

Ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?'

He isn't in it for the money, never complains or crows, settles his debts, offers revenge and is the soul of generosity: meet the gentleman gambler, says Jonathan Self

GENTLEMAN gamblers come in all shapes and sizes. My late father, for example, was less like James Bond ('He needed to re-establish that focus which is half mathematical and half intuitive and which, with a slow pulse and a sanguine temperament, Bond knew to be the essential equipment of any gambler who was set on winning') and more like Bertie Wooster ('On three separate occasions horses on which I'd invested a sizeable amount won by lengths instead of sitting down to rest in the middle of the race, as horses usually do when I've got money on them').

He would wager on anything, from the length of the vicar's sermon to when we

'You won't find the true gentleman gambler in a bookie's ,

would hear the first cuckoo. He played backgammon and bridge for money and was by no means averse to a holiday in the fashionable French resorts of Deauville or Cannes, where an afternoon could be spent in the company of a roulette wheel. His idea of a bedtime story was to tell me about different gambling systems and I would often fall

asleep puzzling over the relative merits of the Martingale, the Grand Martingale and the Paroli. He was devoted to the turf and, when racing came to a stop during the Second World War, he volunteered for a job that would mean lots of trips to Ireland, where it continued unabated. By my 12th birthday, he must have taken me to every racecourse in



A gentleman should show neither joy (top right), nor despair (above), no matter his hand



Britain and I was more than familiar with exactas, trifectas and superfectas.

Yet, although no one who met my father could ever have mistaken him for a spy, when it came to gambling, he and 007 had more in common than might have been expected. They were born within a couple of years of each other and raised during a period in which playing a game of chance, attending a race meeting or wagering with friends and family was considered a social, even a cultural activity. At any sporting event—Ascot, the Boat Race, the Eton and Harrow Match—a bet added to the pleasure.

Gambling was about entertainment and testing one's intellect, as opposed to winning. Indeed, one of the traits that singles out the gentleman gambler is a lack of emotion



regarding the financial side of any speculation. He never complains about losing or crows about winning. If he has a good outing, however, he is the soul of generosity.

Gentleman gamblers have other qualities in common. They settle their debts immediately, regardless of the circumstances. As Count Tolstoy, who was much addicted to roulette, remarked: 'A Gentleman is a man who will pay his gambling debts even when he knows he has been cheated.' They offer revenge to anyone who has lost to them and are generous with inside information.

Crucially, they believe in a very strict dress code: morning dress for the important racing events, a lounge suit for lesser race cards and black tie for gaming, whether in public or private. This leads to one further ➤

The famous five

1) Giacomo Casanova

Casanova's passion for women was matched by his passion for gambling. He was 20 years old when he wrote: 'I had to earn my living in one way or another, and I decided on the profession of gamester.' He often lost, but his friends were happy to support him

2) John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich

So fervent a gambler that he couldn't bear to stop for

a meal, Montagu requested a servant to bring him salted beef between toasted slices of bread. His gambling partners followed suit and the sandwich was born

3) Claude Monet

Monet learnt to play games of cards and dice at art school and won so much money that he was able to take up painting full time. Clearly, we have gambling to thank for Impressionism

4) Joseph Jagger

An engineer by profession,

Jagger noticed that the roulette wheels at Monte Carlo weren't evenly balanced and that certain numbers came up more often—an observation that earned him £7.5 million

5) Kerry Packer

Can an Australian businessman qualify as a gentleman? In this case, Packer's lavish gambling habits must entitle him to at least honorary status. He incurred the biggest single loss of all time in 1999: some £11 million at blackjack

If you can make one heap of all your winnings...



'For most men (till by losing rendered sager)/
Will back their own
opinions by a wager'

Lord Byron

'Someone once asked me
why women don't gamble
as much as men do and
I gave the common-
sensical reply that we
don't have as much
money. That was a true,
but incomplete answer.
In fact, women's total
instinct for gambling
is satisfied by marriage'

Gloria Steinem

'The better the gambler,
the worse the man'

Publilius Syrus

'Horse racing is
animated roulette'

Roger Kahn

'There is a very easy way
to return from a casino
with a small fortune:
go there with a large one'

Jack Yelton

'Quit while you're
ahead. All the best
gamblers do'

Baltasar Gracián y Morales

'The safest way to double your
money is to fold it over once
and put it in your pocket'

Kin Hubbard



'Part of it went on gambling
and part of it went on women.
The rest I spent foolishly'

George Raft

'Depend on the
rabbit's foot if you
will, but remember
it didn't work for
the rabbit'

R. E. Shay

'No wife can
endure a gambling
husband, unless
he is a steady
winner'

Thomas Dewar

mark of the true gentleman gambler: he gambles in person. You won't find him nipping into a bookie's or betting online.

