

# the Weekend card



Marken Julian



Marten invites readers to ask questions about any of the views expressed in the Weekend Card or racing in general. Please email your query to [marten@martenjulian.com](mailto:marten@martenjulian.com)

## The Sleeper Section Marten Julian

*Horses that have been added to the Sleeper Section this week are highlighted in blue.*

### **Albert's Back (4yr Bay Gelding) L 25/1, L 12/1, W 18/1, W 5/4**

There did not seem to be much confidence in Albert's Back in the market before his successful hurdling debut at Wetherby, drifting out to 18/1 from about 12/1. However, on speaking a few days later with his jockey Brian Hughes, I gather connections were hopeful of a good run. Brian told me that he liked the way the horse 'toughed it out' and he did the job with much more ease over the same course and distance over Christmas. Now rated 143 over hurdles, he will look very interesting back on the Flat from a mark of 70. This is a very progressive individual. The Fred Winter Handicap Hurdle at Cheltenham may be on the agenda.

### **Aye Aye Charlie (6yr Bay Gelding) L 4/1, 3<sup>rd</sup> 16/1**

Aye Aye Charlie shaped better at Cheltenham last weekend, plugging on bravely to finish third, than he had over the same course and distance on New Year's Day. To be fair to the horse he would not have liked the testing ground, but he did at least confirm that he is all about stamina – just as his pedigree suggests. I still believe that we will see a different horse in the spring if he gets the chance to tackle three miles on good ground – possibly the Albert Bartlett at Cheltenham. Fergal O'Brien has already said that he doesn't want to forfeit the horse's novice ranking for a paltry sum, so I expect him to continue to aim high. Stay with him.

### **King Crimson (6yr Chestnut Gelding)**

I will monitor the entries for King Crimson but, for now, let's remove him from the list.

### **Paris Protocol (5yr Bay Gelding)**

This son of Champs Elysees has proved something of an underachiever on the Flat, having initially impressed me when winning as a two-year-old Salisbury in September, 2015. Rated on 93 as a three-year-old, he disappointed in four outings at three and then again last season, failing to win from eight starts. Now with Mark Walford from Richard Hannon, he has run twice over hurdles at Doncaster and last time at Catterick. I like the way he jumped on his most recent run, travelling well up with the pace for a long way until fading in the heavy ground on the turn for home. That extended 2m 3f in the ground may have been a shade too far, but I have seen enough to believe he can win a novice hurdle or, perhaps following one more qualifying run, a novices' handicap.

### **Shamlan (6yr Brown Gelding) L 6/1, 2<sup>nd</sup> 33/1, L 14/1, 3<sup>rd</sup> 11/4**

Shamlan is starting to look a little quirky. He appeared to be unlucky when baulked in his run at Wolverhampton in December, where he had been very weak in the market, before being ridden contrary to his optimum requirements over an extended nine furlongs – a trip beyond his best – back there earlier this month. He then ran back at seven furlongs at Chelmsford and was again stopped in his run, this time when starting to make headway from arrears at the home turn. He stays on a mark of 59.

# The Premier List Update – Jumps

## Marten Julian

Here are the dozen Premier List horses from my 2017-18 edition of the Dark Horses Jumps Guide.

### **Debece, Just Minded, Lastbutnotleast, Lough Derg Spirit, Mount Mews, Not That Fuisse, Potterman, Ravenhill Road, Sam Brown, Samcro, Tea For Two, Waiting Patiently**

**Debece:** Off injured at present having banged a knee, but the trainer is hopeful he can get him back soon to go novice chasing. If not, he will either stick to hurdles or miss the rest of the season.

**Just Minded:** Appeared to loathe the testing ground at Hexham, never jumping with any fluency and struggling from a long way out, but ran a better race on unfavourable terms next time at Catterick, beaten into third by horses rated 16lb and 20lb superior on official figures.

**Lastbutnotleast:** Unfortunately, she had to be pulled up at Carlisle after breaking a blood vessel but she then battled very bravely in bottomless ground to win a 2m 3f novices' chase at Haydock. That race may have left its mark judging by her display last time at Leicester, where she finished last of three. Never looking happy she was later found to have twisted a right-hand shoe. She is better than that and will be back, possibly after a little break.

