

Marken Julian

Cheltenham

OPEN

ONLINE PREVIEW



Friday 11 November

Going: *The ground is expected to be good, with good to soft patches, for the first day of the meeting. More rain is forecast at some point on Friday.*

12.55: GLENFARCLAS VETERANS' HANDICAP CHASE (EXT 2M 4F)

These veteran chases are a very welcome addition to the racing programme, often attracting strong fields of old favourites, and this race is no exception.

The pace will probably be set by regular front-runner Dunraven Storm, but for all his courage he seldom gets round without clouting a fence at some stage and that can cost him dear. Realt Mor is quite well treated but far from straightforward and is hard to catch right. The same applies to Eastlake, who pulled up at Aintree last month and probably has another crack at the Topham in the spring as his main target. Benny's Mist usually requires a race to get him ready and the ground is unlikely to be soft enough for him. Shuil Royale has been in good form this year and Ericht has claims but the one that catches the eye is Astracad.

The 10-year-old is trained by Nigel Twiston-Davies, who has a good record at this meeting. Astracad is a regular here, having run 23 times at the track, and he has dropped to a career low mark of 131. He has run well fresh in the past – he won on his seasonal debut last season – and the ground should be ideal. Jamie Bargary takes off a handy 3lb.

This is a tricky opener to the meeting but Astracad, who has already attracted market support, is nicely treated and his trainer will have him primed for this race.

1.30: BETVICTOR HANDICAP CHASE (2M)

Next Sensation is the likely pacesetter here but his form is rather in and out these days and he pulled up last time out. Bold Henry won this race two years ago but has generally struggled since then, winning off 134 at Sandown in January but ending the season with a fall in the Grand Annual and pulling up at Punchestown. He may be a horse best caught fresh.

Johnny Og, who likes to be handy, could spoil things upfront for Next Sensation and that could set the race up for a closer. Irish raider Pairofbrowneyes is very consistent but is consequently getting no respite from the handicapper. By contrast Un Beau Roman has dropped from 137 to 128 following some modest efforts during the summer.

The one that catches the eye is Cumbrian raider Monbeg River. I know from talking to the owners at Carlisle earlier in the week that Martin Todhunter is very pleased with the seven-year-old's condition at present. Placed first or second in all but one of his seven starts over fences – he fell on the other occasion – Monbeg River is a thoroughly reliable performer with the ability to dig deep at the finish of the race. Having started his run from a mark of 105 last September, he is now rated 24lb higher on 129. Noel Fehily was booked for the ride a few days ago.

Next Sensation and Johnny Og look like ensuring this will be run at a strong pace. Bold Henry has to be respected if there is money for him, but Monbeg River is very consistent and should benefit from his rider's quiet style.

2.05: STEEL PLATE AND SECTIONS NOVICES' CHASE (EXT 2M 4F)

This Class 2 contest must rank as the best novices' chase we have seen so far this season.

Most eyes will be focused on Barthers Hill, who is expected to line up provided his trainer Ben Pauling is still happy with the state of the ground. The six-year-old met his only defeat from eight starts in the Albert Bartlett last season, where he ran fourth after coming under pressure at the second last. Successful in each of his four bumpers, he made a smooth transition to hurdles winning at Huntingdon, the Grade 1 Challow Hurdle at Newbury and a Grade 2 at Doncaster. He has the physique of a chaser and it will be interesting to see if he runs as lazily over fences as he did over hurdles.

O O Seven, rated just 11lb inferior to Barthers Hill over hurdles, looks a serious threat. The six-year-old won three of his first four starts as a hurdler before finishing down the field behind Yorkhill here in March. He then ran second to Jer's Girl in a Grade 1 over 2m 4f at Punchestown. Nicky Henderson has been in good form recently and I expect this horse to go very close.

Rock The Kasbah was rated the pick of these over hurdles but has to concede Barthers Hill and O O Seven 8lb for winning at Chepstow last month. That was on ground a little quicker than ideal. Successful last season in handicaps from marks of 136 and 144, Rock The Kasbah has been more highly tried than his two market rivals. He may, though, struggle to concede the weight.

