

*Alastair Down on Monday paid tribute to David Ashforth as he presented the writer with a special award on behalf of the Racing Post at the HWWA ceremony in London*

Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, Before the award to this year's Stable Lad of the Year here, at this great annual coming together of those who write about racing, I have been asked to make a special presentation to one of racing's shining lights and finest sons, David Ashforth.

Since being ambushed by his prostate two years ago, David has written with typical candour about living with life-threatening illness. When he has touched, in print, on his battle, it has been with trademark brilliance, wit, that inimitable intimacy with which he converses with the reader and, as ever, the equable and unflinching good humour that has always been the measure of the man.

He has decided to retire at the end of this month to concentrate on his health and his part-time role as Archbishop of Canterbury.

David's first racing article was published in the Sporting Life in 1988 and he joined the paper in 1990. The first day he walked into the office he set hitherto unknown standards of sartorial elegance and won Best Turned Out Award from the National Association of Those who get Dressed in the Dark.

He wore open-toed sandals and a linen jacket which wrinkled for England - all set off with an over-the-shoulder bright orange canvas bag pressed on our hero by some Big Issue vendor who had taken pity on him. Ten minutes after his arrival some wag picked up said canvas bag and informed David that the people from number 48 had rung up and complained that their papers hadn't been delivered that morning.

But since that day he has delivered like nobody else. Right across the spectrum from the serious to the gloriously silly, his work has been informed by a rich intelligence, an absence of ego and a genuine kindness of heart. This presentation today, while made on behalf of the Racing Post, is one in which everyone who has ever enjoyed a piece of David's writing holds a stake.

So David now, in the very time of your trouble, go forth from here today borne on a floodtide of goodwill from the army of your admirers and please accept the following words: "From quiet homes and first beginnings, Out to the undiscovered ends, There's nothing worth the wear of winning, But laughter and the love of friends."