**Lough Derg Spirit:** Has been raised 1lb, from 137 to 138, following his encouraging second to the ill-fated London Prize in the Elite Hurdle at Wincanton. Jumped as well as ever there and can land a decent prize if he can be found any good ground. He has been given an advance entry for the *Betfair Hurdle at Newbury on Saturday 10th February* and could be an interesting runner off a mark of 138. He is currently priced at around 11/1, but I would not advise stepping in until we know the conditions as he has a preference for good ground.

**Mount Mews:** Made a perfect start to his chasing career at Doncaster, looking a natural under Brian Hughes. He turned out again there last weekend and ran well, getting caught close home by Wotzizname. There were no more than a couple of pounds between them on figures and afterwards Brian Hughes seemed happy to attribute the defeat to the ground, which was unusually testing for Doncaster. The best will be seen of Mount Mews when he is back racing on better going in the spring.

**Not That Fuisse:** Ran an eye-catching race at Doncaster in a competitive extended 2m novices' hurdle, travelling well and staying on steadily towards the finish having been given a patient ride. The way he has finished his last two races suggests a step up in trip may suit, a view endorsed by his pedigree. He could prove very effective in handicaps from his opening mark of 120.

**Potterman:** Shaped well when a close third to Mister Malarky in a novices' hurdle at Kempton, travelling well before fluffing the last flight of hurdles and losing momentum, and ran another sound race when second to Pacific De Baune at Newbury. Bred to stay well so may benefit from a step up to two and a half miles. Not badly treated on an opening mark of 128.

**Ravenhill Road:** Brian Hughes spoke very highly of this seven-year-old when I interviewed him for the *Winter Guide*, saying that connections were not going to ask too much of the horse this season. His unbeaten record came to an end at Doncaster last time out when he had to settle for third place having been sent off a shade of odds-on. Still on the bridle when produced to challenge at the second from home, he shifted left once taking the hurdle and found less than expected when push came to shove. The soft ground was far from ideal and possibly accounted for the defeat. In the light of the trainer's remarks I am surprised to see him entered for races at *Musselburgh on Sunday (2.35)* and *Sedgefield on Tuesday (3.50)*. The first of them is over three miles, where he is rated 6lb behind Mr Whipped but is in receipt of 3lb. We need to stay with him for the time being.

**Sam Brown:** Disappointed on his hurdling debut at Wincanton but made amends when making all to beat New To This Town by seven lengths at Plumpton in December. His rider Aidan Coleman spoke very highly of him afterwards and I expect him to thrive in a higher grade. He has been rated on 135, which could be very fair.

**Samcro:** The son of Germany has a chance to boost his glowing reputation this weekend when he has a choice of three entries at Leopardstown – the *Grade 1 Novice Hurdle over 2m 6f (1.10)* and the *Irish Champion Hurdle over two miles (3.30)* and the *Grade 1 Deloitte Novice Hurdle over two miles on Sunday (1.50)*. You never know these days where horses will eventually run but one of the novice races looks the more likely, for which he will be odds-on in either.

**Tea For Two:** Tea For Two is a hard horse to get right and he was eventually pulled up last weekend in the heavy ground at Cheltenham. He will bounce back on better going in the spring and I will still want to keep him on our side in the Gold Cup subject to suitable conditions.

**Waiting Patiently:** Waiting Patiently always had things under control at Carlisle in November, tracking his main rival until asked to go on and win his race between the last two fences. I was reliably informed that he missed his target at Cheltenham before Christmas due to a minor setback, but he showed no ill effects last time at Kempton when taking a big step forward to win a competitive Listed contest in the most impressive fashion, beating proven Graded winners in the process. Brian Hughes anchored his mount in arrears before making smooth progress on the turn for home. The manner with which he distanced himself from his rivals in a matter of strides was quite special and he is now as low as 5/1 for the Ryanair Chase at the Cheltenham Festival in March. Malcolm Jefferson has hinted at the possibility of dropping back to 2m for the Game Spirit Chase at Ascot in February with a view to running in the Champion Chase although ground conditions would dictate any decisions. He has been raised from a mark of 156 to 164.

### Selections

**Samcro (1.10 and 3.30 Leopardstown Saturday and 1.50 Leopardstown Sunday), Ravenhill Road (2.35 Musselburgh Sunday and 3.50 Sedgefield Tuesday)**

## The Ante-Post Agenda Marten Julian

I think the time is now right to move in with a bet on **Supasundae** at 6/1, non-runner no bet, for the Stayers' Hurdle at Cheltenham.

