

LYRICS ON SONG FOR SECOND DERBY

SUNDAY'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW

By commentator Mark Johnson

Sunday is Derby Day on Jersey and a field of four are due to line up for, what is usually, the most important race of the year in the Channel Islands headed by last year's winner AUSSIE LYRICS.

The mile-and-a-half Jersey Derby, sponsored by La Vallette Investment Management Ltd, is due off at 3.40 when it will be the third of five races on the card run at Les Landes Racecourse, St Ouen, first race 2.30.

The Derby is the true championship race of the season on the flat in the Channel Islands (run at level weights in theory to decide the best horse in the Islands) and the reigning champion AUSSIE LYRICS should put up a bold bid to retain his crown.

However his task has been made considerably easier now by the unfortunate withdrawal of likely favourite BLACK NIGHT, with a shoulder injury, on Wednesday evening thus resulting in the unusually small field for the Derby - the inclusion of BLACK NIGHT in the original field having almost certainly scared off a few potential rivals.

Six year-old French-bred AUSSIE LYRICS bids to give his trainer Christa Gilbert, based at Holly Farm, St Helier, her third win in the Jersey Derby in just five years having saddled MAJOR MAXIMUS to back-to-back successes in the race in 2012 & 2013.

Last year AUSSIE LYRICS was in virtually unstoppable form winning five times - taking his overall career win tally to eight victories. Having won at Nantes in France he then scored four-times on Jersey culminating in a seven length Derby win and an eight length romp in the Clarendon in August.

After the end of the Channel Islands season he ran three more times in France managing just a single third placing at best. The worry is did that long, and hugely successful 2015 campaign, take the edge off AUSSIE LYRICS?

After a generally disappointing 2016 season so far (no wins in four runs), AUSSIE LYRICS will significantly have the assistance of three-time and reigning Channel Islands Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor in the saddle for the first time on Sunday - Batchelor is seeking his second win in the Jersey Derby having registered his only previous success aboard KOKA FAST in 2010.

The official handicapper - who gives every horse in training a numerical "poundage" figure, after every race they run in, with a largest number in

theory signifying the best horse - rates AUSSIE LYRICS the best horse in this year's race. He has AUSSIE LYRICS on 74, BLUE SEA OF IBROX (72), BENOORDENHOUT (61) and BOWL IMPERIOR (58).

So what of the rest of the field?

BLUE SEA OF IBROX is a newcomer to the Channel Islands having formerly been trained by John Berry in Newmarket. The eight year-old grey mare has only won once - a 1m4f Maiden at Pontefract in October and hasn't run since finishing fifth on the all weather in March. She is now trained by Angie Corson who sent out KING KENNY to win the Jersey Derby in 2011.

BENOORDEHOUT will be a third ride in the Jersey Derby for former Les Quennevais student, and now UK-based apprentice jockey, Tim Clark. Trained by Tony Le Brocq BENOORDENOUT has been in great form this season, winning twice, but those victories came over a mile-and-a-quarter and then an extended mile. Stamina has to be a worry for this five year-old who has only once ever raced beyond a mile-and-a-quarter (when runner-up over 1m6f in May last year).

BOWL IMPERIOR bids to give twelve-times Channel Islands Champion Trainer Aly Malzard her sixth win in the Jersey Derby (she first won it in 2004 with CROSSWAYS and most recently in 2014 with ROSSETTI). Four year-old BOWL IMPERIOR, a dual winner in France (once on the flat over a mile plus a win over hurdles) looks to have been bought specifically with the race in mind but he has disappointed in three runs to date on Jersey.

The Verdict - If the real AUSSIE LYRICS bounces back to form (and he hinted when third last time out that he might be doing so) he will be impossible to beat and the improving BENOORDENHOUT can chase him home.

As is traditional, Derby Day gets underway with the Brady & Gallagher (1999) Ltd Conditions Hurdle (2.30) in which three of the five runners are jumping hurdles in public for the first time. None of that trio bring decent flat form to the party so it looks best to concentrate on the two well known hurdlers in the field FOURNI and DALMO. The mare **FOURNI**, trained by Aly Malzard, gets the narrow vote having finished runner-up to STEELY in this race last year and coming here fresh having missed the Champion Hurdle three weeks ago due to a minor training setback.

Sprinters COUNTRY BLUE and VALMINA served up a great finish here at the last meeting and we can expect more of the same this time

around in the 5½f Ravenscroft Handicap Sprint (3.05). Three weeks ago there was just a head between them at the line (in favour of the Karl Kukk-trained VALMINA) and now seven-times course & distance winner COUNTRY BLUE is a pound better off but VALMINA tends to only just do enough to win and I'll take him to confirm the form and record his third win of the Jersey season.

An ultra competitive field of ten go to post for the Animal Health Trust Celebration Mile (4.15) and on paper this looks to be one of the most open and classy handicaps run this season in the Channel Islands. The four year-old filly CHAPEAU BLEU ran a really good race when third behind GREY PANEL over slightly further at the last meeting and now gets a significant pull in the weights. She may be able to open her Jersey account here (she won at Kempton in the UK last year over 6 furlongs) at the expense of several inform rivals including PAS D'ACTION.

Connections of the hat-trick seeking MR OPULENCE could have gone for the Derby on this card (he was entered) but instead go for the concluding EY'S "Building A Better Working World" Handicap (4.50) in which he faces six rivals including last year's winner KING KENNY.

SELECTIONS

2.30	#2	FOURNI
3.05	#1	VALMINA
3.40	#1	AUSSIE LYRICS
4.15	#2	CHAPEAU BLEU
4.40	#1	MR OPULENCE