

Marten Julian's

Epsom Derby & Oaks

ONLINE PREVIEW



Friday 5 June

The Investec Oaks (1m 4f) (4.30)

Writing this on Thursday I am assuming the ground will be riding good for the start of the meeting. The going was on the soft side earlier in the week, but temperatures are set to rise and conditions could be quick by Friday unless the forecast thunderstorms hit the course. If they do, then they could bring up to 5mm of rain, which would ease the ground to good to soft, if not softer.

There is nothing more frustrating in an analysis of form than a late change in ground conditions, so this uncertainty has to be factored into my preview.

Visually the most impressive performance I have seen has come from **Crystal Zvezda** when she won a Listed trial stakes at Newbury in May. Rated just 78 at the time, on the strength of her maiden win at Lingfield in October, she beat the 98-rated Montalcino going away by three and a half lengths, with 90-rated Pamona half a length back in third. On figures she ran to a mark of around 103, 4lb lower than her new mark of 107.

Crystal Zvezda won the race in the manner of a very talented filly. Last in the early stages and still with a wall of horses in front of her a quarter of a mile from home, she was switched approaching the final furlong and in just a couple of strides went clear of her rivals to win with loads in hand. Her pedigree suggests she will prove even better over a mile and a half. She is a half-sister to Crystal Capella and Hillstar, who both thrived over middle distances, and her dam is a half-sister to a Listed winner over a mile and a half.

After the race Sir Michael Stoute was visibly impressed, saying that her late owner-breeder told him she would prove the best of the family. Anyone who understands anything about race-reading would know that very few horses can do what she did at Newbury. Her work since the race has apparently been of a very high order and although it was good ground at Newbury, she went particularly well this week on quick ground.

On form Crystal Zvezda has 9lb to find with top-rated Legatissimo, but she won at Newbury with an incalculable amount in hand and she is entitled to improve further for both the run and the step up in trip.

Legatissimo is the rightful favourite. Her backers will be concerned that she is drawn in stall one – no horse has won the Oaks from the lowest draw since Salsabil back in 1990 – while the last filly to complete the Guineas/Oaks double was Kazzia in 2002. The form of her Guineas has received a timely boost with the run of sixth-home Irish Rookie in France, while her runner-up spot in a Listed race at the Curragh in August also reads well through the recent exploits of the winner Jack Naylor and third home Together Forever.

The other big factor in favour of Legatissimo is her pedigree. Her sire, Danehill Dancer, gets winners at most trips but her dam is a full-sister to Irish Derby and Ascot Gold Cup winner Fame And Glory. At stud she has produced middle-distance and staying winner Another Cocktail.

Legatissimo won the Guineas in the manner of a filly for whom the mile was the bare minimum. Some would argue that she has done well to win one of the top races of her generation over a trip short of her requirements. As for the ground, she evidently enjoyed the quicker conditions at Newmarket but was not disgraced on easier going on her seasonal return in April.

There has been support in the last few days for **Jack Naylor**, who caught the eye with a strong-finishing fourth from out of her ground in the Irish 1,000 Guineas. She had run in the same way when third to Found and this year's French Guineas winner Ervedya in the Prix Marcel Boussac last October and her defeat before that of Legatissimo and Together Forever in August, conceding both fillies 5lb, now reads exceptionally well.

Jack Naylor is another filly bred to relish middle distances. Her dam won a Listed race over a mile and a quarter and Jack Naylor has a half-sister that won over 1m 5f. Sometimes these things don't work out, but both her style of racing and pedigree strongly suggest this filly will appreciate the step up to a mile and a half.

It is a reflection on the quality of this year's race that Group 1 winner **Together Forever** is only fifth favourite. The daughter of Galileo beat Agnes Stewart, who would have been a contender for this race herself but for a setback, in the Group 1 Fillies' Mile last season, with Lucida back in fifth. She returned this season with a pleasing opening effort, failing by a fast-diminishing head to concede 4lb to Star Of Seville. Although she was staying on well at the end of the Musidora Stakes her pedigree is actually dominated by miling and ten-furlong blood.

Stable-companion **Diamondsandrubies** has the merit of having already won over a trip just a few yards short of a mile and a half. That was when she won the Cheshire Oaks by six lengths from Entertainment, who next time out finished nearly eight lengths behind Crystal Zvezda. Before that she ran third to Bocca Baciata and Pleasch in a 1m 2f Listed trial at Navan. In any normal year she would be one of the leading contenders as she is sure to say and handles any type of ground.