I like the way Jessica Harrington is campaigning this eight-year-old. Successful in the Coral Cup from a mark of 148 in last year's Festival, he then stepped up to an extended three miles for the Grade 1 Stayers' Liverpool Hurdle at Aintree, running Yanworth to a length at level weights despite being rated 8lb inferior.

This season he has run third to Apple's Jade over 2m 4f at Fairyhouse and then ran that winner to half a length stepped up to three miles for the Grade 1 Christmas Hurdle at Leopardstown. That was a gutsy effort, trying to give the winner 7lb.

Jessica Harrington has decided to run Supasundae in the Irish Champion Hurdle back over two miles on Saturday in the hope that the race will "sharpen him up." The trainer says the race should leave him spot on for the Stayers' Hurdle and then Aintree, when he should get his favoured good ground.

Supasundae has a progressive profile – this time a year ago he was rated 13lb lower than he is now – and although the ground will be against him this weekend, a good run could see his price tighten a little. The horse is generally 6/1 with the NRNB concession but a little bigger elsewhere without it.

### Ante-Post Selections

**Supasundae EW 6/1 (Stayers' Hurdle Cheltenham)**

**Sacred Life 33/1 (2,000 Guineas)**

**The Pentagon 10/1 (Epsom Derby)**

## Under The Radar Marten Julian

**Evanescent** was caught in the last stride at Lingfield where the high draw probably made the difference. A 2lb rise, from 52 to 54, does not help but the nine-year-old is poised to win again so we'll stay with him.

There are no immediate entries for **Lucky Ellen**, **Air De Rock** or **The Plan Man**.

## The Weekend Action Marten Julian

This promises to be a very informative weekend, probably better suited to watching and learning than backing.

One horse away from the main action that interests me is **Gonalston Cloud**, who is entered for the 4m

*If Edinburgh National Handicap Chase at Musselburgh on Saturday (3.15).*

The 11-year-old is now in the veteran stage, but he has been a thoroughly likeable staying chaser in his time and he ran a good second in this contest last season from a 5lb higher mark than he carries here. He has not shown much in his two runs this season but they came on ground that was probably too soft for him.

I have no doubt that Gonalston Cloud has been tuned up again for this race and I hope he represents a little bit of each-way value.

I have to say a few words about **Kayf Blanco** (1.35 Wetherby Saturday). The nine-year-old has tested me to the limit, and I would not blame you for suggesting he has become an obsession, but he has been running more consistently this season and this is a track he likes. He is rated 7lb lower over fences than hurdles and I have always said that he would benefit from this longer trip.

I hope the ground dries up from it's forecast heavy. He warrants an each-way interest.

Elsewhere I hope to see **Supasundae** run well in the Irish Champion Hurdle (3.30 Leopardstown Saturday). This is all about getting ready for the Stayers' Hurdle, for which I have suggested backing him at 6/1 each-way. He is, though, effective at two miles and with the ground putting the emphasis on stamina he could outrun his odds.

The bookmakers are offering 16/1 each-way first two places, which is just sufficient to tempt me.

#### Selections

**Kayf Blanco EW (1.35 Wetherby Saturday), Supasundae EW (3.30 Leopardstown Saturday),  
Gonalston Cloud EW (3.15 Musselburgh Saturday)**

## The Weekend Selections Retrospective Marten Julian

*This piece is devoted to retrospective analysis of Marten's selections from last week. If any of the horses that are featured in this section are entered and deemed worthy of selection then they will be found in my Weekend Action feature.*

**Colin's Sister** ran a respectable race at Cheltenham last weekend, back up to three miles on testing ground. It did, though, suggest this is the limit of her progress and leaves her a few pounds adrift of the best stayers of her generation. I don't see any point in retaining her on the list at this time.

**Tea For Two** will be back on song at Cheltenham in March, where the likelihood of better ground will be in his favour. I want us to stay with him for the spring.

**That's Life** looks destined for staying handicap hurdles. He is not quick enough to win a bumper and evidently requires more experience over hurdles. We should keep an eye on him because I know how much trainer Nicky Richards likes him, but he is beginning to look like one for the handicappers section of next season's *Dark Horses Guide*.

