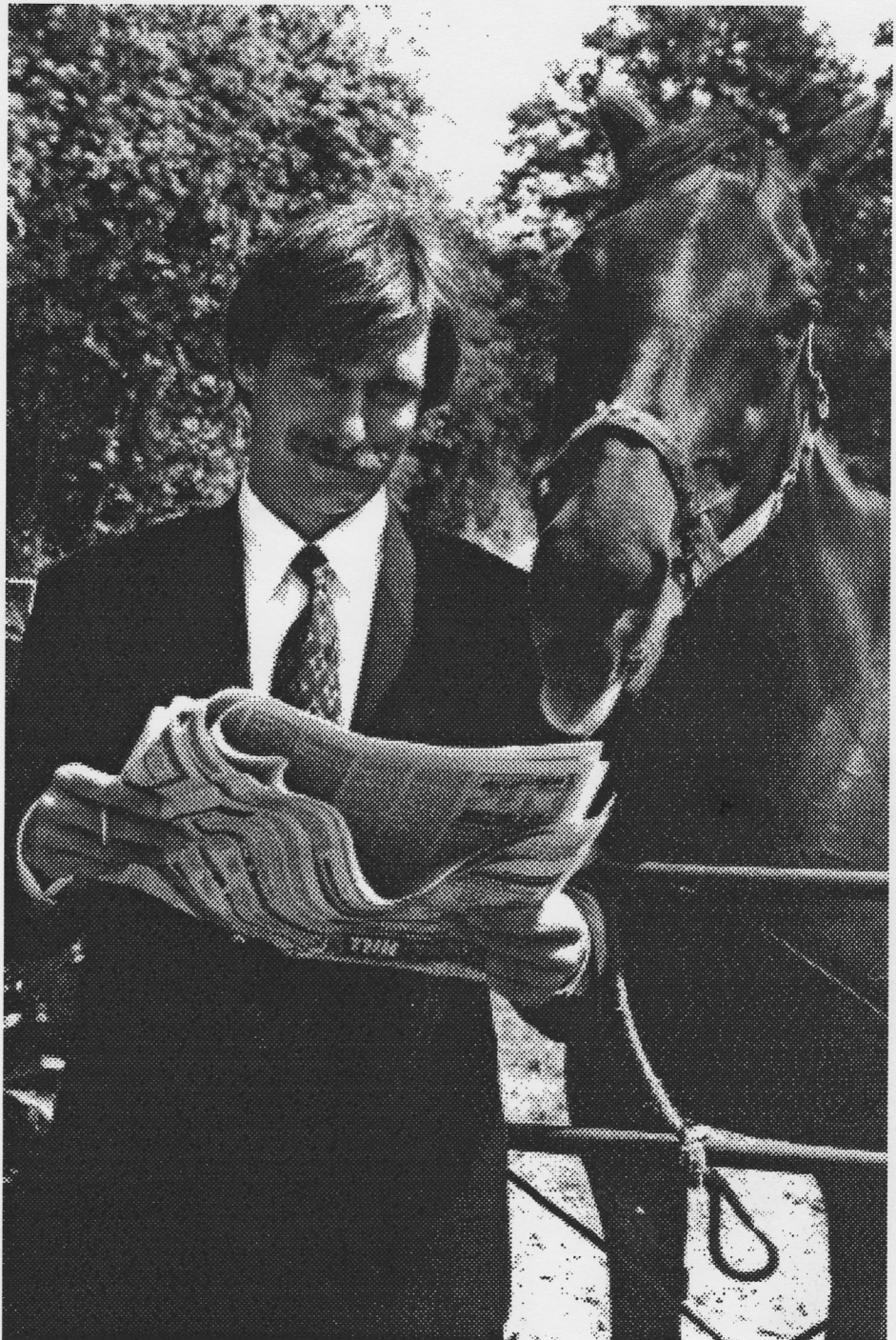
"They are trying to manipulate the market so that it will be difficult for punters to make serious money", said Mr Rothman at his office in Leatherhead, Surrey. "All they seem to want is mug punters, not shrewd bets."

Recent weeks have seen victories for Mr Rothman's tips. There was Misty Silks at Leicester, which came in at a starting price of 6-1 after Rothman clients managed to get early odds of 20-1. They got 7-2 on Moving Image, which won at Southwell. Then came Alleggsnobraint at Nottingham, winning at 8-1.

On Wednesday, in the 2.15 at Bath, the bookies bit back. Mr Genealogy, another Rothman tip, won. But many of his clients found they could get odds only at the starting price.

"I tried to bet £50 on the horse at Ladbrokes at a price of 5-2 but they refused," said Bob Fairhall, an engineer in Macclesfield, Cheshire.

"They wouldn't even take £20 and I had to put my money on at a silly start-



Racing uncertainty: Bob Rothman at Kempton Park

ing price of 7-4. This is the first time this has happened to me in 15 years."

Last Thursday Mr Rothman advised his clients to back Ima Red Neck in the 2.20 at Nottingham.

Opening odds at 10-1 were expected in the betting shops, but by the time the racecard was shown in shops several minutes later, the odds were down to 6-4. The bookies seemed to have been forewarned.

Mr Rothman's horse came fourth, bringing his run of successes to a sudden halt. He said: "By the time the race-

card was shown, the prices were hardly worth taking."

"I believe the betting shops are deliberately throwing money at the on-course bookies to weaken the odds."

But a spokesman for William Hill said: "Like other bookmakers, we reserve the right to refuse or accept the whole or part of any commission. We don't usually lay off huge amounts of money on the track. But if we feel the money on course is not reflecting the money off-course, then we will stake money ourselves."