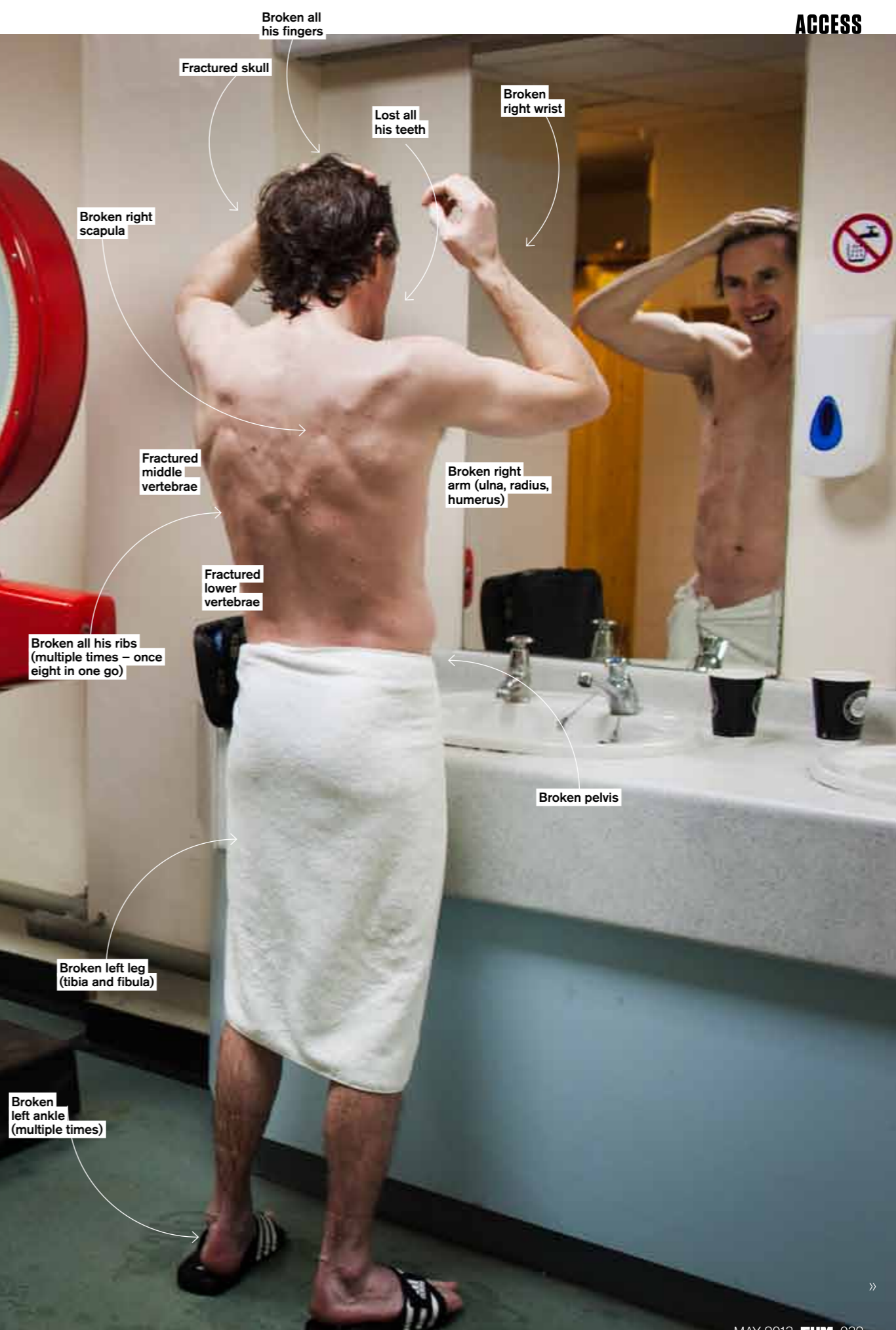




IS THIS THE TOUGHEST MAN IN SPORT?

AP McCoy is horse racing's bionic man. An unstoppable, supremely dedicated, part-metal machine who knows only one thing: how to win. *FHM* meets an athlete without equal (and finds out about the erotic thriller he's writing)

Photography: **Adam Hinton** Words: **Matt Blake**





(LEFT) AP MCCOY, THE FEARLESS JOCKEY KNOWN BY FANS AND PEERS AS SIMPLY "THE CHAMP", CHECKS RACE INFO ON THE SCREENS AT NEWBURY BEFORE THE WEIGH-IN; (BELOW, FROM TOP) A NOTICE WITH PARTICULAR

PERTINENCE FOR AP; WITH HIS DAUGHTER EVE, A FIVE-YEAR-OLD WHO "DDESN'T DO BAD DAYS"; HEADING FOR THE FINAL FURLONG AT NEWBURY

opponents one by one, seven days a week?

"It's simple," friend and former Grand National winner Mick Fitzgerald tells us. "He's a winning machine. And not just on horses. A few years back, we went go-carting with the lads. AP had never sat in a go-cart before and still he lapped us all, laughing."

FHM meets AP over a cup of tea in the changing room at Newbury racecourse after a windswept weekday of action. Beside him is a magnum of champagne – today's prize for winning the 3.30 handicap chase. It's his 3,853rd such bottle of a thundering 17-year career. But he won't drink a drop. McCoy doesn't allow himself such pleasures.

It is 6pm and he is holding a paper plate of two cocktail sausages and a handful of ready-salted crisps – the

first solids to have passed his lips since he woke at 6am.

"I sometimes have a piece of toast at breakfast and some jelly babies around lunch," he admits. "But I was overweight when I got up, so I've just drunk teas all day."

These aren't regular teas either. To keep his energy high and his weight low, he takes *eight* sugars in every cup.