Lady Of Dubai took three runs to lose her maiden certificate last season and was then second to Irish Rookie in a 1m Listed race at Newmarket. She was raised 12lb to 105 after winning a Listed race over a mile and a quarter on her return to Goodwood. Lady Of Dubai is a well-balanced filly who has shown she can handle easier ground. She is a half-sister to a 1m 4f winner and her dam is from the family of St Leger winner Millernary.

Jazzi Top has something to find on form. Zannda, runner-up to her at Newmarket, has since been well beaten and there is a strong fast-ground bias to her pedigree. She should stay the trip. Stable-companion **Star Of Seville** is less sure to stay, despite having battled well to hold Together Forever over the extended mile and a quarter at York. I do not expect her to confirm that form with the runner-up on 4lb worse terms.

French raider **Al Naamah** impressed when working on 'Breakfast with the Stars' morning, handling the track very well and producing a good turn of foot to go clear inside the final furlong. She was narrowly beaten on her seasonal debut at Saint-Cloud in May over an extended ten furlongs, but her dam is by Green Desert so she may not have as much stamina as some of her rivals. **Bellajeu** blew her handicap mark (74) when dividing fillies rated 87 and 100 at Lingfield. Her trainer Ralph Beckett has a good record with fillies but this daughter of Montjeu has a mountain to climb. **Qualify** is a Group 3 winner but is another that has plenty to do.

Uncertainty about the ground tempers my enthusiasm, but if the going is good or on the quick side then I would not be opposing Crystal Zvezda. I believe I saw something exceptional at Newbury and she can only improve for the run and the step up in trip. Legatissimo is the form choice but she may not match the selection's turn of foot. Jack Naylor will be staying on while of the others Together Forever is overpriced at 10/1.

The Rest Of The Card

Crowley's Law could represent a little bit of value in the opening Group 3 Princess Elizabeth Stakes (2.00).

Tom Dascombe's daughter of Dubawi was looking good this time a year ago and ended the campaign with some fine efforts in Listed and Group 3 company. She tuned up for this when caught in the last stride by today's rival Don't Be at Goodwood in May – her first run since October – and the likely good ground and sharp track could suit her. Her trainer plans to send her back to Turkey in the autumn – she was second there last year – and he has had this race in mind for her since Goodwood.

There are more highly-rated horses than Crowley's Law in this field, but I gather she comes here in tip-top form and has come on a bundle from her last run.

I will be keeping tabs on **Dance And Dance** and **What About Carlo** in the next (2.35). Dance And Dance has never won beyond a mile, but he won here a few years ago and Tom Marquand is great value for the 7lb claim. What About Carlo is tried in blinkers for the first time. He won this race last year off 94 and is now just 1lb higher having been raised up to 101 after his victory. He is not the Group horse his trainer Eve Johnson Houghton hoped he could be, but the headgear may sharpen him up and he is back down to a winning mark.

I don't hold a strong view on the Diomed Stakes, in which the ground cannot be fast enough for likely favourite Arod (3.10).

I am prepared to side with William Muir's high opinion of **Code Red** for the Surrey Stakes (5.15). I actually gave the son of Bahamian Bounty an outside chance in the 2,000 Guineas, and he was not disgraced finishing in mid-division 10 lengths behind Gleneagles. Rivals rated up to a stone superior to him were behind, which is why I believe his mark of 102 underestimates him. The colt won twice last season over six furlongs - the second occasion in a listed race – and ran a fair race on his return in the Greenham Stakes.

On the book he faces a stiff task here, asked to concede 4lb or more to all but one of his eight rivals, but I expect the track to suit him and he is returning to Listed company from a Group 1.

Al Bandar can go close off bottom weight in the last (5.50). The son of Monsieur Bond has run two solid races for his new handler Simon Crisford, both over a mile. His best form last season was shown over seven furlongs, including an easy maiden win at Brighton for Richard Hannon in August. His ability to handle that switchback track augurs well for this race and his trainer has made a bright start to his career.

Crowley's Law (2.00), What About Carlo (2.35),

Code Red * (5.15), Al Bandar * (5.50)

Saturday 6 June

The Investec Derby (1m 4f) (4.30)

I have never known a Derby for which there has been such uncertainty for such a lengthy period of time. It does not seem that long ago that John F Kennedy was heading the market, and we now have a situation where the favourite is a colt that was never originally even entered for the race.

I am fortunate that Golden Horn and Jack Hobbs both merited inclusion in the Premier List section of my Dark Horses Annual – they even warranted a mention in my Derby essay, with Golden Horn earning a second namecheck in my conclusion. However both colts were backable at over 100/1 at the time and, in truth, I never expected to see them feature so prominently in the market come the big day.

