

RELAXED AT THE START OF THE SEASON

Channel Islands Horse Racing Preview

By MARK JOHNSON

The 2019 Channel Islands racing season gets underway at Les Landes Racecourse, in St Ouen, on Easter Monday. With an excellent turnout of 38 horses declared across the five race card - which are all handicaps - local punters are in for an ultra-competitive opening day. First race is due off at 2:30 with races then every 35 minutes.

Racing will take place at Jersey's picturesque cliff top venue, on the North-Eastern point of the island, on nine days this year with the season also again incorporating a day at Guernsey's L'Ancrese Common course on Monday 6th May.

As in previous years the Jersey Race Club will host two popular evening meetings during the summer, on Friday 21st June and Friday 5th July when the first race will be at 6:30pm.

The three main races of the season, which comprise the Channel Islands Triple Crown, are as always in the second half of the campaign with the Champion Hurdle the feature race of the second evening meeting on Friday 5th July; the Jersey Derby on Sunday 21st July and the Clarendon Handicap on the closing day of the season - Monday 26th August.

The most glamorous day on the local racing calendar - Ladies Day - this year takes place on Sunday 11th August and will feature a brand new race, The Jersey Oaks. Run over a mile-and-a-quarter it will be a Limited Handicap restricted to fillies & mares.

Feature race on Monday's Opening Day card is the Jersey Bookmakers Feature Handicap over 7 furlongs (1,400m) due off at 3:40pm. Nine runners will line-up for it, five of whom will be racing at Les Landes for the first time. It is one of those Jersey debutants, recent French import **RELAXED BOY**, who may come out on top.

A five-time winner in France (three Handicaps & two Conditions races) he was versatile distance-wise winning at trips from 6f to a mile. His most recent victory came at Marseille Borely (a very similar sharp, left-handed track like Les Landes) in September when taking a 6f 12-runner Handicap by a short head. He will be ridden by Freddie Tett for reigning Champion Trainer Aly Malzard.

Main danger to the selection may well be his stablemate ICE ROYAL (Mattie Batchelor aboard) who took time to acclimatise to racing in the Channel Islands last season but who could have a good campaign this time around. His worry here is the distance - 7f is short of his optimum.

Last year's winner, when the race was run in May, SING SOMETHING and enigmatic ORDER OF SERVICE are others to consider in the field.

First race of the year is the Koka Fast Handicap Hurdle over 2m1f (3,400m) in which an unusually big field of eight go to post. In the closed season the Jersey Race Club have built new safety hurdles - in schooling sessions they appear to jump better than their predecessors and, with considerable extra padding, be safer for horses - so it is perhaps no surprise that this race has attracted such a strong line-up.

STEELY won the 2017 Channel Islands Champion Hurdle but has been off the track for a whole year since winning here last April. The Karl Kukk-trained 11 year-old has always been a bold-jumping front-runner and he should relish the new hurdles. Under Paddy Aspell he is taken to make a winning return at the expense of BAL AMIE and BARWICK.

UK-trained horses have a tremendous record at the opening meeting of the season - it is easier to get them fit given the training facilities in the UK and often they have had a previous run on the

all weather - so 2017 winner **RAINBOW LAD** (trained in the UK by Mick Appleby) looks the obvious choice in the Le Verte Rue Associates Handicap at 3:05 over 1m4f (2,400m). He ran well when third at Wolverhampton in February.

WINKLEVI, winner of the Clarendon Handicap when last seen in August, can take the 1m2f Liberation Brewery Handicap at 4:15 despite now being much worse off in the weights with **BENOORDENHOUT**.

The concluding Bloodstock Advisory Service Handicap at 4:50 could go the way of **BROWN VELVET** despite her long absence from the track. She won three times in 2017 but has a 19-month layoff to overcome.

Selections:

2.30	5	STEELY
3.05	4	RAINBOW LAD
3.40	2	RELAXED BOY
4.15	2	WINKLEVI
4.50	3	BROWN VELVET

SIX LOCAL TRAINERS SET FOR THIS SEASON

For racing fans it is encouraging to know that at the start of the 2019 season a pool of fifty locally-trained horses are ready to race at Les Landes. The training of race horses however isn't just centred around the racecourse in St Ouen. The island has six trainers, all of whom will be represented at the opening meeting on Monday, and they are based in five different Parishes. Here we take a look at each of island's trainers in a little more detail and try to uncover the next star of Jersey racing.

ANGIE CORSON

Based in St Martin

Horses in Training: 5

Number of winners last season: 0

Career Highlights: Sent out King Kenny to win the 2011 Jersey Derby & Clarendon Handicap.

Stable Star: LITTLE LOTTE - dual winner over hurdles at Les Landes

One To Watch: NATIVE ROSIE – unraced to date, makes her debut over 7f on Monday

CHRISTA GILBERT

Based in St Helier

Horses in Training: 10

Number of winners last season: 7

Career Highlights: Champion Trainer in 2017. Has saddled the winner of the Jersey Derby 5 times including a hattrick with Aussie Lyrics in 2015, 2016 & 2017.

Stable Star: AUSSIE LYRICS – three time Jersey Derby winner with that race his target again

One To Watch: BROWN VELVET – versatile mare distance-wise, won three times here in 2017

KARL KUKK

Based in St Ouen

Horses in Training: 10

Number of winners last season: 7

Career Highlights: Sent out Steely to win the 2017 Channel Islands Champion Hurdle.

Stable Star: STEELY – Bold jumping front-runner who returns on Monday after a year off

One To Watch: JACKBLACK – recent import from the UK who may mix hurdles & flat runs

TONY LE BROCCQ

Based in St John

Horses in Training: 4

Number of winners last season: 3

Career Highlights: Trains Grey Panel, with 15 victories the winning-most horse at Les Landes currently in training.

Stable Star: BENOORDENHOUT – placed twice in the Jersey Derby, a nose second last year

One To Watch: WHITE VALIANT – an import from the UK who is a half-brother to Grey Panel

ALY MALZARD

Based in St Ouen

Horses in Training: 17

Number of winners last season: 8 (Champion Trainer)

Career Highlights: 14 times Champion Trainer (1st in 1997 and most recently last year). Has sent out the winner of the Jersey Derby 5 times.

Stable Star: WINKLEVI – won the Clarendon Handicap last year, Jersey Derby the aim this year

One To Watch: RELAXED BOY- exciting import from France where he won 5 races

JAMES MOON

Based in St Martin

Horses in Training: 4

Number of winners last season: 8

Career Highlights: Sent out Black Night to win the 2017 Clarendon Handicap & the 2018 Jersey Derby.

Stable Star: BLACK NIGHT – simply the best horse currently trained in Jersey, won 11 races

One To Watch: WOLF HUNTER – winning 2-y-o in the UK, debuts here on Monday