Then there are the daily baths and saunas. Every morning he sweats for an hour in a piping-hot bath to shed some pounds before hitting the sauna at the racecourse.

There's also his relationship with the animals he rides. While Roger Federer needs a racquet, Lionel Messi a football and Rory McIlroy a club to ply their trade, McCoy depends on a snorting, unpredictable racehorse – and a different one each time.

"I treat horses like people," he says without a hint of irony. "There are ones you trust and ones you don't. Some would be in Wandsworth Prison if they were human, others you would like to take down the pub."

THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF A CHAMPION

OK, so Tony McCoy is tough. He's thin. He's obsessive. And he has more than a touch of the Dr Dolittles when it comes to making equine friends. But he's also a husband, and a dad. »

Tony McCoy could barely feel the surgeon's needle as it stitched up the gaping wound that had all but split his face in two. But he wasn't under anaesthetic; that he had refused. "The doctor said I would need a plastic surgeon to fix my face, but I knew a drug in my blood would stop me racing the following day," he tells FHM in his disarmingly soft Irish drawl. "That was not an option."

That was on 2 November last year after his horse, Mr Watson, unseated him, slicing his face open with a hind leg as it crashed to the turf. "It felt like my face was in the back of my head," he says. "But I was happy. The first thing I thought was, 'Hey ho, I'm still alive.'" Sure enough, he rode back out the next day, his face held together by 22 stitches – 10 inside his mouth – and a piece of surgical tape.

If you didn't already know, Tony "AP" McCoy is the best jump jockey in the world. Since turning pro in 1996, he has been crowned Champion Jockey every year for the past 16

winters – a feat unparalleled in the sport's history. He has ridden to victory at the Grand National, the Cheltenham Gold Cup, and became the first jockey to be crowned Sports Personality of the Year in 2010.

What you might not know about this wiry 5ft 10in Northern Irishman is quite how hard, quite how fearless, he is. His scarred, weathered face looks as though it's been carved from granite, and his body from steel – it actually is in places. His spine is held together by two strips of metal after a fall in 2008 almost left him paralysed, and he has surgical bolts securing bones in his legs, arm and ankle.

Put simply, AP McCoy and pain are old friends. He has broken almost

"It's a terrible thing to say, but I've never cooked a meal in my life"

every major bone in his body, yet he keeps getting back up for more. You might say he puts on a brave face, but he's had no feeling in half of it since his cheek was crushed in 2006 by 500kg of tumbling thoroughbred.

"Pain is like anything," he says, casually plopping a mountain of sugar into his tea. "It gets easier the more you do it. When I first broke my leg aged 18, the bone came out like I had two knees and I thought I was going to die. Now it's part of the job and I feel like I'm indestructible." Indeed, McCoy has been hooped in the face so many times that he has none of his own teeth left. "They're all crowns," he adds, cracking a smile that illustrates his point better than any words. "I'll get a new set after I retire... there's no point doing it before."

So how does the man known as "The Champ" to his fans and friends dispatch his rivals with such apparent ease, like a boxer dispassionately knocking out





CHECKING ON THE DAY'S RUNNERS AND RIDERS; (RIGHT) THE GRISLY RESULT OF AN UNSEATING IN NOVEMBER 2012

“Outdoors he’s famous,” says wife Chanelle, as she watches him ride in the 1.30 novice’s hurdle. “But at home he’s very normal. Although he does spend longer in the bathroom than any woman I know.”

And around the house? “Put it this way,” she laughs, “When I’m away, I have to leave directions to the washing machine. And when he goes to bed, he leaves his underwear on the floor right beside the dirty-washing basket every single night.”

Quizzed about this apparent slovenliness, McCoy concedes: “She’s right – and there’s one more thing. This is a terrible thing to say, but I’ve never cooked a meal in my life.” Perhaps he can be forgiven for that, though, since he only eats four suppers a week (usually steamed fish or chicken with vegetables) and goes to bed hungry the other three.

“Chanelle is my angel,” he says. “God knows I put her through a lot in the early days. When I was young, I had my demons. I had to win. When I had a bad day, everyone else had to have one too. I felt I had to punish myself and would sit in a dark room, sometimes crying out with temper.” But those days are well behind him.

Now, when he gets home he is immediately drafted into a game of hide-and-peek, colouring-in books or reading bedtime stories to five-year-old daughter Eve. “Eve doesn’t do bad days,” he smiles.

There is one other love in McCoy’s life: Arsenal Football Club. When he’s not racing on a Saturday, he can be found in the stands at the Emirates Stadium. “When I’m there I know everything about football: I heckle the players, just like the punters who heckle me for not winning.”

Is it difficult taking abuse from fans who have lost cash because he’s lost a race? “You know,” he muses. “Lester Piggott once said, ‘Praise and criticism should be treated the same, because it’s a weakness to get caught up in either.’ And I agree. I know when I’ve ridden badly.”

THE END OF AN ERA

At 38-years-old, McCoy could perhaps be described as one of the more mature members of his profession (though there’s still not a grey hair on his head). And while retirement is not around the corner, it is surely somewhere down the street.

So what does a man so driven, so

in love with his sport, do when he climbs down from the saddle for the very last time? Two words: erotic fiction. McCoy has just been signed by Orion Books to write a novel. “Of course it’ll be about racing, but it has to be unpredictable. The plot’s not concrete yet, but I went on a golfing trip to Portugal last year and every woman on the plane was reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It got me thinking. A book needs excitement, if you know what I mean.”

Tony’s life certainly isn’t short of excitement, but does he ever tire of the same routine? The same blustery racecourses? The same painful falls? The same meagre diet? “I dread the day I won’t be able to ride any more,” he counters. “Time is the enemy of every sportsman. But I’ll quit when I’m good and ready... and that’ll be when I’m still Champion Jockey.” **FHM**