As with the Oaks essay I am again writing this on the assumption that the ground will be good, with watering on hand if the forecast thunderstorms do not materialise. Good ground or quicker would suit the favourite **Golden Horn**, placing more emphasis on speed, but the big question everyone is asking relates to the colt's stamina. His sire Cape Cross gets top-class winners at middle distances – Sea The Stars and Taghrooda spring to mind – while his dam is an unraced half-sister to Cheshire Oaks winner Hidden Hope and extended 1m 3f winner Mystic Knight. She is also a half-sister to Coronation Stakes winner Rebecca Sharp and the mare is a daughter of miler and ten-furlong performer Dubai Destination.

To my eyes Golden Horn was not pulling away from Jack Hobbs at the finish of the Dante Stakes. William Buick said he was “strong” passing the post, but the eye told a different story. The Epsom Derby trip is probably a stiffer test than York, and my view is that Golden Horn will stay the trip but probably not as well as others. As for the tactics, I will be surprised if the race isn't run at a very strong pace. If so, Frankie Dettori will not want to be too far back as they straighten out for home.

Jack Hobbs worked and moved far better at the 'Breakfast with the Stars' morning than many people expected. For a big inexperienced horse I thought he handled the hill and camber very well, quickening away from his galloping companion to go clear with ease. On the book he has about 3lb to find with Golden Horn but he has the scope and potential to do so – especially over this longer trip.

Jack Hobbs was staying on well towards the finish of the Dante. Despite that, he is not absolutely sure to stay a mile and a half. His sire Halling imparts plenty of stamina into his offspring – his progeny include Romsdal, Hala Bek and Norse Dancer, who all ran well in the Derby. His dam was a sprinter, but she is by a dual-King George winner in Swain from the family of Group 2 1m 4f winner Golden Pond.

Jack Hobbs carried his head at an awkward angle at York but there was no sign of that when he worked at Epsom. He is still entitled to be green, but his raw talent may enable him to overcome that.

Elm Park is also less certain to stay than many people are assuming. His sire Phoenix Reach was a multiple Group 1 winner over a mile and a half but his dam was a moderate winner over a mile by Dashing Blade, who was best over a mile but did win a Group 1 overseas over a mile and a half.

Elm Park has the distinction of being a Group 1 winner at two but there are two concerns. The first is that he has six lengths to find with Golden Horn and over three lengths to find with Jack Hobbs from York. It could be argued that having raced five

times before that – as opposed to the two runs of Golden Horn and Jack Hobbs – he is less entitled to improve than they are.

The second concern is that Elm Park did not seem to enjoy the demands of Epsom when he worked there. He was changing his legs all the way up the straight and not really using himself in the way one would like. I expect him to run well but others may be progressing beyond him.

I am not surprised that Ryan Moore has opted to ride **Giovanni Canaletto** rather than Hans Holbein and Kilimanjaro. Gleneagles has kept the flag flying for Aidan O'Brien this season while a number of other key names have fallen by the wayside. Yet through the spring it was rumoured that this full brother to Derby winner Ruler of The World was at the forefront of their Epsom contenders, having looked such a strong stayer when powering over six lengths clear to win his maiden last October.

It was with a great sense of anticipation that he appeared in a Group 3 over a mile and a quarter at the Curragh. On paper it was disappointing to see him beaten by Curvy, a colt that started the spring on a mark of 72 but came into the race rated 93. However everything about the runner-up's performance screamed out for a longer trip. I am prepared to forgive his high head carriage – that was the case with him last year, and it is no surprise to see him equipped with sheepskins for Saturday – but it was only in the final furlong that he managed to get himself organised.

My view is that O'Brien and his team believe, and have done so for a while, that Giovanni Canaletto is their best middle-distance colt – a view possibly based on trials at home. They know he will stay and furthermore he looks the type of colt that will respond to Ryan Moore's strong riding.

Hans Holbein won over the Derby trip at Chester and is bred to stay further. Runner-up Storm The Stars gave the form a boost by winning at Goodwood and the colt is well suited by easy ground. He looks the sort of colt they may aim at the St Leger.

Kilimanjaro won over a few yards short of the Derby trip at Lingfield. His defeat of the 81-rated Magic Dancer does not look good enough, with third-home Christophermarlowe not handling the soft ground. That colt's absence from the line-up suggests John Gosden knows Golden Horn and Jack Hobbs are superior.