**Un Noble** was quietly supported at Ayr today (Wednesday) but again ran a lifeless race. Having said that he was not given a hard time at any stage so perhaps this was being treated as a confidence booster having had problems with his back and ulcers. Let's keep an eye on him. He is in again at Sedgefield next Tuesday (3.15).

#### Previously Noted Horses

**Better Getalong, Chapel Stile, Cloudy Dream, Giant's Treasure, Mia's Storm, Quixote, Sooda, Stubyuesday, Tea For Two, That's Life, Tocco D'Amore, Un Noble**

## The Irish Angle Stuart Williams

For the second weekend in succession that much sought-after winner proved elusive, with two seconds, two thirds and a fifth achieved from five selections who made it to the racetrack.

Stowaway Forever's near miss was undoubtedly the most frustrating result, coming home a fast-finishing second after getting stuck behind a wall of horses approaching the final flight of hurdles. Available at 16/1 on Saturday night, I am sure that the manner of his defeat will not go unnoticed by

the bookmakers, who will price him up accordingly next time. He should lose his maiden tag soon.

The trio of Heroesandvillains, The Holy One and Whisperinthebreeze should all come on for their first outing over hurdles. While Gordon Elliott confirmed that Jury Duty, who will have burnt the fingers of many in-play bettors, will be aimed at the National Hunt Chase come March.

This weekend we can look forward to the Dublin Racing Festival, with two action-packed days of top class action encompassing the Irish Champion Hurdle and Irish Gold Cup a truly mouth-watering prospect.

€1.5 million in prize money and seven Grade 1 contests have attracted the biggest names that Irish racing has to offer, with Faugheen looking for redemption in the Irish Champion Hurdle, Our Duke putting his Cheltenham Gold Cup credentials to the test in the Irish equivalent and the super-exciting Samcro, whom Davy Russell recently remarked was the epitome of a racehorse, out to further enhance his already lofty reputation.

On Monday Willie Mullins stated that Faugheen still needs to pass 'one or two tests' before being given the green light to contest the two-mile showpiece, where he would clash with last season's dominant Triumph Hurdle hero Defi Du Seuil, who will be hoping to get his career back on track following a disappointing return to action in November (scoped badly).

However, a more surprising clash will take place earlier on the card, as the master of Closutton has confirmed that Min and Yorkhill will cross swords in the Grade 2 Dublin Chase over 2m 1f.

It is undecided who Paul Townsend will get the leg-up on, but Mullins did reveal that it is a case of last chance saloon for Yorkhill over fences, and a return to hurdling will follow if last season's JLT Novice Chase winner fails to impress.

Footpad versus **Petit Mouchoir** (*2.20 Leopardstown Saturday*) looks another hugely informative clash. Footpad is already a very short price for the Arkle Chase at Cheltenham. However, the scopey six-year-old has failed to get the better of Petit Mouchoir on all three of their previous encounters.

I was very taken with Henry De Bromhead's Irish Champion Hurdle winner on his fencing debut at Punchestown, where he attacked his fences with enthusiasm and won with his head in his chest. While he concedes both chasing experience and race-fitness to his younger rival, he will provide the Simon Munir and Isaac Souede owned gelding with his first real test in this sphere, and it wouldn't surprise me if Petit Mouchoir's class and natural ability pulled him through.

The Coral Hurdle is always a tricky puzzle to solve. However, I do have my eye on two experienced campaigners at double-figure prices.

Highland Fling (*4.05 Leopardstown Saturday*) will represent the shrewd operation of Gavin Cromwell, and could easily get involved if rediscovering the form that saw him run out an easy winner at Listowel in September.

That victory came over half a mile further, but the likely strong pace will ensure that the six-year-old's extra stamina will come into play.

The second name on my shortlist is **Tudor City** (*4.05 Leopardstown Saturday*), who finished second in this contest off a 5lb lower mark 12 months ago.

Tony Martin's son of Yeats appears to save his best efforts for Leopardstown, having also finished second in competitive handicap company over this course and distance in December 2016. If tuned up by his canny trainer, he could easily outrun his generous looking price.

In the concluding contest I am looking forward to seeing **Brace Yourself** (*4.40 Leopardstown Saturday*) take on Gordon Elliott's latest bumper machine Rapid Escape.

