

ROSSETTI confirmed himself as one of the true "greats" of modern day Channel Islands racing by retaining his Champion Hurdle crown at the second of the Jersey Race Club's two evening meetings of the season on Friday 1st July.

In one of the best hurdle races to be run at Les Landes in many years Rossetti, under top UK-based jump jockey Noel Fehily, got the better of a protracted battle with Cahill to win by a head. Rossetti is the first horse to win the Smith and Williamson-sponsored Channel Islands Champion Hurdle back-to-back years since the Guernsey-trained Gunner Sid achieved the feat in 1999 & 2000. He also won the Jersey Derby on the flat in 2014 before switching to jump racing.

When winning the Jersey Derby, and the first of his two Champion Hurdles last year, Rossetti was trained locally by Aly Malzard but in order to race successfully this spring over in the UK (he won a Handicap Hurdle at Stratford on 14 June) the grey 8 year-old was transferred to the care of UK-based Neil Mulholland by his owners Bob and Helene Bonney in whose "Sheikh A'Leg Racing" colours he races.

This was a second win in Jersey's biggest jumps race of the year for Mulholland having saddled The Bay Bandit to take the prize in 2014. "Rossetti wants quick ground", Mulholland told the crowd when interviewed on course after the race, "He will have a couple of runs again in the UK now before coming back to Jersey for a valuable Handicap Hurdle his owners sponsor at the end of the season".

For jockey Noel Fehily it was a successful first ever ride on Jersey and came only a couple of days after his return to the saddle following an awkward Hurdle race fall at Newton Abbot on 4 May which led him to be airlifted to hospital. Fehily, who won "The" Champion Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival in 2012 on Rock On Ruby, enjoyed his first experience of Les Landes racecourse. "That was good fun", he said after the race, "Neil invited me to come out here and I was delighted to try something different. It's a nice little track and although we didn't get away from the last too quickly my horse really battled for me".

Battle he did, after being sent off the 4/5 Favourite in the field of seven. Vying for second favouritism was the hat-trick seeking Cahill (Mark Quinlan riding for Christa Gilbert) and top-rated Drum Valley (Mattie Batchelor up for Aly Malzard). With several looking to race handily, it was sure to be a frantic pace. Drum Valley under Mattie Batchelor led from the normally front-running Steely who was struggling to get to his favoured position, with Rossetti tracking this pair in 3rd. With just 2 jumped the field were already well strung out and Steely now led. Turning in for the first time and the front 3 remained the same, with Cahill close up in 4th, and the others struggling to go the pace. Approaching 3 out Mattie Batchelor kicked Drum Valley into it and he and Rossetti had soon passed Steely as the race began to unfold in earnest. Steely soon cried enough and was passed by Cahill who travelled well into 3rd. Turning in and Rossetti travelled strongly in front under Noel Fehily with Drum Valley gallantly trying to cling on to his quarters, while Cahill had come under pressure but was finding plenty for Jockey Mark Quinlan. Approaching 2 out and it looked like it was a case of how far for the favourite as he still travelled smoothly, but a sloppy jump allowed the tenacious Cahill to draw upsides and eventually head the leader on the run to the last. With both jumping the last well Cahill still held a narrow advantage, but Rossetti dug deep and

with both horses and jockeys giving their all it was the Neil Mulholland-trained grey that prevailed by a head from the fast improving Christa Gilbert trained Cahill.

With the hurdle race being the feature and given top billing as the third race on the card it meant, unusually, we kicked off with a flat race - The Country Blue Handicap over 7 furlongs in which a field of six went to post. The German-trained seven-times winner Style and Panache was sent off the 6/4 favourite under Tim Clark for trainer Rudolf Storp. First Cat narrowly shaded the veteran Spanish Bounty for second favouritism. With several of the field less than enthusiastic to start the field eventually got away, with only First Cat forfeiting ground at the start. Fast Freddie took the field along at just a modest place, with Spanish Bounty and Chesterslittlegem pulling hard in behind. Turning in and all bar the Guernsey-trained Foiled was still in with a shot at glory. Fast Freddie still held a narrow advantage from Spanish Bounty, with Chesterslittlegem and First Cat taking the outer route, while the favourite tried to mount a challenge up the inner. In the end, it was Spanish Bounty under Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor who stayed on the strongest to win by 2 lengths, with First Cat narrowly holding on from Chesterslittlegem for second. This was an eighth career success for the Aly Malzard-trained 11 year-old Spanish Bounty.

