

AUSSIE CAN CLAIM CLARENDON GOLD AGAIN **MONDAY'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW**

By commentator Mark Johnson

A competitive field of six, headed by last year's winner and dual Jersey Derby hero AUSSIE LYRICS, will go to post on Monday for the most important Flat Handicap of the Channel Islands' season - the Ross-Gower Associates 2016 Clarendon Handicap over a mile-and-a-half.

"The Clarendon", regarded as the third and final leg of the Channel Islands Triple Crown (following the Champion Hurdle and the Derby) is always the centre-piece of the popular August Bank Holiday meeting at Les Landes Racecourse in St Ouen.

First race on Monday's five race card is due off at 2.30 with the Clarendon run as Race 3 at 3.40.

Unlike the Champion Hurdle and the Derby, in which the runners carry level weights to find the best horse on the day, the Clarendon is a handicap in which an official "handicapper" allots weights to all the various horses to, in theory, give each runner a level chance of winning.

Therefore, as officially the best horse in the race, the dual Derby winner AUSSIE LYRICS must now concede at least 15lbs to all of his six rivals.

Do not underestimate the difficulty of winning back-to-back renewals of the Clarendon - the last horse to achieve the feat was the great Compassionate, trained by Colin McCready, in 2000 & 2001. However, by way of a positive pointer to the chance of Aussie Lyrics on Monday, Compassionate also came into his second Clarendon as a back-to-back Jersey Derby winner earlier on the season.

Last year Aussie Lyrics, trained by Christa Gilbert (based at Holly Farm, St Helier) gave at least 10lbs to all of his rivals and won the Clarendon by 8 lengths. Earlier this season he won his second Jersey Derby by an emphatic 10 lengths. If he turns up in that kind of form again he will take a great deal of beating but he had a tough race at the last meeting when unable to concede 35lbs to UK-trained raider River Du Nord. He finished runner-up then beaten half-a-length.

Opposition to Aussie Lyrics is likely to be led by the Tony Le Brocq-trained Benoordenhout who won two Handicaps in May at Les Landes over shorter distances before throwing his chance away in the Derby when unseating his rider at the start. Benoordenhout will now be the only runner in the race for his connections as stablemate Mr Opulence injured a foot in training last Wednesday morning and now misses the race.

Of the remainder of the field the James Moon-trained mare Hawaiian

Freeze catches the eye amongst the lower weights. She has won both on the flat and over hurdles this season in Jersey and was a good second over hurdles at the last meeting. Bottom weight is the 11-year-old veteran King Kenny who won both this race, and the Jersey Derby, in 2011.

Just over a week after the end of the Rio Olympics “The Clarendon” can see an Aussie strike gold and AUSSIE LYRICS can “do a Mo Farrah” and complete his own double-double of Derby and Clarendon wins.

Another traditional feature of the August Bank Holiday meeting is the Wilsons Estate Agents & Keys Properties “Glory Bee” Handicap (4.15) over a mile-and-a-quarter. This is a unique race in the Channel Islands calendar as it is restricted to horses who are non-winners so far during the current season.

It would never be the plan, at the start of the season, to come back and try to win this race with a horse back-to-back years but LADY PETRUS has that an excellent chance on Monday. Twelve months ago the Karl Kukk-trained mare won the race by 2½ lengths from Carrera and she is back to try and repeat the feat against five rivals headed by Larch who won the Mile Handicap on this corresponding card last year.

However, despite her advancing years (she is now an 11-year-old) there should be no excuses for LADY PETRUS ridden by Philip Prince. All four of her career wins have come over this exact course & distance and her best two runs this year, including when third last time out when badly off at the weights, have also been over a mile-and-a-quarter.

Racing gets underway with the Arzal Memorial Handicap Hurdle (2.30) over 2 miles and this looks a hot race on paper in which any of the five runners can be given a decent chance. Champion Hurdle runner-up Cahill takes on the likes of UK-trained raider Jazzy Lady (who won over 2½ miles at the last meeting) plus last year’s winner Fourni and runner-up Dalmo. However, BOWL IMPERIOR looks an intriguing addition to the hurdling ranks in the Channel Islands and he may be able to defy top-weight and win his first race over jumps on Jersey.

The Aly Malzard-trained 4-year-old has only run on the flat in Jersey so far - finishing 10 lengths second in the Jersey Derby behind Aussie Lyrics last month - but earlier in the year he won over Hurdles in France, over 2¼ miles, for top French jumps trainer Arnaud Chaille-Chaille.

Although this is penultimate meeting of the Channel Islands’ season the Liberation Brewery & Roquette Cider Handicap is the last 5½ furlong sprint of the campaign and old adversaries throughout this season

VALMINA and Country Blue can lock horns one last time over their favourite distance. The latter currently has the bragging rights with three victories to Valmina's two this year but the latest shuffling of the weights may allow the Karl Kukkk-trained Valmina to level the yearly score.

There will also be a rematch in the finale - the Hunscombe Stud Breeding Success Handicap Mile (4.50) when course & distance first, second and third on Derby Day - CHAPEAU BLEU, Pas D'Action and Grey Panel all reoppose.

Although up in the weights, and beaten over shorter at the last meeting, CHAPEAU BLEU has every chance of making it two out of two in races at Les Landes over this extended mile trip at the expense of Pas D'Action (better over 7 furlongs) and Grey Panel (ran flat in a weaker race at the last meeting having had a hard campaign). She can complete a double on the card for trainer Christa Gilbert.

Going into the penultimate meeting of the season three-time and reigning Champion Mattie Batchelor leads Jersey-born apprentice Tim Clark 9 wins to 8 wins in the Jockeys Championship while multiple Champion Aly Malzard leads Tony Le Brocq 10 wins to 7 wins in the Trainers Championship.

* Dual and reigning Channel Islands Champion Hurdler ROSSETTI won again over in the UK on Wednesday evening - ridden by Noel Fehily the 8 year-old grey, now trained by Neil Mulholland, won a £5,500 2 mile Handicap Hurdle by 3¼ lengths. Unfortunately ROSSETTI will not race again in Jersey this season - connections reporting that he will not now run in the Firpine Development Limited Series Hurdle Race Final (the richest ever race run in the Channel Islands) on 11 September.

Selections:

2.30 1 BOWL IMPERIOR
3.05 1 VALMINA
3.40 1 AUSSIE LYRICS
4.15 4 LADY PETRUS
4.50 1 CHAPEAU BLEU