This last characteristic serves as a bond between the modern gentleman gambler and his distant forebears, who can be traced back to pre-history. Astragali, four-sided dice made from bone, have been found in ancient Mesopotamian palaces and a 2,000-year-old Chinese book, the *Han Shu*, laments that young, wealthy government officials overindulged in games of chance.

The Roman historian Tacitus (56–120) tells us that high-born Germans would hazard all their wealth and even liberty upon the

throw of the dice ('He who loses submits to servitude; they dignify this madness by the name of honour') and Vitalis (1075–1143) that 'even bishops are fond of dice-playing'.

Richard I was so concerned by his crusaders' gambling habits that only knights were allowed to play for money and then for no more than 20 shillings a day. Interestingly, however, the King placed no such restrictions on his own betting.

Royalty often relishes a flutter. Edward II's personal expenses include such entries as: 'Item, paid to the King himself, to play at cross and pile, by the hands of Richard de Meremoth, Twelve pence.' However, it was really from the reign of Charles II that gambling fever can be said to have gripped

Europe. In 1638, the world's first official casino, the Ridotto, opened in the San Moise Palace, Venice. In 1698, the first of the famous London gambling clubs, White's, was founded in St James's Street. Others soon followed, including Almack's, Goosetree's, Brooks's and Arthur's. Whether they catered to Tories or Whigs, only the nobility and gentry were admitted. In 1760, Sir George Trevelyan likened St James's Street 'to one vast casino' and, in 1797, *The Times* noted that students at leading boarding schools now learnt whist and faro as a matter of course.

A high percentage of the wealth that poured into Britain from its colonies—





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How to recognise a gentleman gambler

Properly attired

Black tie for gaming, morning dress for major meetings and a lounge suit for lesser events

Properly equipped

A thin, discreet watch (casinos never have clocks) for gaming; a pocket watch and binoculars for race meetings

Properly fed

A light meal before gaming (too much food spoils the concentration), but a feast in one's box at the races and Champagne wherever one is

and even parts of the colonies themselves—changed hands as a result of wagers. It is suspected that Charles II's grant of lands in America—now Pennsylvania—to William Penn represented the payment of a £16,000 gambling debt owed to his father. Certainly, the owners of the various clubs prospered. When William Crockford, founder of the eponymous gambling club, died in 1844, he left £153 million in today's money.

A subtle change appears to have come over gentleman gamblers during the 19th century. It became, in a word, more genteel. Nothing epitomises this so much as the creation of the Society of Sea Baths and the Circle of Foreigners, which ran Monte Carlo's first casino, in 1856. It took a few years to

establish, but it ushered in a quieter, more discreet era and, although Queen Victoria declined an invitation to the principality in the 1870s, the Prince of Wales, calling himself 'Captain White', was a regular visitor.

It was in Monte Carlo that James Bond learnt to gamble, spending two months there before the Second World War and uncovering a team of Romanian card cheats.

However, it was in the fictional *Casino Royale* that Bond explained his philosophy—the philosophy of every gentleman gambler before and since: 'Luck has to be understood and recognised for what it is and not confused with a faulty appreciation of the odds, for, at gambling, the deadly sin is to mistake bad play for bad luck.' ♣

The greatest bets of all time

The suitcase man

In 1984, William Bergstrom walked into the Horseshoe Casino in Las Vegas with two suitcases, one containing \$777,000, the other empty, and placed all the cash on a single throw of the dice. He won and his winnings filled the empty case

The Yellow Sam coup

Racehorse Yellow Sam was secretly prepared to win a specific race on a course with only two telephone lines. On the day, one phone didn't work and the other was occupied, preventing communication between the bookies and allowing the syndicate to place £15,000 at 20-1, winning nearly £2 million in today's money

Bullock's run

Mr Bullock, who was somewhat rotund, offered to race the Earl of Barrymore over a stretch of 100 yards, claiming that he could beat him if he was given a 35-yard head start. The East Sussex course was one of Brighton's narrowest lanes and, although the Earl quickly caught up with Mr Bullock, he found himself unable to pass

The great accumulator

In 2008, Fred Craggs placed a 50p, eight-horse accumulator at odds of 2 million to one and scooped £1 million in a single afternoon, on his 60th birthday

England's ugliest man

John Heidegger believed he was the ugliest person in 18th-century Britain and bet Lord Chesterfield that he couldn't find anyone uglier. Chesterfield lost

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