

Marken Julian

Cheltenham November Meeting

ONLINE PREVIEW



Part One

Going: *The advance going report is for good to soft ground and, with no rain forecast until Saturday, that is how it should ride on the first day. The ground is a little quicker on the Cross-Country course.*

Friday 17 November

12.40: Markel Insurance Amateur Riders' Handicap Chase (3m 1f)

Three names leap off the page here – Jamie Codd, Derek O'Connor and Sam Waley-Cohen – with each of them more than good enough to compete on level terms with the professionals.

Waley-Cohen has been booked to ride Indian Castle for Ian Williams. He was beaten nine lengths by What Happens Now, ridden here by Derek O'Connor, and is set to meet the winner on 7lb better terms. Indian Castle, formerly trained by Donald McCain who has charge of What Happens Now, has not won since joining his new yard but he has run well here on a number of occasions, notably when a close fourth to The Druids Nephew in a 3m 1f handicap chase here at the 2015 Festival. The problem is he has not won much, with just two victories from 15 starts over fences.

What Happens Now is hard to fault, having won four times this season from seven starts, second once and third twice on the other three occasions. He also won three out of four last season and four of his eight starts over fences. He is in great form and likes to be handy.

Jamie Codd rides Dueling Banjos, who ran second of 16 on his seasonal return at Exeter. Kim Bailey's seven-year-old has form over shorter trips but is bred for further.

Gentleman Jon likes the good ground and has been given a chance by the handicapper. Regal Flow has place claims and Solstice Son has run well fresh in the past. Irish raider Angus Milan has slipped to an attractive mark.

This is a race best watched.

1.15: Fairlight Books Novices' Handicap Hurdle (Ext 2m)

Kerry Lee's horses are steadily running into form and she can go close here with Magic Dancer, who can run unpenalised off the same mark as that from which he won at Kempton on Monday.

In the first three in seven of his 10 starts over hurdles, the concern regarding Cheltenham is that after his latest victory the trainer said the horse is best suited to an easy track. Richard Patrick, who claims 5lb, rode him well at Kempton and he takes the mount again.

Banditry has been running consistently this autumn but a 4lb rise for being beaten last time at Ludlow is a little harsh.

We need to watch how Counter Shy moves in the market. The lightly-raced son of Galileo beat Banditry by two lengths in a maiden hurdle at Worcester in September and has since run second to Midnight Shadow at Uttoxeter in October. He has scope to improve beyond this mark of 124.

Or De Vassy was rewarded for some consistent efforts when winning a 2m 4f novices' hurdle at Sedgfield in October. This is tougher.

Plato's Kode won juvenile hurdles at Market Rasen and Worcester in August and has since run well when second at Huntingdon and third at Wetherby. Man Look is consistent but the handicapper may now have a grip on him.

This is a race best watched.

1.50: Betvictor Handicap Chase (2m)

Doitforthevillage ran a decent sort of race behind Foxtail Hill when sixth here last time out. A winner at Warwick in April he is not overburdened from a 6lb higher mark. Before that he was travelling well in the Red Rum Handicap Chase at Aintree when a horse cannoned into him after jumping the fourth last.

Successful in five of his 13 starts over fences, trainer Paul Henderson earmarked this race for the eight-year-old after he won at Warwick in the spring.

Stable-companion Un Beau Roman has slipped down the weights but he has not run well in his two starts this autumn. There has, though, been early market support for him at 14/1 from 20/1.

Ian Williams can do little wrong this year and he has a sound chance of picking up this valuable prize with Kapstadt. The seven-year-old ran well to finish second at Ludlow last month and had a good summer on the Flat.

It's only a matter of time before Venetia Williams hits form and Bright New Dawn has a good race in him. He is, though, not straightforward and could still be in the grip of the handicapper.

Exitas has had a tremendous autumn, rising from a mark of 107 in September to 133, up a further 10lb for his latest victory at Ascot. Whatever happens here he will be very interesting if they switch him back to hurdles from 119.

Mick Thonic has failed to complete his last two starts but he has a chance on the same mark as when winning here in April. Rock On Rocky could outrun his likely long odds if he can return to the form he showed when winning in the spring.

