

## **AUSSIE WINS THIRD DERBY AFTER EPIC DUEL JERSEY RACING - REPORT**

**By Mark Johnson**

It was quite simply one of the best races ever seen at Les Landes. History was made by AUSSIE LYRICS at the end of Sunday's La Vallette 2017 Jersey Derby - an epic duel between two top horses fought out over a-mile-and-a-half that was decided by the smallest possible winning margin. A race that will live long in the memory of those who saw it.

Victory for 7 year-old French-bred Aussie Lyrics, trained by Christa Gilbert at Holly Farm in St Helier and ridden by Alice Mills, confirmed him as one of the true greats of Channel Islands racing.

It had been 32 years since the Guernsey-trained Whitworth had last completed a hat-trick of wins in the most prestigious race of the Channel Islands season and Aussie Lyrics is only the third horse to win the Jersey Derby three times in the last 50 years. (*see the table below*).

But it could not have been closer at the line. The winning margin was quite literally a flared nostril - officially a nose which is the shortest outright winning margin up from a dead-heat - from the gallant Black Night (trained by James Moon and ridden by Philip Prince) in second.

In all this was an eleventh career victory for Aussie Lyrics, who has now won seven times over 1m4f at Les Landes, after previously scoring three times in France and once in the UK before coming to Jersey.

Winning the Jersey Derby is becoming something of a habit for trainer Christa Gilbert - she has now saddled the winner five times in the last six years having also won the race in 2012 & '13 with Major Maximus - but this was a first win in the big race for rider Alice Mills. Aussie Lyrics has been ridden by three different riders to win the Derby - Freddie Tett was aboard in 2015 and Mattie Batchelor was up last year.

Five went to post for this year's race with a first prize of £2,380, with Black Night (impressive winner of both his starts so far this season at Les Landes) sent off the short-priced 1/3 favourite ahead of Aussie Lyrics at 9/4 with Benoordenhout, Flutterbee and Gabster completing the field.

Right from the start it was a case of Black Night and Aussie Lyrics

dominating the race - Black Night leading with Aussie Lyrics all the while holding his position close-up on the leaders inside never more than a length away.

Running uphill out of the dip, with about 3 furlongs (600 metres) to run, Aussie Lyrics narrowly stuck his grey head in front and from then on the two horses locked horns for a thrilling and protracted duel up the home straight which had the crowd roaring with encouragement. A stride from the line Black Night was in front but Aussie Lyrics critically had his head coming down (and therefore going forward) as they hit the post.

“It was very tight”, said trainer Christa Gilbert after the race, “He is such a battler and Alice rode a brilliant race on him”. Asked if Aussie Lyrics would be her runner in next year’s Jersey Derby too, and bid for an unprecedented fourth win, Mrs Gilbert said, “He’s only seven and hopefully has a number of years ahead of him, so I don’t see why not”.

Tactically it was a fantastic ride by Alice Mills, who was riding her seventh winner of the Channel Islands season putting her second in the Jockeys Championship, “We didn’t really decide on a change of tactics but when Black Night went on I thought I’d try to go with him and not allow him to dominate all the way”, the winning rider confessed, “I thought we had just got there on the line but I wasn’t sure”.

### **THREE-TIME JERSEY DERBY WINNERS**

#### **In the last 50 years**

2015, 2016, 2017 AUSSIE LYRICS (Christa Gilbert)

1983, 1984, 1985 WHITWORTH (Jeremy Hollowell, Guernsey)

1970, 1972, 1974 IT’S A JINX (Stephen Arthur)

Paddy Aspell consolidated his position at the top of the Channel Islands Jockeys Championship with a double in the first two races on the card. His brace of winners, on GREY GEM and NATIONAL SERVICE puts him on to eleven winners for the campaign from just twenty-five rides.

Aspell, brother of dual Aintree Grand National winning rider Leighton Aspell, has run up an unusual record himself in hurdle races at Les Landes this season. So far there have been six hurdle races run at Les

Landes in 2017 and Paddy Aspell has ridden the winner of all six of them! His latest jumping winner came aboard Grey Gem in the opening "In Memory of Lottie" Conditions Maiden Hurdle.

Odds-on favourite Grey Gem, who was making his debut over hurdles having never won in 17 starts on the flat, is trained by Karl Kukk and he beat fellow jumping debutant Kersivay by 20 lengths.

The first of two UK-trained winners on the card was National Service who supplied the second of the Aspell double. Saddled by Clare Ellam, National Service was recording his fifth career success but was snapping a losing run of 26 races since a victory at Wolverhampton in February last year. Despite his long losing run National Service was very well backed, down to 7/4 from 3/1, before beating Country Blue 4 lengths.

The other UK-trained winner on the card ORDER OF SERVICE was also very well back, down to 2/1 second favourite, in the ultra competitive Building A Better Working World Handicap Mile. The Shaun Harris-trained 7 year-old was making his Channel Islands debut, under Marc Goldstein, and disputed the running throughout before beating the fast finishing Brown Velvet by a length.

Having finished runner-up to Aussie Lyrics in the Jersey Derby twelve months ago BOWL IMPERIOR stepped down in grade but up in distance to win the concluding 1m6f Animal Health Trust Handicap. The 11/8 favourite was ridden by Mattie Batchelor, for trainer Aly Malzard, and made virtually all the running to hold the late challenge of Hawaiian Freeze by half-a-length.

Next meeting at Les Landes is the ever popular Ladies Day fixture on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August when the scheduled first race is at 2.30pm.