

Bulletin Book Extracts

Continuity with the Dark Horses Annual ...

In my *Dark Horses Guide* I made out a case for **Nichols Canyon**, now the winner of seven of his 10 starts over hurdles. A genuine and classy performer for John Gosden on the Flat, with two Listed victories and a Group 3 placing to his name, he landed four Grade 1 races as a novice last season without getting the credit he deserved. This season he became the first horse to beat Faugheen, where the close proximity of Wicklow Brave in third suggests the favourite underperformed, before winning his sixth Grade 1 race when beating Identity Thief in the Ryanair Hurdle at Leopardstown over Christmas.

Nichols Canyon ran the worst race of his career just under a month later when he trailed home 28 lengths third to Faugheen and Arctic Fire in the Irish Champion Hurdle, possibly feeling the effects of his tussle with Identity Thief in the heavy ground.

Nichols Canyon's greatest asset is his tenacity. He is not the sort of horse ever to win on the bridle, but he handles any ground and has strong winning form over two and a half miles – always an asset in the Champion Hurdle. Willie Mullins says the horse reminds him of Hurricane Fly – a great compliment - and there is a case for saying he has the best overall form in the race, even though the ratings suggest otherwise.

Strong Opinions ...

I have no doubt that **My Tent Or Yours** is one of the most talented horses Nicky Henderson has ever trained. I don't know what sort of level of ability he shows at home, but it would not surprise me to learn that he could hold his own with useful milers on the Flat.

I have never known a horse that pulls so hard in the early stages of a race achieve such a high level of form. I have no idea how much energy he expends through refusing to settle, but so great is his ability that he still manages to figure at the end of the race.

My Tent Or Yours returned in fine fettle last autumn but has taken a while to come to hand. He represents established form which, on collateral links to the new generation, may leave him a little bit to find. However nobody should underestimate this horse's huge talent and the trainer hopes that now he is an older horse he will settle better. I have my doubts, but nobody should be in the least bit surprised to see him win. He is, in his trainer's words, a 'huge talent.'

An Alternative View ...

Although unbeaten this season, **Yanworth** could not be described as a natural hurdler. He won with a little more in hand than the margins suggest at Exeter and Warwick before comfortably holding the useful Charbel in a Grade 2 race at Ascot, but on each occasion he flicked the top of the occasional flight, while last time at Cheltenham he was a little deliberate and ponderous. He does not attack his hurdles - he had a long old look at the third last at Cheltenham – and in the hurly-burly of a big field, especially at this level, such hesitancy could cost him dear.

Yanworth was never going better than on the run-in in that race, possibly relishing his first crack at the extended 2m 4f. That step up in trip could have been the reason for his improvement, but whatever the case those stepping in at short odds need to be mindful of my concerns.

Eye for Detail ...

The key to **Thistlecrack's** recent success can be found in his pedigree. As a son of Kayf Tara out of a mare by top-class stayer Ardross that won at three miles Thistlecrack could hardly be endowed with more stamina. It was therefore highly creditable that he was able to display such useful form over two miles, winning a bumper and a novices' hurdle at the tight Wincanton track, landing a decent Class 2 at Ascot and then running a very good fifth to Ebony Express in the Imperial Cup.

Logical Reading of the Form ...

Connetable is a favourite of mine. He split Footpad, in second, and Fixe Le Kap, in fourth, when runner-up in a decent three-year-old hurdle at Auteuil last May. I liked the way he stayed on to chase home Gibralfaro on his UK debut at Ascot in January and it was again his gritty attitude that served him well when he landed a top-class Listed event at Sandown, beating the exceptionally gutsy Rayvin Black, Peace And Co and the underrated Kayf Blanco. The runner-up has since landed the prestigious Kingwell Hurdle at Wincanton.

A strict line through Gibralfaro leaves him plenty to find with stable companion Zubayr, but he has the greater experience of the two and has shown he can gallop up a hill. I like this horse very much and expect the race to suit him.



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