I like the way Doitforthevillage has been prepared for this and at 7/1 he represents good each-way value.

Selection: Doitforthevillage (EW 7/1)

2.25: Steel Plate And Sections Novices' Chase (Ext 2m 4f)

This promises to be one of the best novice chases of the season, with Finian's Oscar a shade of odds-on to concede 8lb to three useful opponents.

On hurdle ratings this is not a straightforward task, with Movewiththetimes rated on 146 and William Henry on 145 – just 5lb and 6lb behind the favourite but in receipt of 8lb. Furthermore, for all his talent Finian's Oscar did not impress with his jumping technique on his chase debut at Chepstow, although the same occasionally applied when he was racing over hurdles last season.

Colin Tizzard is very keen for the horse to gain some experience of Cheltenham with a mind to the festival in March. For those keen to back him I suggest you take out an 'in-running' option on Betfair as he is sure to trade longer once racing if he runs in his usual style.

Movewiththetimes will have come on from his chase debut here in October, when he ran fourth to North Hill Harvey. Paul Nicholls has taken his time with the son of Presenting, who ran Ballyandy to three-quarters of a length in the Betfair Hurdle last February. He would have run next in the Supreme Novices' Hurdle but for sustaining an injury.

I'm a little surprised to see this exciting prospect stepped up to two and a half miles at this stage because he has loads of pace and doesn't need a stiffer test.

William Henry shaped well over hurdles here last season, running second twice and winning once from three visits to the track. His best form was when he ran Wholestone to three lengths in a Grade 2 hurdle here in January. He also would have run at the Festival but for injuring a shin.

Coo Star Sivola, who ran so well to finish fourth in the Martin Pipe Conditional Jockeys' Handicap Hurdle here in March, was disappointing when fifth of six on his chasing debut at Chepstow in October. Nick Williams is struggling to find form at the moment but he has enjoyed great success at this venue and regardless of their price his horses always warrant a second look. They are seldom run outside their class.

This is a closer knit contest than the betting would suggest. Of the four Movewiththetimes is the horse with the scope to progress but all four are potentially top-class novice chasers in a race which is definitely best watched.

3.00: Glenfarclas Cross County Handicap Chase (Ext 3m 6f)

This race holds no interest for me.

3.35: Ballymore Novices' Hurdle (2m 5f)

I will be surprised if this race does not prove a key guide to the Neptune Novices' Hurdle back here in March.

Vision Des Flores currently heads the market on the strength of his third to Poetic Rhythm last month at Chepstow. He pulled hard there but kept on well and now meets the winner on 5lb better terms for just over six lengths. Last season the son of Balko won a bumper for his former connections at Punchestown.

I was impressed with On The Blind Side both in the paddock and the race when he made a winning UK debut at Aintree last month. He was thought likely to come on for that run – a view confirmed by his burly appearance beforehand.

He finished eight lengths ahead of Aye Ayr Charlie, who did steady late work from the last. Out of a mare by Le Moss, he is bred to relish this stiffer track and extra furlong. A 50/1 overnight price tag seriously underrates his chance.

His trainer Fergal O'Brien, who has been in such splendid form this autumn, is also represented by Poetic Rhythm. This tough son of Flemensfirth battled on exceptionally well to beat Amour De Nuit on his return at Chepstow but I am not convinced that he is good enough to concede weight away to five such promising rivals.

Calett Mad has switched back to hurdling from chasing, having races over as far as four miles over fences. His two victories this season have been over three miles, making all on each occasion. It will be a surprise if his rider does not adopt the same tactics over this shorter trip.

The mare Momella takes a step up in class, having won on her hurdling debut at Newton Abbot in May and then again at Fakenham last month. Dan Skelton has taken his time with her but is keen to avoid soft ground, so conditions here should suit her ideally.

This is very hard to call. On The Blind Side impressed me as having a touch of quality at Aintree while Calett Mad could steal a march from the front. Momella could be anything but, at 50/1, I expect Aye Ayr Charlie to outrun his odds. He will relish a strong pace and should be staying on strongly at the finish.

Selection: Aye Aye Charlie (EW 50/1)

Cheltenham Update Line

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