Having caught my eye at the Cheltenham Sales in November, I was pleasantly surprised by the manner of his debut victory at Down Royal, as I considered him to be something of a slow burner. However, he more than warrants a crack at this valuable prize and could easily give the Gigginstown House Stud inmate the most to think about.

It is no surprise to see Espoir D'Allen a short-priced favourite for the Spring Juvenile Hurdle given his unbeaten status and Grade 2 victory over course and distance in December, where he beat the Gordon Elliott trained **Farclas** (*1.15 Leopardstown Sunday*) by a comfortable one-and-a-quarter lengths.

However, I would expect the Gigginstown House Stud owned runner to give Espoir D'Allen much more to think about this weekend on the back of that hugely promising debut effort, where he ran all the way to the line and claimed second place from stablemate Mitchouka, who franked the form on his only subsequent start.

Natural progression both mentally and physically would put Farclas right in the mix. And Gordon Elliott's recent praise is encouraging.

Whilst I hold no strong opinions on the Deloitte Novices Hurdle, I certainly haven't given up on Real Steel (*1.50 Leopardstown Sunday*), whose somewhat strange performance over Christmas mirrored many of his stablemates.

Highly thought of prior to that contest, he may give stablemate Sharjah, who would have won had he stayed upright, the most to think about. Therefore, he warrants a second chance.

Both Dortmund Park (*2.25 Leopardstown Sunday*) and Moyross (*2.25 Leopardstown Sunday*) are entered in the opening Grade 1 contest on Saturday and William Fry Handicap Hurdle on Sunday. With just three starts over hurdles apiece, it will be interesting to see whether Gordon Elliott and Noel Meade elect to pitch their talented youngsters into competitive handicap company.

The former scored impressively last time out and could easily be well treated off a mark of 142, while the latter arrives here following a disappointing display in Grade 1 novice company. However, his mark of 133 could significantly underestimate his potential. They could both run well in whichever engagement they take up.

**Monalee** (*3.00 Leopardstown Sunday*) will be given a real test in the Flogas Novice Chase but I am hopeful that he will pass it with flying colours.

Invitation Only and Sutton Place represent strong opposition. However, Monalee would be much shorter in the betting had he stood up at Christmas and should be effective over this reduced distance (2-3 over intermediate trips). Hopefully he can put his festive faux pas behind him.

I am very much looking forward to seeing Our Duke (*3.35 Leopardstown Sunday*), who accounted for the classy pair Coney Island and Disko in a Grade 1 novice chase over this course and distance in December 2016, back on the track following issues that led to a hugely disappointing reappearance at Down Royal in November.

Last year's brilliant Irish Grand National winner has enjoyed both a racecourse gallop and schooling session at Punchestown in preparation for this Grade 1 prize, which will hopefully set the eight-year-old up for a crack at the blue riband contest come March.

Recent reports have been encouraging and Our Duke has already displayed the ability to go well fresh. Hopefully Jessica Harrington's imposing gelding can get his season back on track.

### Selections

**Petit Mouchoir (2.20 Leopardstown Saturday), Tudor City (4.05 Leopardstown Saturday), Brace Yourself (4.40 Leopardstown Saturday), Farclas (1.15 Leopardstown Sunday), Monalee (3.00 Leopardstown Sunday)**

## Jodie's Jottings Jodie Standing

It was a mixed bag last week.

Perfect Harmony was disappointing despite finishing second at Doncaster on Friday. He looked woefully one-paced but it later transpired that he received a nasty cut when he clipped heels with another horse. He will be fine and Sandown's EBF Final is the target, when maybe he will be more effective on spring ground.

On Saturday, Cheltenham's ground did indeed become very testing which I thought would have suited the Nigel Twiston-Davies-trained Ballyhill, but as with Ballyandy in the previous race he ran flat and a short-lived effort down the back straight quickly petered out as the tempo increased.

By contrast, Frodon bounced back to winning ways under Bryony Frost who again excelled in the saddle with a confident and tactically astute ride. The six-year-old was racing from a career high mark of 154, but when taking Bryony's 5lb claim into account he was effectively racing from the same rating as when he won the Caspian Caviar Gold Cup last season. I imagine, following a 10lb rise, handicaps will now be out of the question and the Ryanair could be the target.

The horse to take from Cheltenham was perhaps Santini.

