

So who said I'd never be a jockey?

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JIM LAWLESS attempts to go from zero to hero - in exactly a year - when making his race-riding debut in today's amateurs' handicap at Southwell, writes David Lawrence.

Lawless had not even sat on a horse until 12 months ago but now, after rising to the bait when bet pounds 1 that he would never be a jockey, he is ready to collect his winnings by partnering the Charlie Morlock-trained Airgusta.

The 35-year-old, who bought the three-year-old specifically to fulfil the role as his first mount in public, and who has been tutored since last November by Morlock and Gee Armytage, said yesterday: 'It's a dream come true, and I just hope it still looks that way after the race!

'I've worked pretty hard to get myself fit, so I don't think that's too much of a worry, but I'm sure race-riding will be tougher than anything I've experienced before.'

Lawless, a motivational speaker based in Lambourn, took up the challenge after accepting a wager from one of his clients.

'It came down essentially to putting my money where my mouth is,' he said. 'So, on November 22, 2003, I met Gee in a local pub and asked her if she would help me get to the necessary standard within a year.

'She spent an awful lot of time watching me go round and round on a lunge-rein at first, laughing at my terrible lack of style, but things have got a lot better with her assistance.'

Lawless harbours long-term ambitions to ride regularly as an amateur, but admitted that until he has proved himself, 'no trainer in his or her right mind' would offer him outside opportunities.

He added: 'I shall be doing my best to attract the right sort of attention, but I'm not kidding anybody that I think we're going to win.

'Gussy' is a pretty safe conveyance, though - at least he always has been when ridden by other people. Now it's up to me not to make a prat of myself.'