Second race was the rather ironically named (given the cold breezy weather) The Summer Evening Handicap Sprint over 5 furlongs. Only 3 went to post, and although on a hat-trick Country Blue started the second favourite to Valmina who he had narrowly beaten last time out, and making up the trio was Kersivay. The field got off to a level break, and with nothing seeming particularly keen to tow the other two along it was left to Country Blue to pull his way into the lead under Mattie Batchelor, from Valmina on the inner of Kersivay. Turning in and the field made their way to the stands side rail in search of better ground led by the Alyson Malzard trained Country Blue. Having kicked for home Country Blue had failed to find the few lengths from his rivals he normally does, and Valmina was starting to wear his old foe down and began to draw upsides at the furlong pole. Despite Country Blue gamely sticking his neck out the favourite was on top come the line to win by a head for trainer Karl Kukuk and jockey Nick Slatter. This was a twelfth career win for Valmina and his second of the year at Les Landes.

If Rossetti was the equine star of the evening, Grey Panel - winner of the La Verte Rue Handicap over 1m1f - certainly also deserves a place on the poster. The Tony Le Brocq-trained 8 year-old was recording his twelfth career win and every one has been achieved at Les Landes. Further more this victory took him past the career win tally of his dam Minnie's Mystery, herself a champion of Channel Islands racing whose eleven wins included the 2003 Jersey Derby. A field of ten went to post for this race and favourite was the Mick Appleby UK-trained City Ground who was having his 50th career start. After a false start, the field was taken along by Engaging Smile, with Grey Panel sat on the rail and favourite City Ground in third pulling hard under top UK-based amateur rider (and his usual partner) Serena Brotherton. Rebel Woman soon moved up round the wide outside, while the rest of the order remained unchanged until approaching 3 out several were starting to send out distress signals, including the leader who was soon passed by the strong-travelling Grey Panel under Tim Clark who led into the straight. In behind Chapeau Bleu had made ground under Mark Quinlan on the inside of the favourite. Having gone the shortest route, and on his favoured ground Grey Panel went on to record a very authoritative victory from City Ground who stayed on to snatch second on the line.

The final race was The "Building a Better Working World" Handicap over 1m4f. Narrow favourite was the popular Major Maximus, with last time out winners Black Night and Mr Opulence vying for second favouritism. The field jumped off at just a moderate pace with no one seemingly wanting to lead, and it was left to Lady Petrus under Philip Prince and Mr Opulence under Tim Clark to dictate a rather sedate pace. Approaching 5 out and the pace started to quicken, and this soon found out Lady Petrus who began to back track, while Aussie Lyrics and King Kenny kept the new leader Mr Opulence in their sights, with Black Night trapped out very wide on the track also keeping tabs. Appearing to race a little lazily as is his wont Mr Opulence was given a couple of reminders 3 out heading into the dip. Turning in he had been joined by Aussie Lyrics with King Kenny wider still, while in behind the English trained Zarliman made ground. Approaching the final furlong Mr Opulence was staying on stoutly, while Aussie Lyrics run had come to an end, and this left Zarliman as the nearest challenger, but having pulled hard earlier in the race he had nothing left in the tank and Mr Opulence eventually went on to score by 1 1/2 lengths. This brought up a double on the day for jockey Tim Clark and trainer Tony Le Brocq who does remarkably well with his small string of horses.

The riding double, in the last two races, puts Tim Clark on six winners for the season - two victories clear of Mattie Batchelor, Jemma Marshall and Philip Prince on four. Aly Malzard (eight winners) leads Tony Le Brocq (six) and James Moon (four) in the Trainers title race. Next meeting is the Jersey Derby on Sunday 24th July - first race 2.30pm