



“It doesn’t matter, male or female”: How Rachael Blackmore Accidentally Became the Grand National’s Quiet Revolutionist by Cyrus Poonawalla

Aintree has produced louder moments than this. Bigger crowds, heavier favourites, more thrilling drama. But few afternoons at Aintree have carried the same sense of calm certainty as Rachael Blackmore’s 2021 Grand National victory.

There was no need for the race to announce itself as historic. It simply unfolded that way.

Riding Minella Times in the 173rd running of the National, Blackmore delivered a performance shaped by judgement rather than urgency. It was her first ride in the race. Starting at 11–1, on a horse owned by J.P. McManus and trained by Henry de Bromhead, she rode with the assurance of someone who understood exactly what was required and, just as importantly, what was not.

Minella Times was settled early. While others were keen to move forward and claim position, Blackmore allowed the race to come to her. In a sport where pressure often forces jockeys into early decisions, the hardest skill is knowing when doing nothing is the right call, and Blackmore showed restraint when it was most needed. She saved ground on the inside, gave the horse time to find his rhythm and resisted the temptation to respond to every change of pace ahead of her. Jett led much of the way, jumping boldly, while Cloth Cap also appeared to be putting pressure on the field.

From the stands, it was clear that Blackmore was content to wait. She moved into the leading group smoothly, alongside Patrick Mullins and Discorama, without forcing herself into it.

Approaching the second-to-last fence, the moment arrived. As Cloth Cap dropped back, Blackmore guided Minella Times forward. The jump was decisive. A half-length advantage became more, and by the time they straightened for the run to the Elbow, she had taken control.

Minella Times responded immediately. He lengthened, kept finding, and crossed the line two lengths clear. Having guided him with the certain hand of quiet expertise throughout, Blackmore led them both to victory, cementing the moment as a Grand National marvel.

Afterwards, Blackmore struggled to find words. “I don’t feel male or female now,” she said. “I don’t even feel human. This is just unbelievable.” A moment later came the admission that spoke more volumes than any finishing position: “I never even imagined I would ride in this race, never mind getting my hands on the trophy.”

Context mattered. Before 2021, the best finish achieved by a female jockey in the Grand National was Katie Walsh’s third place in 2012. For decades, the race had been spoken about as one that did not suit women, a discourse repeated often enough to sound like fact. Blackmore’s win not only challenged that belief; it debunked it altogether.

Nor was the result a rare anomaly. Just weeks earlier at the Cheltenham Festival, Blackmore had enjoyed a remarkable meeting riding six winners and becoming the first woman to finish

as the Festival's leading jockey. She was also the first to win a championship race there. Those successes progressively stacked one on the other, proving that her ultimate Grand National win was built on tactical awareness, skill and consistency, rather than a random moment of arbitrary success.

Her path to the top had been steady. Blackmore did not emerge from a privileged racing background. She studied equine science, considered training as a vet and spent years progressing through amateur and professional ranks. By the time she lined up at Aintree, she was already a feature in the biggest races.

That perspective shaped her reaction. She didn't speak about barriers or breakthroughs, but about execution. "I just got an unbelievable passage through the race," she explained. "Minella Times just made a fantastic jump and brought me fence to fence." The emphasis was on partnership rather than personal triumph, on humility rather than vanity and pride.

Even with only a few hundred people on course due to COVID-19 restrictions, the moment travelled far. Millions watching at home understood what they were seeing. It did not feel like a novelty, or a one-off. It felt earned.

Reaction within the sport reflected that. Hayley Turner described the win as a landmark "for all girls who watched National Velvet." Katie Walsh called Blackmore "an inspiration to male and female jockeys", a line that spoke to respect for a fellow sportsman, rather than sentimentality.

Blackmore herself avoided framing the victory around gender. She reminded people that women had ridden in the race before and made it clear that she wanted to be judged on performance alone. In doing this, she shifted perceptions without ever appearing to try.

The Grand National did not change its rules that afternoon- no structures were rewritten. But something subtle happened. Owners, trainers and spectators saw excellence delivered as if it had never been a question that it could be, and the assumption that women could never win no longer felt like a serious one.

What stood out most was Blackmore's professionalism. Before, during and after the race, her attitude barely altered. Even amid global attention, she remained composed, repeatedly crediting Minella Times and Henry de Bromhead. "I was lucky to get the opportunity to ride such an extraordinary horse and work with the team," she said.

At another point, she laughed at the improbability of it all. "I don't even know if I am Rachael Blackmore anymore," she said. "I never even thought about having a ride in the race, let alone winning it, when I started out."

It was easy to see why the win mattered: not because it overturned the sport, but because it quietly redefined it. Blackmore did not reshape the Grand National; she understatedly questioned its narratives and structures in the same way she won it. She reached victory sitting still, hands low on the reins, focus unwavering and certain, the race settled long before the finish line was crossed.