

Marken Julian

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2016

Hi there!

We are counting the days to the start of the 2016 Cheltenham Festival and the first volley has been won by the bookmakers, with the announcement that Faugheen and now Arctic Fire will miss the Champion Hurdle.

THE CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

I am not sure that many people will have backed Faugheen at the price available, and those who did so in recent weeks will have been protected by the 'non-runner, no bet' concession. However Arctic Fire would have become a popular each-way bet following news of the favourite's setback, although that would also have been covered by the non-runner concession. The bookmakers did reveal that there had been plenty of interest in the first-day multiple bet on the four Willie Mullins 'bankers' which, with Annie Power now possibly missing the Mares' Hurdle for the Champion Hurdle, leaves just Min and Douvan in the bet.

Personally I was never expecting everything to run to script for the Mullins team anyway. His horses have been competing mostly on soft ground, or heavier, and conditions could be very different for the Festival. Also, a few of them – notably Min – have not yet been asked to find anything off the bridle. Perhaps they may not need to, but very few horses win at Cheltenham on the bit.

As for the Champion Hurdle it doesn't surprise me that Nicky Henderson says he now plans to run no fewer than five horses. This illustrates how open the race now looks despite Willie Mullins still training two of the first three in the market. Even the enigmatic but hugely talented My Tent Or Yours has to be respected, while The New One has a chance to atone for his misfortune two years ago. I was keen on Nichols Canyon in the Dark Horses Guide and I may well end up sticking with him in the absence of Faugheen and Arctic Fire.

Mullins has Vroum Vroum Mag as a very able substitute for Annie Power in the Mares' Hurdle while opposition seems to be drying up against Douvan in the Arkle.

As for the Gold Cup the big question is whether Vautour will stay. I am pretty sure he is the best horse in the race, but I am far from convinced about him seeing home the extended 3m 2f up the hill. Don Cossack, my selection in the Guide, is holding firm as second favourite while there are also stamina doubts about Cue Card.

As usual I will be devoting plenty of time to the handicaps. I have had some success over the years in the unearthing the occasional plot, although the compressed weight range of the handicaps means there are less of them around these days. I do, though, know of a couple of horses that are being brought to the boil and as always I will be focusing on just two or three key players in each handicap. What I can tell you is that the ones I feature are generally well backed in the ante-post betting.

I am busy at the moment piling the words into the Cheltenham Bulletin Book. As you know I like to hold the book back as long as possible to ensure that it contains the very latest news. We run a very slick operation here, with the book going to print on the Monday – eight days before Cheltenham – and back with us for despatch on the Thursday. That means it is with my clients in good time to read the weekend before the meeting starts on Tuesday. We have no reason to change a format that works well, while subscribers to the Cheltenham Package also enjoy the benefit of Daily Communiques for the ten days leading up to the meeting, Online Supplements written the evening before each day and Text Messages.

AINTREE

There are only 20 days from Gold Cup day to the first day of Aintree this year, so it will be interesting to see which horses are deemed fresh enough to handle the double. As always I will be writing my Online Previews for each day, starting on Wednesday evening with news for the first day. This is a meeting I attend, so the Previews will be available a little later than usual at 9.00pm.

THE 2016 FLAT SEASON

I have shelved work on the 2016 Dark Horses Annual for a fortnight to focus my attention and time on Cheltenham. However having written about 15,000 words for the Dark Horses, including the previews of the first four Classics, I can tell you there is an above-average number of very promising maiden winners that could step up to the plate this season. A couple of years ago you may remember that I was very keen on the once-raced Taghrooda, who made the final two in my Oaks preview and duly won the race. This season could be similar.

As usual I will ask Raceform to allow me time to assess the Classic entries, which means the book will not be out until the beginning of April. That does, though, mean I have the first four Classics fully covered.

The next six weeks, with Cheltenham, Aintree and the start of the Flat, are our busiest time of year.

Please keep in touch with Rebecca if you have any queries or requirements relating to our services.

Here's hoping for a great Cheltenham!

Bye for now

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maren". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

PS To order any of our services for Cheltenham or Aintree please call the office on 01539 741 007.