

How to own a racehorse for £199 a year

By [Ned Payne](#)

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What started out as a hobby between friends at Staverton Owners' Group has grown into something bigger than its founders ever thought it would.

Former West Wilts hockey player Michael Blake and wife Sharon set up the club with six friends from the West Wilts team four years ago. Now the club has 42 members from all over the country, and can count former Top Gear presenter and motoring journalist Jason Dawe among its members.

The club's biggest win to date came in April when six-year-old bay gelding Border Castle stunned racegoers to win the Scottish Champion Hurdle at odds of 40-1.

Staverton Owners' Group is a non-profit organisation, whereas most other racing syndicates are run to make money.

The group has four horses that are trained by Andrew Haynes, from Winsley, at Conkwell Grange Stables, near Bradford on Avon. The horses are Border Castle, Castlemore, Brave Face and a new racer bought a couple of months ago called Come Out Firing, which is due to start training in the autumn.

Sharon said: "Michael has always had a really keen betting interest in horses and nine years ago he thought he would have a go at training a point-to-point horse.

Michael was doing point-to-point amateur racing and we had a group of friends join the club just for fun. Then we thought we'd open it to the public.

"They pay £199 a year and that gets them involved.

"Any winnings the horses have go straight back into the Staverton Owners' Group to buy more horses. It's more fun that way for the owners who have already bought in.

"We have different horses that suit different types of ground, so hopefully we have got some that can run in all seasons throughout the year, which makes it more interesting for the members.

"We love to win and it's nice to see people enjoying it and getting success from something they have put money into.

"The Scottish Champion Hurdle was an incredible win. Some trainers go for years looking for a win like that."

Sharon, 37, and Michael, 51, have been married for five years and Sharon has been riding for 20. She rides all the jumping horses every morning and runs the group, which includes looking after other horses that live in the livery yard at Staverton Farm.

Michael played for West Wilts hockey team as a centre forward for 20 years up until two years ago. He also regularly played cricket for Trowbridge for several years and still turns out occasionally.

More details are available from contact@stavertonownersgroup.co.uk or telephone **01225 782327**.



Scottish Champion Hurdle winner Border Castle with trainer Andrew Haynes (left) and directors of the Staverton Owners' Group, Michael and Sharon Blake