

HARD TO HANDEL CAN GATECRASH VASE PARTY

Bank Holiday Jersey Racing Preview

By Commentator Mark Johnson

With the last four winners of the Jersey Race Club's Spring Bank Holiday feature race – the Warwick Vase – returning odds of 100/30, 7/2, 4/1 and last year 5/1 it is no surprise the competitive 1m2f (2,000m) Handicap is considered something of a favourites' graveyard – the last favourite to claim the Vase being that season's subsequent Jersey Derby winner Major Maximus (a 2/1 chance) in 2012.

On Monday six horses line up for a typically open looking renewal of the La Vallette 2017 Warwick Vase (due off at 3.40) and the centre-piece of the five race card at Les Landes Racecourse, in St Ouen, first race 2.30.

Half of this year's field also ran in the race twelve months ago with the Tony Le Brocq-trained Benoordenhout winning by 2½ lengths from Black Night (runner-up) and Aussie Lyrics (5th).

Taking nothing away from last year's surprise winner, but, the two most exciting horses currently trained in the Channel Islands are the horses he beat that day - Black Night (trained by James Moon) and Aussie Lyrics (Christa Gilbert) - and both of them were highly impressive when winning on their local seasonal debuts at the last meeting on 14 May. A fortnight ago Black Night won the 1m½f (1,700m) Jersey Guineas by 7 lengths while Aussie Lyrics won the 1m4f (2,400m) Handicap by 2 lengths.

Don't be surprised if these two stars dominate the betting on Monday but perhaps their party might be gatecrashed by **HARD TO HANDEL** who was second to Black Night in the Jersey Guineas off level weights but now receives 18lbs from that rival. It is also worth noting that **HARD TO HANDEL**, a 4 times winner in the UK, has joined 13 times Channel Islands Champion Trainer Aly Malzard since that second placing in the Jersey Guineas.

Unusually there are two races run on this card over the distance of 2 miles – the first race (over hurdles) and last event (on the flat).

The opening Liberation Brewery Maiden Hurdle (2.30) is for horses who have never previously won over jumps and sees a field of five go to post.

The likely favourite is Captain James who comes here in winning form having taken a 1m1f (1,800m) Handicap on the flat at the last meeting but he has disappointed in five previous runs over hurdles including when third in this race back in 2015.

His main rivals are Honcho, best known as a sprinter on the flat but placed already in two of his three runs over hurdles in the UK, and hurdling debutant **FRIVOLOUS PRINCE** who has already won twice over 1m4f (2,400m) in the UK at Wolverhampton this year. The selection is the latter trained by Karl Kukk.

The second of the 2 mile contests on the card is the concluding Green Island Restaurant Handicap (4.50) which has attracted a field of six. For the last couple of years this race has been run over the slightly shorter distance of 1m6f (2,800m) and twelve months ago it was won by the mare **FOURNI**. Despite the increase in distance the result could remain the same as FOURNI showed no ill effects for her heavy fall on Easter Monday by finishing an excellent second back here over hurdles at the last meeting. In a really competitive finale she is just preferred to last season's Clarendon Handicap winner Hawaiian Freeze, out-and-out stayer Mr Opulence and Jersey debutant Beyond Measure.

No horse running at Les Landes on Monday will have gone to races more often than popular UK-trained veteran **SWISS CROSS** in the 7f (1,400m) Bloodstock Advisory Services Handicap (3.05). This will be the spritely 9 year-old's 114th career start and he has won on 12 occasions to date.

Trained in Newmarket by Phil McEntee SWISS CROSS has raced just once previously at Les Landes winning over the same distance, by 6 lengths, in August last year. He has finished third at Brighton twice recently suggesting he can maintain his unbeaten record here on Jersey. His dangers include Country Blue (the Channel Islands' champion sprinter but who struggles to stay this distance) and the improving filly Princess Kodja.

St Helier-based trainer Christa Gilbert heads the C.I. Trainers Championship after two meetings of the season (with 4 winners) and she can add to that tally with **LUCIFERS SHADOW** in the 1m½f (1,700m) Prince of Wales Handicap (4.15). Her grey 8 year-old bids for a third win in this corresponding race having previously won it in 2014 & '15. Grey Panel and Flying Author may be dangers.

For the first time this season there is a significant carryover into the popular Pick 4 Jackpot pool at this meeting. The victory of 9/2 chance Captain James in the final race at the last fixture on 14 May meant the Pick 4 Jackpot was not hit and now a carryover of £963.47 will be in the pool before betting opens on Monday. In the Pick 4 Jackpot racegoers have to select the winners of races 2, 3, 4 & 5.

SELECTIONS:

2.30 5 FRIVOLOUS PRINCE

3.05 1 SWISS CROSS

3.40 4 HARD TO HANDEL

4.15 2 LUCIFERS SHADOW

4.50 5 FOURNI