Flying Angel, from the Premier List of my Dark Horses, made a winning chase debut at Perth before falling when looking beaten behind Rock The Kasbah at Chepstow. He was rated behind a few of these as a hurdler and has a 5lb penalty, but his trainer Nigel Twiston-Davies does well at this meeting so don't be surprised to see him outrun his price.

Its'afreebee finished ahead of O O Seven when third in the Neptune having won his previous three starts over hurdles at Bangor and twice at Haydock. He was nominated for this race after winning on his chase debut at Fakenham in October, where he made all to land odds of 30/100. Theinval, third to Rock The Kasbah at Chepstow, likes the summer ground. Sizing Tennessee liked to make the running over hurdles but may not be asked to do so on this chasing debut.

Barthers Hill could be a class apart, but he tends to need plenty of stoking up and that could leave him vulnerable on this chasing debut. Rock The Kasbah is very tough but may struggle to concede the weight. Its'freebee has every chance but I want to be with O O Seven. I have long felt that chasing would be the making of him and he is fairly priced at 6/1 overnight..

2.40: NEPTUNE INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT HYDE NOVICES' HURDLE (EXT 2M 5F)

This could be the time to see Baden come to himself. He looked useful when winning his sole start in a point-to-point in May, 2015, and ran three good races over hurdles last season, twice here and then at Punchestown in April. The terms of the race suit him.

The one I most respect is Spiritofthegames, a son of Darsi who won a point-to-point at Lisronagh in April and was then bought by Dan Skelton for £50,000 at Doncaster. He looked well bought when beating Progress Drive in comfortable fashion at Ayr last month, with the third eight lengths away. The runner-up is highly rated by Nicky Richards and there was much to like about the way the first two quickened away after the last.

Peregrine Run is chasing a four-timer having won this autumn at Down Royal, Gowran Park and Limerick. Trainer Peter Fahey earmarked this race for the six-year-old after his latest victory. West Approach, a half-brother to Thistlecrack, was generally disappointing last season. He made a promising return when running Wholestone to half a length here in October and now meets that winner on 3lb better terms. He is not sure to be suited to this drop back in trip.

Wholestone has won at Warwick and last time, beating West Approach. His main target is the Albert Bartlett over three miles here in March. Leith Hill Lad improved on last season's efforts to win at Kempton in October. Pilansberg was useful on the Flat in France, reaching the frame in Group class races. He won well last time at Fakenham but has more to do here. Bally Gilbert ran with promise without winning last season.

This is a tough one to call. Wholestone and West Approach may need further and Pilansberg is probably better than his recent form suggests. Baden is set to make up for lost time but Spiritofthegames did well to beat a useful horse at Ayr and may now be ready for this step up in class.

3.15: OPUS ENERGY NOVICES' HANDICAP HURDLE (EXT 2M)

The lightly-weighted Wildmoor Boy could lead this field a merry dance while we need to monitor the betting on Tudor City, who returned to winning ways on the Flat last time at Limerick. Tony Martin's four-year-old is relatively unexposed over hurdles, a maiden after six starts and rated on 114.

The one that I've had my eye on for this is Debece, a five-year-old son of Kayf Tara trained by Tim Vaughan. Last season he won the third of his three starts in bumpers by 19 lengths at Market Rasen in March and made a smooth transition to hurdling when winning a novice event at Kempton in May. He was not disgraced when chasing home Hag Stone, possibly not setting a sufficiently strong pace. Closely related to Don Poli, he will improve for a step up in trip.

There are many others with chances but Debece could be well treated on 116, with useful conditional rider Alan Johns claiming 3lb. He is available overnight at 10/1.

3.50: MARKEL INSURANCE AMATEUR RIDERS' HANDICAP CHASE (3M 1F)

I have no news or views for this race.

Marten Julian's Update Line

If you want to keep in touch with Marten's latest thoughts ring him on:

0906 150 1555

Selections given in the first minute

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