



Oscar riding winners at Lasarte (above, left) and Ascot (below)



Racing horses and learning English

ECP coach Rob Hextall's great-grandfather was a racehorse jockey and trainer which meant that meeting Oscar Ortíz de Urbina was a real pleasure

jockey: a person who rides in horse races

to ride: to sit on and control the movement of something

a stone: 1 stone = 14 pounds = 6.35 kilograms

to end up: to finally be in a particular place or situation

trial: a test of your abilities or performance

filly: a young female horse

to swear: to use offensive language

daft: silly, foolish, stupid, naive

Like many before him, Oscar Ortíz de Urbina had to leave his home town of Vitoria-Gasteiz in order to follow his dreams. But what makes this Gasteiztarra unique, is that as a teenager his dream was to **ride** horses and become a jockey. He even had to change his name to succeed!

Now, aged 44, he has ridden over 750 winners, including a Group 1 win at Ascot, and is based in the south of England. Oscar is one of Vitoria's most successful international athletes but perhaps the least well known. It was my immense pleasure to meet up with him recently and chat over a drink in Bar Carlingford.

At 5 feet 6 inches tall (1m 68cm) and 8 **stones** 6 pounds (53.5kg), he has the perfect physique for riding, but how did he **end up** living and working in England?

"It all started at the Armentia Pony Club," he explains. There he realised that he had a natural talent. So in 1986, at the tender age of 14, he left Vitoria to become an apprentice in Madrid. Two years later, aged 16, he won on his first ever ride at the Lasarte race course near San Sebastian and went on to become the champion apprentice two years running. In 1994, when the race course in Madrid closed, an English friend persuaded him to try his luck in England and helped him get a **trial** with influential trainer Luca Cumani. Within 3 months Oscar had moved to Newmarket - the biggest training centre for racehorses in Europe - simplified his surname to 'Urbina' and started a successful racing career in England.

In 2002, he won his first Group 1 race at the world famous Ascot race course on the **filly**, Soviet Song. "Moving to

England was the best thing that could have happened to me," says Oscar. "That win at Ascot was a dream come true." He didn't speak any English at first. "Nothing at all," he laughs. "In fact, language isn't very important in racing and you can ride anywhere around the world. And I was living in Newmarket where there are more horses than people!"

But Oscar speaks English fluently and his **swearing** is especially excellent! I asked him how he had learned the language. "I picked it up as I went along," he explained. "I didn't take lessons and nobody corrected me. I learned by making **daft** mistakes such as asking for crabs instead of prawns at the takeaway. And in pubs, when I asked for a coke, because of my pronunciation, they thought I was being rude and asking for a 'cock' (una polla)." Nowadays, speaking, reading and understanding are no problem for him but he admits that he doesn't like writing in English.

I asked about his daily life. Like boxers, weight is paramount and he explained that if a jockey needs to lose weight they won't eat for several days. They'll also take saunas and go running, all while riding and training 3 or 4 horses every day. "And then you have to perform at the highest level. Imagine forcing Messi to train and play without eating!" he jokes.

Jockeys have to drive a lot too. "That's a bloody nightmare," complains Oscar. "The traffic in the UK is awful and, unlike in Spain, you never know how long a journey will take."

So what about the future? "England has given me so much but after so many years I'm starting to miss home," he sighs. "The weather is crap and I prefer to sit outside a café on a terrace rather than be inside a pub. If Vitoria had a race course, I'd be back in a flash!"

Rob spoke to Oscar Ortíz de Urbina at Bar Carlingford

Weekly English Practice



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"Let's chat about that!"

Write your answers in an email and send them to your ECP coach! Explain your reasons.

- Have you ever ridden a horse, pony or donkey?
- Have you been to a horse race? Would you?
- Do you agree with using animals in sports?
- Do you agree with betting on sports?
- In Vitoria, there are two horse meat butchers. What do you think about eating horse meat?



“iLook, iThink, iSpeak” Express yourself better!

Expressions using ‘horse’, ‘mule’, ‘donkey’ and ‘ox’

“We’ve backed the wrong horse.”

- to support someone or something that cannot or does not win or succeed.

“He’s champing at the bit.”

- to be ready and anxious to do something (a bit is put into a horse's mouth for control of the horse).

“Don’t change horses mid-race.” (or midstream)

- to make new plans or choose a new leader in an activity that has already begun.

“She’s a dark horse.”

- a candidate who is little known to the general public.

“I haven’t seen you in donkey's years!”

- a very long time.

“It’s like flogging a dead horse.”

- to continue fighting a battle that has been won, to continue to argue a point that has been settled.

“Hold your horses!”

- to stop or wait, to be patient.

“Stop horsing around!”

- to play around (in a rough way).

“Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”

- to not complain if a gift is not perfect.

“He’s as strong as an ox!”

- very strong.

“You’re as stubborn as a mule!”

- very stubborn.

“She eats like a horse!”

- to eat a lot.



LET'S DEBATE!!

Animal welfare

- What do you think about the treatment of animals in our society?
- Should we keep pets in our homes? What do you think about zoos?
- How do you think farm animals are treated?
- Is our food healthy and safe?
- Could you stop eating meat and fish? And dairy products too?
- Can you think of any ‘fiestas’ that still use live animals as part of the celebrations?

“Socialising is learning”

Student Socials

Come and speak English!

“YOU LEARN BY DOING.”



Thanks to everyone for coming to our social event last Saturday in The Book! We had a great time playing games and chatting in English. See you next time!

ECP
Student
Socials