When I wrote my piece last week he was a 7/4 chance but the combination of heavy ground teamed with Nico De Boinville appearing to choose Pacific De Baune put people off and as a result he returned

odds of 4/1. It was a better performance than the winning margin would suggest. He coped with the ground rather than enjoyed it and he stayed on extremely well up the hill. He's a robust unit and despite already appearing to possess plenty of class, it's exciting to think what he may mature into next season. He will be given an Albert Bartlett entry at Cheltenham but it may be a year too soon. He is some novice chasing prospect for next term.

Over at Doncaster Calett Mad was another of Nigel Twiston-Davies' inmates to run a little flat. He was warm beforehand, but that's nothing unusual. He made the running from the drop of the flag but had only a limited response once off the bridle. I have since noticed he had a wind operation after his previous run and he may still be struggling with that, although Nigel's horses are all running a little below par at the moment, as are Fergal O'Brien's who trains next door.

Calett Mad is entered at Musselburgh on Sunday in the Pertemps Handicap Hurdle Qualifier (3.10). I'd be surprised if he made the journey.

Moving on to this week and for me one of the most interesting runners on Saturday at Sandown is Jonjo O'Neill's **Palmers Hill** (4.10 Sandown Saturday).

He had a lofty reputation when making his stable debut having won impressively between the flags and he duly obliged with a thoroughly professional performance. However, the bubble was slightly burst last time when appearing to not stay the extended 2m 5f trip at Ascot despite being one of the last off the bridle and still right there at the penultimate flight.

At the time Jonjo's horses were woefully out of form and I believe that had more to do with Palmers Hill's performance than him being a non-stayer. He has been allocated - what could be - a very lenient handicap mark of 124 and I will be absolutely amazed if he cannot take advantage of it. He was entered in a Grade 2 at Cheltenham's Open Meeting which indicates he is rated highly.

The current heavy ground would be a slight concern but having won on soft ground it's clear he can cope with such conditions. If today is not his day, it certainly will be soon.

I also want to give **Topofthegame** another chance (3.00 Sandown Saturday).

He ran well in the Lanzarote Hurdle following a couple of months break having fallen on his chasing bow. He was one of the first off the bridle but kept himself in contention with many good leaps and he stayed on all the way to the line, albeit at the one pace.

Kempton is more of a speed track which perhaps did not play to the gelding's strength, whereas a stiff track like Sandown and a couple of furlongs extra may be exactly what he needs.

Up at Wetherby I'll be keeping close tabs on **Captain Chaos** who has had the Grade 2 Towton Novices' Chase as his target since his victory at Aintree (2.40 Wetherby Saturday). He has turned a corner with the application of blinkers and is very effective on heavy ground. Dan Skelton targets his horses well and this one must be in the shake-up.

I will also be watching Luccombe Down closely if he takes up his engagement in a handicap hurdle at Musselburgh on Sunday (3.10). He disappointed me last time when trailing home in ninth at Cheltenham at the December meeting, but I was taken with what I saw at the Showcase meeting in October and believe he'll be winning from this mark on spring ground. As I said before, Fergal O'Brien's stable are going through a quiet patch at the moment so I'll be watching on this time.

Further north, at Musselburgh, I want to stay on the right side of **Silsol** (3.15 Musselburgh Saturday).

I hinted at him catching my eye in last week's piece when Bryony Frost rode him to finish fifth in the Welsh National.

That was his first chase start since January 2016 and only the eighth of his career. A mark of 143 leaves him 9lb inferior of his hurdles rating and he looked to me as if he is on the cusp of winning over fences.

Bryony did the business for us last weekend, so let's hope she steps into the plate again. At around 10/1 he's an each-way play.

Over in Ireland for the Dublin Racing Festival at Leopardstown the main horse for me to follow is **Blackbow** (4.40 Leopardstown Saturday).

He showed a determined attitude to pull away from his rivals on his stable debut at this track on Boxing Day despite being headed in the final furlong. The runner-up, The Holy One, has since let the form down, but Blackbow is sure to improve for the run given his stout pedigree and huge stature.

In an interview last week Willie Mullins said he may also run Minella Encore, but I also see Carefully Selected is on the advanced entries. He impressed me immensely when winning over the Christmas period, but that was in a 2m 4f bumper and this could be a bit sharp for him.

