

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview Sunday 25 May Fixture

From now until the end of the season racing will take place at Les Landes at two to three week intervals. However, there has been a gap of five weeks since the opening fixture, which created something of a dilemma for local trainers. It is quite a long season and not easy to keep a horse fit and ready to race from Easter until September and, with a long gap between the first and second meetings, some local trainers seemed to be of the view that they would not have their charges fully wound up for Easter knowing that they would have to ease back for a month.

This may, in part, explain the whitewash suffered by local runners on Easter Monday when English trained horses swept the board. Most of them were fit from running on the all-weather tracks and certainly looked in sharper condition than the local contingent. One of the problems is the need to accommodate the single annual Guernsey fixture, which is invariably held on the first May Bank Holiday. Depending when Easter falls, this tends to create problems for the Jersey programme and perhaps it's time the regulator, the CI Racing & Hunt Club, considered alternating that date between L'Ancrese and Les Landes. After all, the Guernsey fixture could not happen without almost all the runners coming from the UK and so, to a certain extent, it would not matter whether it occurred in early or late May.

Sunday sees Jersey's second fixture of the season when the opening race at Les Landes is the Chesil Bank Handicap Hurdle, named in honour of "George", the stable name of the grey gelding trained successfully by Stephen Arthur to win numerous races at the course, both over hurdles and on the flat. The best-turned-out prize for this and all Sunday's races is generously sponsored by Meriel Edwards who, with her husband, was a long-time supporter of the Arthur stable. Here, one UK challenger, Special Report, takes on four locals. Neil Mulholland took the hurdle race at Easter, but Special Report is less convincing on paper than The Bay Bandit, having failed to win in 27 attempts, and former CI Champion Hurdler Landolino may be capable of conceding 11lb. Constanzina seems to have too much to do, while the others are out of the handicap.

Round two is a 5 furlong handicap dash sponsored by the regulator. It also sees a challenge from Nikki Evans, the Monmouth trainer, in the shape of Thrtypointstothree. This three year old maiden looks to have plenty to do against older horses, but the form of its debut, just over two lengths behind Emirates Flyer, if reproduced here would be good enough. Unfortunately he has failed to improve in five subsequent runs and could

be vulnerable. Purley Queen and Chesterslittlegem are interesting arrivals on the local scene and Phil Collington, a leading rider in Arab races, is an interesting booking for the latter. Kersivay is not consistent, but he ran as well as any local runner at Easter and may have best prospects of keeping the prize at home.

The Bloodstock Advisory Service Jersey Guineas is the main event, an extended mile weight-for-age conditions race. Ancient Greece won embarrassingly easily under Mattie Batchelor at Easter and it's no surprise that George Baker has brought him back for more. That was over further, but he'd have won at any trip and although this is a tougher assignment he will be hard to beat. First Cat, who ran well for rookie trainer Karl Kukk last time, and Spanish Bounty look best of the home side. The other raider is Buaiteoir and has won three times on the all-weather, but not since 2011 and is hard to assess.

The Liberation Brewery Handicap will be run over a mile and a half with the weights headed by another of George Baker's team, regular visitor I'm Harry. He won the beer money at Easter over the same trip when held up by Mattie Batchelor before coming to seal the contest easily enough inside the final furlong. He's been raised 5lb, which seems fair. River Du Nord was fourth then and a 6lb pull doesn't look enough to turn the form around. Sweet Liberta won this last year when she looked on an upward curve, but a minor injury ended her season early. This is her seasonal debut and she should probably be watched for signs of better to come. Steely ran respectably on his local debut and could improve while King Kenny, though having no chance against Ancient Greece, ran well to be second; a similar performance would see him in the frame again.

The Channel Islands Racing & Hunt Club Handicap brings the curtain down. This 9 furlong handicap is for horses rated up to 55 and has drawn the biggest field with eleven facing the starter. This marks the first Jersey runner for Martin Keighley, perhaps better known as a trainer of high class jumpers from his yard near Cheltenham. He's had only two dozen runners on the flat in the past five years and his runner here, Up In Flames, is still a maiden after a dozen attempts under both codes. His third at Kempton last October reads quite well in the context of this contest. Midnight Sequel was second in a better race at Les Landes last time and this is a drop in grade. The locals are perhaps best represented by multiple winners Pas D'Action, Grey Panel, Jackpot – a winner for Brendan Powell last time, now with Alyson Malzard – and Rebel Woman who swerves a tougher encounter in the Jersey Guineas. This race is a bookies' benefit and should be approached with caution.

It can't be long odds against the visitors sweeping the board again, but it is to be hoped that the home side will strip fitter and keep some of the prizes in the Island.

Selections

Landolino

Kersivay

Ancient Greece

I'm Harry

Grey Panel