

It may come as surprise to most readers to learn that once again it was yet another grey day at Les Landes yesterday afternoon; however Race Club officials will be relieved that this had nothing to do with the weather as finally racegoers were able to bask in glorious sunshine and witness the last three races on the card being won by grey geldings on an afternoon of thrilling finishes.

One of the two races that failed to fall into this category was the opening 2013 Champion Hurdle the afternoons feature race, prior to proceedings former multiple course winning hurdler Koka Fast whose owner sponsored the race paraded in the paddock, as for the race itself despite having four runners go to post it looked a match between last year's winner Landolino and the Sir Alex Ferguson owned UK raider If I had Him. Early pace to the race was set by outsider Deepika with last year's victor close on his heels and with four furlongs to go jockey Tony Proctor asked Landolino to go on and win the race, his mount seemed to duly oblige as he quickened six lengths clear from his main rival who had been under pressure as the four runners passed the stands with a circuit to go, however the perseverance of Jockey Mattie Batchelor on If I Had Him came to fruition where it mattered as he managed to put the nine year olds head in front on the line to deny Landolino by a neck the accolade of becoming the first horse since Gunner Sid in 1999 and 2000 to win consecutive C I Champion Hurdles.

Having been mugged on the line by Batchelor in the first Proctor gained swift revenge in the following Bastille Handicap run over five furlongs as Batchelor seemed destined to make it a quick fire double on Spanish Bounty before Proctor came with a late effort on the Stephen Arthur trained First Cat to win by half a length with Country Blue finally appearing to get the hang of the tight left handed Les Landes track running his best race of the season a neck away in third. Race favourite Kersivay failed to get his normal flying start at flag fall and despite taking up the running after a furlong faded out of contention as the field turned for home.

Having enjoyed two close finishes in the opening races things got even tighter in The Brady and Gallagher (1999) Handicap when Tim Clark got Grey Panel up on the line to mug Pas D'Action by a short head with Neuilly who had been surprisingly ridden from off the pace a length back in third. This result had Les Landes form students scratching their heads as both the winner and runner up are believed to need give under foot in order to show their best form, although this could be testament to the watering efforts of the clerk of the course Mark Evans being able to prepare a racing surface that allowed the equine protagonists who do not enjoy a firm surface the chance to find a strip on the course that did not encumber their chances.

Things got even closer in the following Citation Handicap as in racing terms there was less than a cigarette paper splitting the first three home when Lucifer's Shadow gave Batchelor a double on the afternoon when getting the judges verdict by the shortest of margins from Vamos who finally consented to put his best hoof forward failing to salute the judge by a nose with Lady Petrus being denied a second consecutive win a further short head back in third, with Toggle being only a further quarter of a length back in fourth this meant less than a length separated the first four home.

The afternoon's proceedings were brought to a close in The Tom and Jerry Handicap when Tony Proctor completed his double on the card aboard Moose Moran who was completing a hat-trick of wins, after being held up for much of the race Proctor brought his charge up on the stands side, which appeared to be the quickest strip on the track to win by four lengths from King Kenny who was showing his best form for of the season with Garden Party making eye catching late progress to finish half a length away in third.

The first two home will probably be taking part in The Jersey Derby at the next meeting with the race looking as if it could be one of the best Jersey Derby's for many years as Neuilly, Landolino and the English trained I'm Harry are expected to be amongst the runners and hopefully under hoof conditions will allow last year's Derby winner Major Maximus (who was a late non runner yesterday) to defend his crown setting up a most intriguing contest. This takes place on Sunday 28th July with the normal first race time of 2:30.