It's a big ask for Blackbow to improve enough to get the better of the likes of Felix Desjy or Rapid Escape, but those horses have shown their 'A game' to a certain degree, whereas Blackbow can only build on what he has done.

On Sunday, **Outlander** at 12/1 looks overpriced for the Gold Cup (3.35 Leopardstown Sunday).

The current favourite is Our Duke at 7/2, but I believe his price is down to reputation and potential. He also has to prove his wellbeing having tailed off on his seasonal reappearance at Down Royal in November.

Road To Respect is an extremely reliable type but Outlander had his measure earlier in the season, and although that form was reversed last time in the Leopardstown Christmas Chase, Outlander's record at this track reads 31111, opposed to Road to Respect's 133.

Obviously, it's a very close-knit affair and the Gigginstown horses appear to take it in turns at winning these big races but Outlander clearly saves his best for this track and thrives on soft ground. The one who could spoil the party is Coney Island.

### Selections

**Palmers Hill (4.10 Sandown Saturday), Topofthegame (3.00 Sandown Saturday), Captain Chaos (2.40 Wetherby Saturday), Silsol EW (3.15 Musselburgh Saturday), Blackbow (4.40 Leopardstown Saturday), Outlander (3.35 Leopardstown Sunday)**

## The Weekend News

### Ian Carnaby

Whether last week's Trials Day at Cheltenham will prove as informative as the upcoming Leopardstown meeting where the festival is concerned seems rather doubtful but there were one or two very good performances and several talking points.

I was a little surprised that bookmakers went 25/1 about Definitely Red for the Gold Cup following his clear-cut victory in the Grade 2 Cotswold Chase. Of course, top-class races are still priced up with the leading stables holding sway and even these days a Gold Cup winner trained in Yorkshire would be regarded as 'unfashionable'.

This is silly, of course, as Michael Dickinson and Peter Easterby demonstrated many years ago. Definitely Red's trainer Brian Ellison will not be worried about the odds and I must say I think 25/1 is generous with each-way in mind.

The horse has gone on improving, as we can see from his form with The Last Samurai. Receiving 12lb in the Grimthorpe Chase at Doncaster last year, Definitely Red beat him very easily (by 14 lengths). On Saturday he was conceding 6lb but still had him well back in fourth. The Last Samurai would have caught Bristol De Mai for third in a couple more strides but is very one-paced and the Grand National is clearly his race.

That may well be the target for Bristol De Mai, as well. Banter (the old-fashioned, harmless kind) in the racing press lightens the coverage and Nigel Twiston-Davies clearly has little time for some of the comments where his most talented inmates are concerned. However, I think those of us who see Bristol De Mai as a stayer suited by testing conditions have quite a lot going for us after last week's effort. As in the King George, he could not go on when the emphasis was on pace and coverage of his wide-margin win in a bog at Haydock was more than generous.

American seemed to surprise Harry Fry with his good run in second. It was certainly a big improvement on his reappearance at Newbury and he still looks the part - a powerful, long-striding horse who can carry weight. That may be just as well if he falls short of Gold Cup class because he would inevitably shoulder a hefty burden in something like the Midlands Grand National.

Naturally I was pleased with Agrapart, who made it a good winning day for us in the Cleeve Hurdle. To her great credit, Lizzie Kelly matched Daryl Jacob stride for stride on the run-in and the winner forged clear close home. This was his first win over three miles and he would not be disgraced in the Stayers' Hurdle but was not entered because he must have soft ground. I doubt very much that we saw the winner last week and I still feel The New One will be the one to beat if Sam Twiston-Davies can get him tucked away for most of the race.

Maria's Benefit is a bonny mare and was another winner for us at Doncaster at Grade 2 level but she will need a long rest now. She led and went clear but Irish Roe joined her at the last, looking the winner. She then stuck her head out and would not be denied but both of them need a lengthy spell on the sidelines. It's cracking form but caution next time is advised.

We have been a shade unfortunate not to catch Sophie Leech's Man Of Plenty, who keeps running well without quite making the frame in valuable handicap hurdles. The trouble is that it may keep on happening because the handicapper has no reason to drop him and races like the bet365 Scottish County Hurdle (2.05 *Musselburgh Saturday*) and the Grade 3 Betfred Heroes Handicap Hurdle (3.00 *Sandown Saturday*) still look a shade too tough.

