

BACHELOR EXCELS ON BLUE JERSEY RACING - REPORT

By Mark Johnson

Country Blue confirmed himself as one of the most successful sprinters ever seen in the Channel Islands when winning an unprecedented third “Jersey Bullet” at Les Landes Racecourse on Sunday.

This three-quarters-of-a-length victory, from the favourite Fruit Salad, in the featured 5½ furlong (1,100m) Dallas Burston Group 2018 Jersey Bullet Handicap - the most prestigious sprint of the Channel Islands racing season - was Country Blue’s eleventh career success in all.

The first of those wins, for the French-bred 9 year-old gelding, came in France but all his other ten successes have come over this distance at Les Landes including back-to-back wins in the 2015 & 2016 “Jersey Bullet”.

Country Blue, trained by Aly Malzard, was given an outstanding tactical ride by former four-time Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor. Getting his mount to break best, in the six runner field, he dictated the pace before making a move off the final turn, about a quarter-of-a-mile from home, to bring his mount across the track, tight under the stands’ rail.

Batchelor was the only one of the six riders in the race to employ the tactic - often favoured over the years by experienced Les Landes jockeys on rain-softened ground (the course took 27mm of rain the previous day turning the ground to “good to soft, soft in places”) as the strip of turf right under the outer rail in the straight often remains the quickest strip.

Coming across the track however also meant sacrificing ground as well as Country Blue having to race alone with nothing around him to race. Under such a willing partner Batchelor’s gamble paid off and punters who kept faith with Country Blue were rewarded with a juicy 7/2 winner.

Victory in the big sprint completed a double on the card for former thirteen-times Champion Trainer Aly Malzard initiated by Ocean Crystal in a close finish to the 1m4f (2,400m) Green Valley Handicap.

10/1 chance Ocean Crystal, who had won over the shorter trip of 1m1f (1,800m) back in April, just held on here to win by a head from the favourite Hawaiian Freeze.

Ocean Crystal was ridden to victory by locally-based rider Michelle Hooper, who works for winning trainer Aly Malzard. Hooper was recording her third success as a jockey.

Sometimes really good racehorses give you “the wow factor” - Black Night did that with just under a quarter-of-a-mile to go in the President’s Handicap. Conceding at least 9lbs to all his seven rivals, in the extended mile contest, Black Night showed a blistering turn-of-foot to quicken away from those rivals leaving them toiling. He ran out an eight length winner from Order Of Service.

Trained by James Moon, 6 year-old Black Night is already the highest-rated horse currently running on the flat in the Channel Islands and he continues to take all before him. This was his seventh win at Les Landes and his eighth career success in all.

Black Night was ridden to victory by Davy Delalande. The trainer jockey como of Moon and Delalande had earlier initiated their own double on the card when Veronica’s Napkin took the opening George & Leonora Sullivan Perpetual Handicap Hurdle, over 2¼ miles, from stablemate Samuel French.

Although no off-island-trained horses ran at this meeting there was still strong international flavour to proceedings with trainer James Moon bringing in three French-based jockeys to ride his four runners on the card.

As well as dual-winner Davy Delalande his compatriots Corentin Smeulders (2nd in the Hurdle) and Damien Boutet (2nd on Hawaiian Freeze) were also in action.

The final race on the card, the 1¼ mile Brady & Gallagher (1999) Ltd Handicap, saw Gabster - trained by Karl Kukk and ridden by reigning Champion Jockey Paddy Aspell - make all the running to win for the second time this season. As she had done at the previous meeting Gabster won unchallenged, this time coming home 10 lengths clear of Mendacious Harpy.

After four meetings of the Channel islands season (three meetings on Jersey & one on Guernsey) there is now a three-way tie for the lead in the Jockeys Championship with Paddy Aspell and Davy Delalande now joining Philip Prince (who didn’t ride on Sunday) on three winners, with three other riders on two winners.

The double for James Moon means he now joins Karl Kukk on four winners at the top of the Trainers Championship, one ahead of Aly Malzard and Christa Gilbert.

Next meeting at Les Landes is the first of the season’s popular back-to-back Friday evening fixtures on 22nd June. First race at 6:30pm.