

BEN LOOKS BEST IN BANK HOLIDAY HANDICAP

MONDAY'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW

By commentator Mark Johnson

A competitive and classy field of six, headed by three-time Jersey Derby hero Aussie Lyrics, will go to post on Monday for the most important Handicap of the Channel Islands' season - the La Vallette 2017 Clarendon Handicap over a mile-and-a-half.

"The Clarendon", regarded as the third and final leg of the Channel Islands Triple Crown (following the Champion Hurdle and the Derby) is always the centre-piece of the popular August Bank Holiday meeting at Les Landes Racecourse in St Ouen.

First race on Monday's five race card is due off at 2.30 with the Clarendon run as Race 3 at 3.40.

Unlike the Champion Hurdle and the Derby, in which the runners carry level weights to find the best horse on the day, the Clarendon is a handicap in which an official "handicapper" allots weights to all the various horses to, in theory, give each runner a level chance of winning.

The first four home in last month's Jersey Derby (Aussie Lyrics, Black Night, Benoordenhout & Flutterbee) all re-oppose here but, at the weights, it could be the third home on that occasion

BENOORDENHOUT who comes out on top this time.

Runner-up in this race last year (when beaten 1½ lengths by Hawaiian Freeze) the Tony Le Brocq-trained 6 year-old appeared to run the race of his life to be beaten just over 2 lengths by Aussie Lyrics and Black Night in the Jersey Derby when meeting those rivals at level-weights.

BENOORDENHOUT now receives 10lbs from Aussie Lyrics and a whopping 24lbs from Black Night in this handicap. Jemma Marshall, who will be aboard **BENOORDENHOUT**, is looking for her second win in the Clarendon having ridden River Du Nord to victory in 2013.

Last month Aussie Lyrics became the first horse in 32 years to win the Jersey Derby three times when he beat Black Night just a nose at the end of an epic duel. It is quite possible that next time out, when beaten by UK-raider Barwick, he "bounced" after such a heroic effort but it would be no surprise to see him back to his best for this assignment. This is a race Christa Gilbert's stable star won in 2015 - the last horse to win two Clarendons was the great Off Minor in 2003 & 2006.

Should Black Night win the Clarendon it would be one of the best

weight carrying performances ever seen in the Channel Islands. Conceding a stone to Aussie Lyrics and 24lbs to Benoordenhout looks a huge task, particularly for quite a small horse like him, but he has already put up two huge winning performances so far this season at Les Landes and he ran creditably when beaten just 8½ lengths in a 1m4½f Group 3 race at Deauville. It is also reported he lost a shoe that day in France.

Twelve months ago Black Night's trainer James Moon sent out the winner of the Clarendon in the shape of HAWAIIAN FREEZE. That mare hasn't won again since, in eleven subsequent starts, but it means she is now qualified for the traditional under-card feature on Clarendon Day - the Gadget Guys 2017 "Glory Bee" Handicap (4.15) over 1m2f.

The "Glory Bee" is a unique race in the Channel Islands racing calendar in that it is restricted to horses who haven't won so far during the current season. Six horses bid to break their 2017 season "duck" in this year's renewal but, unlike most of her rivals, HAWAIIAN FREEZE actually comes into this race with an improving form profile as opposed to being simply out of form. Runner-up in her last two races, behind generally better horses than she meets here, suggests she may be the bet of the day. The last two "Glory Bee" winners Ocean Crystal (last year) and Lady Petrus (2015) are amongst her rivals in a field made up entirely of fillies & mares.

The opening Arzal Memorial Handicap Hurdle (2.30) over 2m2f features the winners of all seven hurdle races run so far this year at Les Landes. Steely has won three of them (including the Champion Hurdle), Little Lotte won the first two, Grey Gem won a maiden hurdle on his only start to date over jumps and BOWL IMPERIOR won the longest race of the entire Channel Islands season - over 2½ miles - at the last meeting.

The Aly Malzard-trained BOWL IMPERIOR comes into this race seeking a hat-trick having also scored over 1m6f, on the flat, on Derby Day and this strong stayer may be able to continue his winning run.

The European & Mediterranean Horse Racing Federation Handicap Sprint (3.05) is the final 5½f sprint of the season - the shortest race at the final meeting is over 7f. All five of the runners who met in the sprint here on Derby Day clash again and the result may be the same with NATIONAL SERVICE still narrowly preferred to Country Blue.

The Hunscombe Stud Breeding Success Handicap Mile (4.50) is a really competitive and open affair in which any of the seven runners would have

a big chance on their best form. It was way back in 2012 that GREY PANEL won this corresponding race (one of his 14 wins at Les Landes) but he can go close again however Lucifers Shadow is the one to beat.

Going into the penultimate meeting of the season (meaning there are ten races in total left to be run) it is very close at the top of the Jockeys Championship and we are almost certain to have a brand new Champion this year. Four-time, and current, Champion Mattie Batchelor has not enjoyed much success this season with only 3 winners to his name so the title will be decided between Paddy Aspell and Alice Mills. The gap between the duo is just one winner - Aspell on 11, Mills on 10 wins.

It is still mathematically possible for 13-times, and current, Champion Trainer Aly Malzard to hang on to her crown but she would have to win at least half of the remaining races this season to do so. She trails Christa Gilbert by 5 winners - Gilbert on 11 wins, Malzard on 6 wins.

* Among the crowd on Monday will be representatives from the European & Mediterranean Horseracing Federation who have gathered in Jersey for their Executive Council meeting. The Channel Islands Racing & Hunt Club (who oversee racing in both Jersey & Guernsey) are members of the Federation.

Selections:

2.30	1	BOWL IMPERIOR
3.05	3	NATIONAL SERVICE
3.40	4	BENOORDENHOUT
4.15	3	HAWAIIAN FREEZE
4.50	6	GREY PANEL