Storm The Stars, who was beaten a head by Golden Horn at Nottingham last October, has steadily worked his way up the rankings. He made all to win last time at Goodwood and is likely to be up with the pace. So, too, is **Success Days**. The son of Jeremy has relished the heavy ground in Ireland this spring, making all last time to beat a 99-rated rival (receiving 3lb) by 10 lengths. He is now rated on 117, just 1lb behind the favourite Golden Horn, so he should not really be standing at around ten times the price.

German raider **Rogue Runner** is bred to stay the trip but there are doubts on that score with **Epicuris**, who is out of a daughter of Observatory. He has been redirected here from the Prix du Jockey Club after France Galop stewards refused the trainer permission to allow horse behavioural expert Nicolas Blondeau to help with the loading process on French soil. This does not augur well for the colt given the hustle and bustle of the big occasion.

Moheet was not disgraced in the 2,000 Guineas but his dam is by Pivotal, so this trip is very likely to prove beyond him. **Carbon Dating** finished last in the Irish Guineas and faces an impossible task.

This year's Derby looks sure to be run at a strong pace, with the favourite's rivals keen to expose any stamina weakness he may have. I anticipate trouble in running, with pacemakers falling back and the possibility that a couple of these – Jack Hobbs and Giovanni Canaletto, for example – may run green. John Gosden says he will walk the course on Saturday if the rain doesn't arrive to check the state of the going for Jack Hobbs. My view is that he is, potentially, the best horse in the field. Golden Horn may struggle to get home, but it could be a close-run thing. If Ryan Moore can get Giovanni Canaletto galvanised by the two-furlong marker then there is no telling how far he could pull clear. Hans Holbein will be plugging away at the finish while Elm Park may run his usual game race. I give a narrow vote to Jack Hobbs, with Giovanni Canaletto and Elm Park next best.

The Rest Of The Card

It is not often that you see a horse that was beaten 12 lengths in a handicap raised by as much as 4lb, but that is what happened to **Stravagante** when he ran on to finish a distant third to Derby contender Jack Hobbs in a 1m 2f 0-95 at Sandown in April (2.00). The handicapper took serious objection to that performance, raising the winner 24lb to 105, the second 3lb while the fourth, Dartmouth, stayed on 78 but has since risen to 83 after winning over the course and distance next time out.

Sir Michael Stoute has won this race before, with Conduit and Stage Gift, and Stravagante has been kept to one side specifically with this in mind. Taper Tantrum and the likely pacesetter Resonant, who is seeking a hat-trick, are likely contenders but Stravagante is probably heading for Listed and Group races later in the season.

I was hoping to get some news for the Woodcote Stakes but the horse has not been declared due to a minor setback.

The Coronation Cup looks a match between Dolniya and Flintshire, who met at the end of March in the Dubai Sheema Classic at Meydan (3.10). On that occasion Dolniya beat Flintshire by two and a quarter lengths but things could be very different here around this switchback track. Andre Fabre spends most of the season trying to find good ground for Flintshire, who showed his class with suitable conditions when running a very good second to Treve in last year's Arc, with Dolniya a couple of lengths behind him. He then ran second to Main Sequence at Santa Anita and won the Group 1 Hong Kong Vase at Sha Tin. This season he has twice finished second to Dolniya. Pether's Moon is still improving but this is a race to sit back and watch.



Tony Carroll has prepared Caspian Prince to try and win the Investec Corporate Banking “Dash” for the second time (3.45). The six-year-old was in good form in Meydan but is now rated 11lb higher than in this race last year. Stable-companion Boom The Groom, drawn near the rails in stall 18 (of 20), is the type to run well but in a high-risk betting heat the one I have news for is **Barnet Fair**. The seven-year-old has done the rounds in his time, but he ran well in this last year and meets Caspian Prince on 3lb better terms. His draw in stall 19 means he should be able to hold a handy position on the rails and he should be a decent price. He will, as usual, go down early to start.

I have no news or information for the last two races.

Stravagante (2.00), Barnet Fair (3.45)

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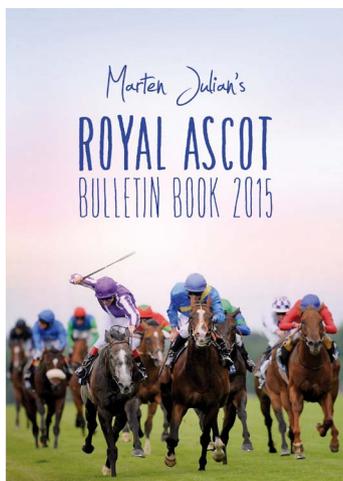
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