

FLAT JOURNAL

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Edition 3 - By Dan Briden

The Royal Ascot two-year-old scene has been taking shape of late. The Albany Stakes in particular is bubbling up into a potentially red-hot renewal, with a clutch of fillies impressing on their debuts in recent weeks.

The George Scott-trained **Sea Venture** is a Sea The Stars filly who belied her pedigree to make a very impressive winning start in a 6f fillies' maiden at Haydock a couple of weeks ago. A 100,000gns breeze-up purchase, she was waited with in rear and was then short of room as the race began to take shape soon after halfway, but she was switched out and fairly took off entering the final furlong to win going away by 3 lengths.

Quite whether it was as strong a race as it seemed beforehand is up for debate, but there is no denying how taking a display it was. She qualifies for the Chesham Stakes by dint of her sire and she would be an interesting runner in that race, but her display of speed combined with a red hood pre-race suggests that connections may stick to 6f for the Albany.

Richard Hannon's **Dark Issue** also laid down a solid marker for the Albany when taking apart the opposition in a 6f fillies' maiden at Goodwood two weekends ago. It is a race that the Hannons actually won a while back with future multiple Group 1 winner Sky Lantern, while future 1000 Guineas heroine Billesdon Brook finished second in the 2017 renewal.

Dark Issue's explosive performance wasn't exactly forewarned by the market (she was a weakish 11/1 chance), but the turn of foot she produced inside the final furlong was most taking, quickly settling the issue as she scored by 5½ lengths from the 'right' horses. It will be interesting to see if owner Bunny Roberts is able to resist overtures from the likes of Wathnan between now and Ascot - she has done so previously with the likes of Geminiani and Aristia.

George Boughey spoke highly of **Libertango** when we touched base for a discussion about his juveniles in late April, so it was perhaps no surprise to see this 400,000gns daughter of No Nay Never beat a field made up primarily of colts at Leicester last Tuesday.

She was settled in midfield and travelled better than most, making smooth progress over two furlongs out and then sustaining her challenge to come out on top in a duel with fellow breeze-up

buy Savage Mariner. Boughey has a strong record in the Albany with fillies with weaker credentials than Libertango, making her a formidable contender to go close at Ascot.

As if that trio wasn't enough, Hamad Al Jelani's **Alta Regina** then threw her hat into the ring at Lingfield on Saturday evening. A 240,000gns breeze-up purchase, the Sioux Nation filly was settled in behind from a wide draw, showing patent signs of inexperience when produced with her challenge but fairly forging clear under minimal assistance from the saddle to win pulling up by 4¼ lengths.

Guessing how Wathnan will place their myriad of Royal Ascot hopefuls is a dangerous game, but Alta Regina's big stride, allied with a strong finish over 5f suggests that another furlong would be well within her range. Wild Blossom is seemingly the 'chosen one' for the Queen Mary after her 10-length win on debut, so Alta Regina turning up for the Albany wouldn't at all surprise.

One other filly of Wathnan's who could join Alta Regina should everything go to plan on debut next Monday at Carlisle, is the Karl Burke's **Light of Dawn**. A nicely-bred filly by Showcasing, she fetched €625,000 at the Arqana breeze-ups and was reported by her trainer to be flying at home when we spoke last week. The fact that she is able to hold a high place in the pecking order in a yard replete with two-year-old talent says plenty, though it would be a quick turnaround between Carlisle and Ascot - 11 days to be precise - should things go to plan first time out.

The 5f fillies' maiden at Nottingham on Wednesday (3.18) has been used as a stepping stone by Karl Burke for the Queen Mary Stakes the past three years, with 2024 victor Leovanni successful at Ascot.

He relies on **Queen of Christmas** this year. She is a €305,000 daughter of Mehmas who has impressed on the practice grounds although, interestingly, Burke suggested to me that she wouldn't be in the same sort of ability range as Wild Blossom, who he admittedly rates incredibly highly.

Speaking of pricey purchases, Simon and Ed Crisford's **Senorita Bonita** was top at the Craven Breeze Up sales at a cool 900,000gns. By Starspangledbanner, she hails from a decent middle-distance family. Having passed up a couple of previous entries, it appears this Nottingham race has been something of a target for her. The stable took the 2022 renewal with a filly who subsequently finished last in that year's Queen Mary.

Wathnan have owned the winner of the two past renewals of this race and they will be represented this time by Archie Watson's **Terminology**. A €360,000 purchase from the Arqana Breeze Up sales, the daughter of Havana Grey has a relatively light pedigree, though half-brother Pellitory reached a peak rating of 104, making him one of Sergei Prokofiev's best performers. Havana Grey is certainly an upgrade in terms of stallion, while Terminology very clearly caught the eye at the breeze-ups.

Michael Bell is set to unleash **Bayside View** in the 6.5f fillies' maiden at Doncaster on Saturday (1.55). She is a daughter of promising first-season sire Bayside Boy and a three-parts sister to recent Pretty Polly Stakes winner Jennifer Jane (by New Bay), while her dam Enlace was successful first time out at two. I spoke to Bell last week and he reported that this filly was high up in the yard's pecking order.

Finally, there may be a late contender for the Coventry Stakes making an appearance on Sunday in the 6f novice event at Goodwood (2.25). Hamad Al Jelani has been entrusted with €800,000 breeze-up colt **Royal Heritage**, who is a Blue Point close relation to useful 7f-1m winner Lattam (by Lope de Vega) and he hails from an old, fairly sharp Shadwell family that includes the likes of Haatheq and Wid. He has reportedly worked well since arriving from Arqana and is expected to book his ticket to Ascot.