In the latter event I quite like the look of Philip Hobbs' **Westend Story**, who was one of four winners for Richard Johnson at Wetherby recently.

Still a little on the 'dark' side, Westend Story was a good bumper horse - good enough to finish fifth in the Champion Bumper at Cheltenham - but took a while to get things together over hurdles before Christmas when the Hobbs stable was not quite firing. In handicap company last time, he ran out a ready winner, giving a couple of pounds to Rose Dobbin's Shanelough (well held in third), who prevailed under twelve stones at Doncaster on Saturday. Westend Story likes soft ground and will appreciate the 2m 7f+ trip on Saturday. I feel there is more to come from him and he can be backed each-way.

Bringing a good novice chaser back to non-handicaps is always a problem because they have a penalty to carry if already successful in one. Hobbs' **Rolling Dylan**, who has the size and scope to end up in better company, is entered for the Best Odds Guaranteed At 188Bet Novices' Chase (1.40 *Chepstow Friday*) but must give at least 6lb all round by virtue of his success in a Worcester handicap chase back in November.

I'm not at all sure Worcester form (I always associate the venue with summer jumping) translates all that well anywhere else but one must rid oneself of prejudice and Rolling Dylan has certainly shown he does not need summer ground. Maybe, with the stable having been under a cloud, Philip thinks it important to get another race into him. He has more scope than anything lining up against him here.

The near-fifty thousand pounds guaranteed prize-money for the Listed Betway Cleves Stakes (2.00 *Lingfield Saturday*) reminds us that some very familiar sprinters are getting ready for Championships Day as well as the start of the turf season.

Boom The Groom isn't quite as good as before and both Caspian Prince and Kachy are better at five furlongs than six. So, this is something of a nightmare but you might keep an eye on Fahey's Kimberella with the final in mind, while the enigmatic (where enigmatic means unreliable) Harry Hurricane will be 20/1 plus when finally deciding to have a going day, though he is highly tried here.

#### Selections

**Rolling Dylan (1.40 Chepstow Friday), Westend Story each-way (3.00 Sandown Saturday)**

**Marten Julian**

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# Selections

## Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February

Rolling Dylan	Ian Carnaby's Weekend News	1.40 Chepstow
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## Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February

Samcro*	The Premier List Update (Marten)	1.10/3.30 Leopardstown
Kayf Blanco (EW)	Marten's Weekend Action	1.35 Wetherby
Petit Mouchoir	The Irish Angle (Stuart Williams)	2.20 Leopardstown
Captain Chaos	Jodie's Jottings	2.40 Wetherby
Topofthegame	Jodie's Jottings	3.00 Sandown
Westend Story (EW)	Ian Carnaby's Weekend News	3.00 Sandown
Silsol (EW)	Jodie's Jottings	3.15 Musselburgh
Gonalston Cloud (EW)	Marten's Weekend Action	3.15 Musselburgh
Supasundae (EW)	Marten's Weekend Action	3.30 Leopardstown
Tudor City	The Irish Angle (Stuart Williams)	4.05 Leopardstown
Palmers Hill	Jodie's Jottings	4.10 Sandown
Brace Yourself	The Irish Angle (Stuart Williams)	4.40 Leopardstown
Blackbow	Jodie's Jottings	4.40 Leopardstown

## Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> February

Farclas	The Irish Angle (Stuart Williams)	1.15 Leopardstown
Samcro*	The Premier List Update (Marten)	1.50 Leopardstown
Ravenhill Road*	The Premier List Update (Marten)	2.35 Musselburgh
Monalee	The Irish Angle (Stuart Williams)	3.00 Leopardstown
Outlander	Jodie's Jottings	3.35 Leopardstown

## Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February

Ravenhill Road*	The Premier List Update (Marten)	3.50 Sedgefield
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\*This horse has another entry

## Marten's Ante-Post Selections

Supasundae EW 6/1 (Stayers' Hurdle Cheltenham)
Sacred Life 33/1 (2,000 Guineas)
The Pentagon 10/1 (Epsom Derby)

## The Irish Angle (Stuart Williams) – Ante Post Selections

Dortmund Park @ 40/1 for Supreme Novices' Hurdle
Bapaume @ 40/1 (Ante-Post Stayers Hurdle)