

FOURNI CAN LEAD FOUR-RUNNER CHAMPION FIELD **FRIDAY EVENING'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW**

By commentator Mark Johnson

It is Champion Hurdle Day at Les Landes on Friday when the centre-piece of the five race evening meeting is the most prestigious jumps race of the year to be held in the Channel Islands - the Dallas Burston Group 2017 Champion Hurdle. Gates open at 5pm with the first race at 6.30pm.

Four runners, a slightly smaller field than usual, go to post for the feature race at 7.40 mainly due to the prevailing hot dry weather which has led to quick firm conditions on course.

The field is headed by the Christa Gilbert-trained Cahill who was beaten just a head, into second, by the classy Rossetti in an epic duel for this race twelve months ago. Unfortunately, that hard race appears to have left its mark on Cahill who hasn't performed anywhere near his best in four subsequent runs. He is, however, the class horse in this field at his best.

Without doubt the inform horse coming into the Champion Hurdle is the Karl Kukk-trained Steely who has made all the running to win his last two races. This is Steely's third attempt at the Champion Hurdle having finished third in 2016 and fourth last year. One thing very much in his favour is the form of his jockey Paddy Aspell. Currently the leading rider of this Channel Islands' season, Aspell has ridden the winner of all the previous four hurdle races to be run at Les Landes in 2017.

Both Cahill and Steely must have a great chance of lifting the crown but it would be wrong to rule out the only mare in the line-up **FOURNI**.

Although she has to step up a little on her previous form to win a race like this Fourni, who represents dual C.I. Champion Hurdle winning trainer Aly Malzard (she won it in 2009 with Koka Fast and 2015 with Rossetti) looks certain to get the strongly run race that suits her and she now gets a 7lbs pull in the weights for a 12 length defeat by Steely earlier in the season.

Fourni invariably stays on strongly at the end of her races and she bids to give reigning Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor a fourth win the race having previously won it in 2013, '14 & '15.

The fourth runner in the field is the maiden Granit Man, trained by James Moon, who looks out classed.

The evening's racing gets underway at 6.30 with the La Verte Rue Handicap over 5½ furlongs. This looks a cracking sprint on paper with the three main protagonists, in the five runner field - **SWISS CROSS**,

Country Blue and Purley Queen - boasting a total of 16 wins at Les Landes between them.

Sprightly veteran Swiss Cross, trained in Newmarket by Phil McEntee, has won 13 races in total but more significantly is a perfect two-out-of-two in races at Les Landes. He won a 7 furlong handicap here in August last year (by 6 lengths) and took the “Jersey Bullet” over Friday’s race distance on 11 June by 7 lengths.

Both Country Blue (injured) and Purley Queen (firm ground) skipped the “Jersey Bullet”, so this will be a much hotter race, and it would be no surprise if either of them gave Swiss Cross a real run for his money. Country Blue, a nine-times course winner, took this race back in 2015 (and was runner-up last year) while Purley Queen bids for her sixth course win on what will be her fiftieth racecourse appearance.

The “Building A Better Working World” Handicap over 7 furlongs at 7.05 looks a wide open competitive affair. UK-trained Justice Rock, a stable mate of Swiss Cross, won at Yarmouth last month and will therefore have his supporters but it might be worth chancing the one-eyed **FIRST CAT** (he has no right eye) to run a big race. The Karl Kukk-trained 10 year-old won a similar race to this on Easter Monday.

BLACK NIGHT is the highest-rated horse running on the flat currently in the Channel Islands and he can defy top weight in the Ravenscroft Handicap (8.15) over 1m2f. The progressive 5 year-old, trained by James Moon, could not have been more impressive when winning the Jersey Guineas last time out by 7 lengths. He may have too much toe for dual Jersey Derby winner Aussie Lyrics, as well as last meeting winners Flutterbee and Benoordenhout, over this distance.

The biggest field of the evening (nine runners) goes to post for the finale at 8.50 - the Wilson’s Estate Agents Handicap over 1m4f. Last year’s winner of this corresponding race **MR OPULENCE**, trained by Tony Le Brocq, looks to be coming into form just in time for his repeat bid following a decent third-placing at the last meeting. Bowl Imperior and Spring Dixie look to be his two main dangers.

SELECTIONS

6.30 1 SWISS CROSS
7.05 5 FIRST CAT
7.40 4 FOURNI
8.15 1 BLACK NIGHT
8.40 4 MR OPULENCE

