

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview Saturday 7th June evening meeting

by Bobsbest

For almost as long as I can remember, hurdling has been the Cinderella event of local racing. From time to time the Jersey Race Club asks owners, trainers and members whether the single jumping race which begins every fixture should be scrapped and each time the response is overwhelming – “Hands off our hurdling”. It’s not clear whether this support is based in anything more than tradition, after all, the history of racing in Jersey is closely associated with hunting and at one time point-to-point racing was the most popular manifestation of the sport.

The question has to be asked, if hurdling is apparently so popular why don’t more owners enter their horses in jump races? Saturday’s evening meeting begins with the portentously named “The Big Buck’s Is Coming Next Meeting Hurdle” and it has attracted just three runners, hardly an exciting opening to an otherwise attractive programme. The race is restricted to locally trained horses which have not won a hurdle race, so the opportunity to run is reduced in two ways. Those who want to retain the hurdle event on every card should think carefully about the conditions that frame these races and do what they can to ensure they are as open and attractive to owners as possible.

On all known recent flat form Mr Opulence should win this race, but that doesn’t always work out when there are 8 obstacles to be negotiated and of his two rivals we know that Reach Out can jump well enough, even if he is slow. Steely has never jumped a hurdle in public, but he is winner on the flat in 2012 and didn’t run too badly when over 18 lengths behind I’m Harry last time. If he jumps well enough, and it’s big if, in this weak heat that form may be good enough.

The main event is The E.D. Capital Warwick Vase, a handicap over a mile and a quarter. Sweet Liberta heads the weights and I am convinced we are yet to see the best of this mare formerly trained by Andrew Balding, whose colt Impulsive Moment will have represented him earlier in the afternoon in the Derby at Epsom. In April last year she gave Becks Bolero 10lb and a 5 lengths beating, and now has to concede 13lb; a 3lb advantage may not be enough for the latter to reverse the form. First Cat beat all except the odds-on Ancient Greece last month and at level weights that was an eye-catching performance, but he’s never attempted this far and all his winning in Jersey has been at 7 furlongs. If you go back to the 2012 Jersey Guineas, King Kenny beat First Cat at level

weights; his form has been regressive since then, by he gets 17lb from his old rival and he may yet enjoy one more day in the sun. Up In Flames is a maiden after 13 runs in four countries, but he didn't do too badly in a low-level race behind Midnight Sequel last time; this is much tougher.

The Geoffrey Edwards Memorial Handicap is a typical, really competitive, 7 furlong race. It is vital that there's no repetition of the shenanigans that lead to a false start and two horses withdrawn in the sprint race at the last meeting. That was eventually won by Purley Queen on her local debut; she may not have beaten much, but she was impressive and will take all the beating here. She has won over an easy 7 furlongs at Epsom, so the extra distance should not be a problem. I despair of Spanish Bounty; he has been drifting down the handicap, but seems unable to capitalise on his easier mark though he did run respectably behind Ancient Greece last time and is bound to pop up when I desert him. Pas D'Action ran his usual sound race in a lower grade last time and the others were behind Purley Queen or were withdrawn after a false start in that shambolic sprint. It's worth pointing out that Chester'slittlegem is due to be ridden by Philip Prince, one of last season's apprentice finds and a very interesting booking here.

The "What's New Pussycat" handicap is so named in celebration of Sir Tom Jones birthday, 5th June 1940, and serves as a timely reminder that the great knight will be performing in Jersey at the Big Gig In The Park next month. This is a low-level handicap over an extended mile and includes all the usual suspects headed by Grey Panel. The latter caught a tartar in Midnight Sequel last time, but went down by only half a length with the rest well beaten off; that form is good enough to win this 9 times out of 10, but will this be the exception? Lucifer's Shadow and Jackpot are both in and out performers while Kersivay is better over shorter. Athania is not an entirely a lost cause and, for the first time, she will have the assistance of leading jockey Mattie Batchelor. It's hard to make a form case for either Frankie M or Rocquaine.

I am fortunate enough to have visited "The King" Elvis Presley's former home, but not on this day in 1982 when Graceland was first opened to the public – hence the "Graceland Handicap" which closes the programme. With the hurdle race restricted, this two mile handicap is contested by three hurdlers including the former champion, Landolino. In my view he looked as though he would improve for his first run of the season and as it was a winning one he must have a good chance of giving weight all round in here. Sworn Mammy is interesting; she is trained in Germany and has been competing in modest company in that country as well as France and Belgium; one win and a dozen places from 40 starts reads quite well in this context and it's reasonable to assume her trainer,

Rudolf Storp, considers it worthwhile travelling such a long way to compete. If this is the beginning of a trend, it may soon be a case of welcome to Les Landes, home of international racing.

Selections

Steely

Purley Queen

King Kenny

Grey Panel

Landolino