

AUSSIE CONTINUES CHRISTA'S PERFECT RUN JERSEY DERBY REPORT

by Mark Johnson

AUSSIE LYRICS, ridden by Mattie Batchelor, nonchalantly outclassed his rivals when winning his second Jersey Derby on Sunday at St Ouen's Les Landes Racecourse.

The six year-old grey son of Aussie Rules thus became only the third horse this century to complete back-to-back wins in the Channel Islands' most prestigious flat race emulating Compassionate (2000 & '01) and Major Maximus (2012 & '13).

Aussie Lyrics' emphatic ten length victory (it had been by seven lengths last year) also maintained a remarkable unbeaten run of success in the race for Holly Farm, St Helier-based trainer Christa Gilbert. Her record now stands at four runners/four winners in the contest as she is also the trainer of Maximus Maximus. She did not have a runner in 2014.

For three-time, and reigning, Channel Islands Champion Jockey Batchelor it was a second win in the race following his victory on Koka Fast in 2010.

As good as 4/7 favourite Aussie Lyrics looked winning - and he was impressive - The old sporting adage "It's no good being good if you're not lucky" could apply to him in this year's Jersey Derby, sponsored once again by La Vallette Investment Management Ltd.

This was a race that simply fell into the winner's lap. Firstly, on the Wednesday evening prior to the race the inform likely favourite Black Night was withdrawn having suffered a shoulder injury in training. His defection reduced the field to an unusually small four runners and then there was drama the moment the starting tape was released.

The noise of the starting tape flicking back spooked the second favourite Benoordenout causing him to whip round and unseat his rider Tim Clark. Although Clark quickly jumped back aboard, his chance was already gone and it effectively meant Aussie Lyrics was left with only two rivals - Bowl Imperior and Blue Sea Of Ibrox - to beat.

Bowl Imperior, with Jemma Marshall up for five-time Jersey Derby winning trainer Aly Malzard, set a decent early pace with Aussie Lyrics tracking in second and Jersey newcomer Blue Sea Of Ibrox (under Nora Looby) in third. Turning for home, with a quarter-of-a-mile to go in the mile-and-a-half "Classic", Bowl Imperior and Aussie Lyrics were together but the body language of the two riders told the real story. Marshall was animated urging her mount to dig in and find more while Batchelor was motionless, exuding confidence.

Around a furlong-and-a-half (300 metres) from the line Batchelor asked his mount to quicken and seal the verdict - the response was

immediate and unequivocal. Aussie Lyrics won “geared down” by ten lengths from Bowl Imperior with Blue Sea Of Ibrox the same margin back in third. Benoordenhout completed for a distant fourth.

“I was very lucky to ride him for the first time today”, jockey Mattie Batchelor told the big crowd gathered around the Les Landes Winner’s Enclosure when interviewed after the race. “Usually he is now Mark Quinlan’s ride but he had to go and ride in Germany today”.

“He traveled like a class horse throughout the race”, Batchelor explained, “And he had a real change of gear at the end. He is definitely one of the best horses I have sat on since I’ve been coming over to Jersey”. In all this was Aussie Lyrics’ ninth career success and his fifth around Les Landes.

Trainer Christa Gilbert was in no hurry to nominate any end of season plans for her stable star. He won the Channel Islands’ biggest flat handicap, The Clarendon, at the end of August last year before going over to run three times in France during the Autumn, “We’ll wait to see how he comes out of this,” she said, “but his owners certainly enjoyed their visits to France with him last year so perhaps that could be a plan again and hopefully he’ll be back for this race again next year”.

A great deal of water will pass under the bridge ahead of the 2017 Jersey Derby but if Aussie Lyrics does line up and go for the hat-trick he will be bidding to become the first horse in over thirty years to win the race three times - the most recent being Whitworth in 1983, ’84 & ’85.

Victory aboard Aussie Lyrics in the Jersey Derby completed a treble of wins in the first three races for jockey Mattie Batchelor who had also ridden Fourni to win the opening hurdle race and Country Blue to win the sprint. Both these winners were trained by Aly Malzard.

FOURNI took the 2 mile Brady & Gallagher (1999) Ltd Conditions Hurdle by five lengths from Dalmo. Although four runners went to post this was a race totally dominated by the first two home from the drop of the flag and Fourni always looked the winner having taken over the lead from Dalmo at the third last flight of hurdles.

This was a fifth career win for the seven year-old mare Fourni, and her second win of the year, having previously won on the flat over a mile-and-three-quarters in May.

The middle-leg of the Batchelor treble came on COUNTRY BLUE who made virtually all of the running to just hold First Cat a short head in the Ravenscroft Handicap Sprint. It was very close at the line (neither Batchelor or Philip Prince the rider of the runner-up were certain who had won after they crossed the line with Batchelor believing he might have just been pipped) but the camera showed course specialist Country Blue had his head down where it mattered most. Eighth of Country Blue’s nine

career wins have come over this exact 5½f course and distance.

Country Blue's win completed a terrific week as an owner for Jersey Race Club President Tony Taylor who was also owner, or part owner, of two winners at Sandown Park on Wednesday evening.

Jersey Derby winning trainer Christa Gilbert completed her own double on the card when saddling CHAPEAU BLEU to take the Animal Health Trust Celebration Mile by two lengths from Pas D'Action. Alice Mills was aboard the winning four year-old filly who came from a little off a furious early pace to record her first victory since moving to the Channel Islands from the UK.

This was a rough race with several of the ten runner field bunching up on the inside rail shortly after turning into the straight. In the melee fading early front-runner Larch clipped heels and unseated Michelle Hooper. Luckily Hooper was immediately back on her feet with only minor superficial injuries. The subsequent Stewards Enquiry found Philip Prince, the rider of fourth-placed Brown Velvet, to be guilty of careless riding (in that he allowed his horse to drift left-handed into the rail interfering with runner-up Pas D'Action, ridden by Jemma Marshall, which in a knock-on effect caused Larch to be squeezed up and unseat her rider. They fined Prince £50 for careless riding).

Jockey Tim Clark and trainer Tony Le Brocq - out of luck with Benoordenhout in the big race - received some compensation when well-backed favourite MR OPULENCE took the concluding EY'S "Building A Better Working World" Handicap by 2½ lengths from last year's winner King Kenny.

This was a third win of the year for Mr Opulence who had himself been entered in the Jersey Derby but went for this 1m6f Handicap instead. He has now won seven times (all on Jersey) - four times on the flat and three times over hurdles.

With three days racing left this Channel Islands racing season Mattie Batchelor and Tim Clark are tied on seven winners at the top of the Jockeys Championship while Aly Malzard leads Tony Le Brocq ten wins to seven in the Trainers Table.

Next meeting is the ever popular Ladies Day on Sunday 14th August (first race 2.30) when the equine action on track has to share the crowd's attention with the likes of the Best Dressed Lady and Best Hat Competitions!