

BLACK NIGHT CAN SEIZE AUSSIE'S CROWN

SUNDAY'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW

By commentator Mark Johnson

Sunday is Derby Day on Jersey and a field of five are due to line up for the most prestigious race of the year in the Channel Islands.

The mile-and-a-half Jersey Derby, sponsored by La Vallette Investment Management Ltd, is due off at 3.40 when it will be the third of five races on the card run at Les Landes Racecourse, St Ouen, first race 2.30pm.

The Derby is the true championship race of the season on the flat in the Channel Islands (run at level weights in theory to decide the best horse in the Islands) but for one horse and his connections victory on Sunday would mean far more than usual.

Aussie Lyrics, trained by Christa Gilbert at Holly Farm in St Helier, stands on the verge of becoming one of the true greats of local racing history as he attempts to win the big race for the third time. It is 32 years since Whitworth became the last horse to win the Jersey Derby three times in 1983, '84 & '85.

The 7 year-old has been trained specifically with this race as his target all season and, as a six times course and distance winner, he sets the standard. His trainer certainly knows what it takes to win this race as she has saddled the winner of four of the last five runnings - stablemate Major Maximus winning in 2012 & '13 before Aussie Lyrics's brace of victories in the last two renewals.

However, in this year's line-up there is a horse who has the potential to beat not only Aussie Lyrics on the day but, in time, also eclipse his wonderful record at Les Landes. That horse is BLACK NIGHT.

James Moon's lightly raced 5 year-old Black Night would have been favourite for last year's race but for an eleventh-hour setback (shoulder injury) that ruled him out of the contest.

Now he looks likely to be the short-priced favourite as his two emphatic victories already this season (over 1m½f in the Jersey Guineas and 1m2f in a handicap last time out carrying top weight) confirmed that, on his day, he is currently the best horse trained in the Channel Islands.

Although Black Night's best form so far has been recorded over shorter distances, two of his six wins have come over the Derby's 1m4f trip so there should be no stamina doubts.

C.I. Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor (who rode Aussie Lyrics last year) and Champion Trainer Aly Malzard are represented by the mare Flutterbee who posted a career-best effort when winning over 1m4f last month. The field is completed by Benoordenout (Jemma Marshall riding for Tony Le Brocq) and Gabster (Andrew Elliott up for Karl Kuk).

Derby Day gets underway at 2.30 with the four-runner "In Memory of

Lottie” Conditions Maiden Hurdle over 2 miles. This maiden hurdle is usually run at the Warwick Vase meeting, at the end of May, but with that fixture abandoned this year due to fog it replaces the usual conditions hurdle on this card. Aussie Lyric’s stablemate CAPTAIN JAMES will be a short-priced favourite here having won already three times on the flat this season but he isn’t bombproof.

Captain James has raced five times over jumps (two chases and a hurdle in France plus two hurdles races here) without really appearing to have a great cut at his obstacles. His flat speed, and the fact he is in great form at present, may see him through this test but for those wanting a bit more value Grey Gem may be of interest. The 6 year-old makes his hurdling debut here but he certainly has the size and scope to make a jumper.

The Ravenscroft Handicap Sprint (3.05) looks a decent opportunity for dual Champion C.I. Sprinter COUNTRY BLUE to finally get his season back on track after a disappointing campaign to date. At the weights he should confirm recent form with his old adversary Purley Queen in a race Country Blue won in both 2013 and last year.

The Building A Better Working World Handicap Mile (4.15) is always one of the most competitive handicaps of the entire season and this year’s renewal is right up to scratch. This was also a really rough race last year and CHAPEAU BLEU came through it with flying colours to beat Pas D’Action 2 lengths with Grey Panel third. All three line-up again.

Although not in the same kind of form so far this season it wouldn’t be a surprise to see Chapeau Bleu bounce back to her best given a similar type race on Sunday. Hard To Handel is the likely favourite, in the nine-runner field, after some really good placed efforts this season (including a second to Black Night in the Jersey Guineas) but he is now on a long losing run and he has finished runner-up on his last three starts.

Twelve months ago on this card BOWL IMPERIOR finished runner-up to Aussie Lyrics in the Jersey Derby but this time he contests the concluding Animal Health Trust Handicap (4.50) over 1m6f. His trainer Aly Malzard saddles five of the nine runners in this race and two more of her team - Fourni and Spring Dixie - may be the main dangers.

Selections:

2.30	1	CAPTAIN JAMES
3.05	1	COUNTRY BLUE
3.40	3	BLACK NIGHT
4.15	5	CHAPEAU BLEU
4.50	2	BOWL IMPERIOR

LA VALLETTE 2017 JERSEY DERBY

AUSSIE LYRICS V BLACK NIGHT HEAD-TO-HEAD

AUSSIE LYRICS		BLACK NIGHT
Christa Gilbert	TRAINER	James Moon
Alice Mills	JOCKEY	Philip Prince
France	BRED IN	Ireland
7 years-old	AGE	5 years-old
30	TOTAL RACES	19
8	CAREER WINS	6
6	WINS ON JERSEY	5
6	WINS AT 1m4f	2
71	OFFICIAL RATING	89
£31,004	PRIZEMONEY	£15,053
2 (no wins)	HEADTO-HEAD RECORD	3 (inc 2 wins)