

BARWICK & BATCH READY FOR BIG HURDLE

FRIDAY EVENING'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW

By Mark Johnson

It is Champion Hurdle Day at Les Landes Racecourse, St Ouen, on Friday when the centre-piece of the five race evening meeting is the most prestigious jumps race of the local season - the Jersey Cheshire Home 2019 Channel Islands Champion Hurdle. Gates open at 5pm with the first race at 6.30pm.

Five runners go to post for the 2m1f (3,400 metres) Champion Hurdle, which will be run as race 3 on the card at 7:40pm, headed by last year's runner-up **BARWICK** and UK-trained challenger MRS BURBIDGE.

BARWICK, who is trained next to the track by Aly Malzard and will be ridden by Mattie Batchelor, is an eleven-times career winner (8 flat & 3 hurdle races) including the opening race of the current season - a 2m1f Handicap Hurdle on Easter Monday - by 16 lengths from Champion Hurdle rival VERONICA'S NAPKIN. He has since finished runner-up on the flat, over 2 miles, at L'Ancrese in Guernsey.

Fourteen-times Champion Trainer Aly Malzard (who will also be represented by BAL AMIE in the big race) bids to win the Champion Hurdle for the third time. She previously sent out Koka Fast (2009) and Rossetti (2015) to land the prize.

Four-times Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor has had a luckless local season to date - he has yet to have a winner from 20 rides but has been aboard five runners-up. A change of luck here would give him a fourth victory in the big race having been aboard If I Had Him (for owner Sir Alex Ferguson in 2013), The Bay Bandit (2014) and Rossetti (2015).

Being a championship race, the runners in the Champion Hurdle race off level weights (except for a 5lbs sex allowance for mares) but if the official handicapper had his way **BARWICK** would be conceding plenty of weight to his four rivals. He is rated 119 with stablemate BAL AMIE 6lbs inferior on 113, MRS BURBIDGE (94), VERONICA'S NAPKIN (88) and 2017 winner STEELY (87).

MRS BURBIDGE gives the race an international angle as she represents the UK-based team of trainer Neil Mulholland and leading jump jockey Sam Twiston-Davies who recently celebrated his 1,000th career winner.

Mulholland certainly knows what it takes to win a Channel Islands

Champion Hurdle having already lifted the trophy twice - with The Bay Bandit in 2014 and Rossetti in 2016.

MRS BURBIDGE has won three of her six previous starts at Les Landes but all her wins on Jersey have come on the flat. She has finished runner-up in both her local hurdle starts to date.

In a race likely to be run at a scorching early pace, probably set by 2017 winner STEELY, at the line **BARWICK** is taken to come out on top ahead of MRS BURBIDGE and BAL AMIE.

Horse Racing on Jersey appears to be experiencing something of a renaissance this year and it's popularity with visiting UK-based trainers reaches a modern day record level on Friday when six UK trainers ship runners (10 horses) across to compete on the card.

In total there are 42 runners declared on Friday representing 12 trainers as all six locally licensed trainers also have runners on the card.

Newmarket trainer Phil McEntee makes no secret of the fact he loves visiting Jersey and he brings two runners across for this meeting including popular stable veteran **SWISS CROSS** in the opening Wilsons Estate Agent Handicap over 7 furlongs.

Sprightly 12 year-old **SWISS CROSS** faces nine rivals in his bid for career win number 16 on his 153rd lifetime start. He has already shown a real liking for racing on Jersey - winning on three of his four previous visits. With Sam Twiston-Davies aboard him for the first time he can win again from fellow UK raider MR POTTER and KALANI ROSE.

The Millbrook Handicap Sprint (7:05) looks a cracking contest in which a case can be made for several runners. With ground conditions likely to be quite firm - due to the current hot, dry, windy weather - it may pay to follow another veteran course specialist in the shape of **COUNTRY BLUE**. After three solid placed efforts so far this season he may now have things spot on to deliver an eleventh course win. "Jersey Bullet" heroine FRUIT SALAD and MAN OF THE SEA look the main dangers.

HARD TO HANDEL had things drop just right for him when winning the Warwick Vase here in May and he may again get a strong pace to run at in the Plantagenet Handicap (8:15) over 1m2f. He may capitalise if WOLF HUNTER and ICE ROYAL go hard in front early.

Leading rider of the season to date Freddy Tett can maintain his clear

lead at the top of the Jockeys Championship with victory aboard **SAFIRA MENINA** in the appropriately named finale - The Most Beautiful Sunset Handicap (8:50) over 1m6f.

SAFIRA MENINA didn't have much room close home when third behind Jersey Derby bound White Valiant here over 1m4f at the last meeting. On that occasion **KENOUGHTY** finished narrowly ahead of the selection but, on quicker ground and over a longer trip, that form may now get reversed.

Trainer Tony Le Brocq has announced that **GREY PANEL** - the most prolific winner at Les Landes in recent years - has been retired.

The grey 11 year-old son of 2003 Jersey Derby winner Minnie's Mystery only ever raced at Les Landes - winning 15 of his 58 career starts (over distances ranging from 1m½f to 1m4f) and recording at least one victory in each of seven consecutive seasons from 2012 to 2018.

Followers of this column have hopefully made some summer holiday money recently. Selections have won 4 of the 5 races at both of the last two meetings and, at the last meeting on 21 June, a £1 straight line on the Pick4 Jackpot using the selections won £54.80

SELECTIONS

6.30 2 SWISS CROSS
7.05 5 COUNTRY BLUE
7.40 2 BARWICK
8.15 4 HARD TO HANDEL
8.40 1 SAFIRA MENINA