

NIGHT'S DRAMATIC NOSE JOB!

JERSEY RACING - REPORT

By Mark Johnson

No one ever said life was easy. BLACK NIGHT would certainly subscribe to that theory.

Twelve months ago the James Moon-trained Black Night lost the Jersey Derby by a flared nostril. On Sunday, at a sun-baked Les Landes Racecourse, Black Night just had his nose in front at the line but then had to survive an anxious twenty minute-long stewards' inquiry before his victory was confirmed.

The 1½m La Vallette Jersey Derby has long been regarded as the most prestigious race of the Channel Islands racing season but it is rapidly becoming the most dramatic too.

Black Night had been odds-on favourite to win the race last year but, at the end of an epic stretch-long duel with Aussie Lyrics, the head-bob on the line went the way of Aussie Lyrics who in the process became the first three-time winner of the Jersey Derby for 32 years.

Roll the clock forward to this year and Black Night was again sent off odds-on favourite (at 8/13) to beat seven rivals in the biggest field gathered for the race in many years.

Up against him were the likes of Aussie Lyrics again (now bidding to become the first ever four-time winner of the race), highly-rated and versatile Barwick (who had been runner-up in the C.I. Champion Hurdle a fortnight earlier), Gabster (winner of her last three races) and Lastmanlastround who attempted to become the first UK-trained winner of the race since Guy Harwood's View From Above in 1991.

Black Night, who as usual when racing on Jersey, ran unshod (and with his rider Davy Delalande putting up 2lbs of overweight) was dropped out the back of the field as Gabster led them early at a really decent tempo.

With about a half-mile to run Alice Mills on three-time Derby hero Aussie Lyrics took the lead and, with several rivals including Black Night

looking to have quickly come under pressure, an historic fourth victory looked a possibility.

On ground quicker than ideal for him, and lacking a run since April, Aussie Lyrics was headed once in the home straight and immediately the race became a head-to-head battle between Black Night and 10/1 chance Benoordenhout (ridden by Paddy Pilley and trained by Tony Le Brocq) who had finished a close third in the race last year.

Benoordenhout, against the inside rail, first led in the straight but was then narrowly passed on his outside by Black Night only for the latter to wander under pressure in the final half-furlong. Much to his credit Benoordenhout (who has never won a race beyond 1¼ miles in distance) rallied but just failed to peg back Black Night by a nose. The two main protagonists pulled 6 lengths clear of third-placed 33/1 chance Safira Menina who ran her best race to date on Jersey. Aussie Lyrics eventually finished fifth.

Even before the result of the “photo finish” had been announced the claxon sounded for a stewards’ inquiry. With Black Night’s French jockey Davy Delalande speaking virtually no English the stewards inquiry process, quite understandably, went on a little longer than usual due to the use of an interpreter.

The stewards allowed Black Night (owned by trainer James Moon’s mother Anne) to keep the race but there was a double sting in the tail for jockey Delalande. He was fined a total of £200 for the ride - £100 for excessive use of the whip and £100 for careless riding in so far as he did little to try and prevent Black hanging in towards his rival when wandering under pressure close home. They were however satisfied that any minor interference that took place didn’t effect the result as Paddy Pilley on the runner-up never, at any point, stopped riding.

Given the small winning margin it was a really tough call for stewards but, in this reporter’s view, it was the correct decision.

Rest of the Derby Day Card in Brief -

The Black Night connections of Moon and Delalande initiated a double

on the card when taking the opening 2 mile Conditions Hurdle with SAMUEL FRENCH. This was a first ever career success for 6 year-old Samuel French who beat Captain James 6 lengths.

A hectic travel week for jockey Tom Garner started in the best possible way with his victory aboard the Karl Kukk-trained LIMELITE in the 5½f Sprint Handicap. After his flying Sunday day-trip from Southampton airport to Jersey he is off this week to ride in one of America's most important Grade 1 Steeplechases at Saratoga in up-state New York.

The win of Limelite completed a successful weekend for long-time Jersey racing supporter, owner Bunny Roberts, whose colours were also carried to victory by the Richard Hannon-trained Himself at Newmarket on Friday evening.

UK-based trainer Richard Guest (most famous as a jockey for riding Red Marauder to victory in the 2001 Aintree Grand National) was at Les Landes to saddle his TELLOVOI for victory in the 1m½f Handicap. Tellovoi, ridden by Philip Prince, romped to a 6 length success in what is usually one of the most competitive handicaps of the entire season.

Local-based rider Michelle Hooper is enjoying her best ever season and she rode her third winner of the campaign when OCEAN CRYSTAL (trained by Hooper's boss Aly Malzard) won the concluding 1¾m Handicap.

With only two meetings (and therefore just ten races) of the Channel Islands season left the races to be Champion Jockey and Trainer are incredibly close.

Philip Prince and Davy Delalande are joint top of the Jockeys Championship with six winners apiece (Prince just leads on count-back as he has one more second-place finish) ahead of Alice Mills with five winners and reigning Champion Paddy Aspell on four.

James Moon, with seven winners, leads Karl Kukk and reigning Champion Christa Gilbert by just a single winner in the Trainers table. Thirteen-times Champion Aly Malzard is right behind on five winners.

Next meeting at Les Landes is the ever popular Ladies Day fixture on Sunday 12th August when the scheduled first race is at 2.30pm.