

# **NTF Weekend Notes – 2018 Aintree GN Festival**

## **Day 1 - Thursday**

### **1.45 Manifesto Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 2m 4f – Good to Soft – 6 ran**

#### **1st – FINAIN'S OSCAR**

I really think they need to get him over 3m now, something which should help his jumping. For me he just seems to struggle at his fences when they are at or near racing speed over 2m – 2m5f trips but the naturally slower speed they'd be tracking along at over 3m+ should just allow him to measure his fences that much better. He can certainly jump when he wants to, as evidenced by his leap at the final fence, and with 3 G1's now in the bank he's clearly got plenty of class to go to war with, they just need to get his trip sorted out.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> – RENE'S GIRL**

I was surprised by this one here as I thought she would be found out upped to G1 level but she put in a fine performance and she'll be worth keeping an eye on if she head's back down the handicap route, providing there is little to no movement from her current mark of OR 144.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> – CYRNAME**

Seems to be turning into a typical post-Kauto/Denman Nicholls horse (bar the odd exception of course), one that does really well in G2's and 'easier' early season G1's but then comes up short in the proper G1 races. He's possibly also at his very best going right-handed (0/3 LH – 3/6 RH).

#### **5<sup>th</sup> – MODUS**

Not a G1 animal (0/5 at G1 level) and struggles in the spring (0/9 in the March/April period).

#### **Fell – BRAIN POWER**

Continues to disappoint at G1/G2 level (0/8, 1p at G1 or G2 level – 0/7, 1p at G1 level) and I'd be hard pushed to back him in this Grade. People seem to be hanging onto his Clarence House Chase effort too much and he probably just isn't up to the top levels.

### **2.20 4-Y-O Juvenile Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 2m1.5f – Good to Soft – 10 ran**

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> – GUMBALL**

I'm pretty sure this one will prove better than his current mark of OR 136 and he's well worth keeping on the radar for handicaps next season (2018/19).

## **2.50 Bowl Chase – Grade 1 Chase – 3m1f – Good to Soft – 8 ran**

### **1st – MIGHT BITE**

Too much is being made about how good this performance was because he had a 'hard' race in the Gold Cup last time out, it was a good performance because he was the best horse in the race by some way and he won this in the manner he should have. The figures tell us plenty horses come on from Cheltenham and indeed the Gold Cup and go on to win at Aintree, as always the significance of him backing up a 'hard' race at Cheltenham is being over-egged, he's just a bloody excellent racehorse. I suppose the worry about him next year is that he'll be a 10yo come Gold Cup time and they haven't won a Gold Cup since 1998 (75 aged 10yo+ have tried and failed).

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – BRISTOL DE MAI**

Never really been a huge lover of Aintree (0/3) or the Spring/Autumn time (0/8 in March-Oct – 8/15 in Nov-Feb) so this was a highly commendable effort. He'll be a force in the top races next term when the mud is flying and I'd probably take him to overturn the form with Might Bite in the Betfair Chase at Haydock if it comes up a bog again.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – CLAN DES OBEAUX**

His first try over such a trip (3m+) but I'd say he stays it well enough and this opens up options for him. I'm not fully convinced he's a full on G1 animal (0/3 at G1 level) but I'm open on that at present. Ground with juice in it may prove his optimum (4/9 on Good to Soft or softer – 0/4 on Good ground).

### **5<sup>th</sup> – SUB LIEUTENANT**

Not sure why they persist with this one in G1's as he's now 0/14 at the top level. He's also 0/11 over 2m5f+. In fairness he's probably a hard horse to place off his mark anyway (OR 158) but if that mark could be lowered to closer to 150 he might be of interest in the Handicap sphere.

## **3.25 Aintree Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 2m4.5f – Soft – 9 ran**

### **1st – L'AMI SERGE**

For me this track just suits him better than Cheltenham (0/5 at Cheltenham) and the smaller field he had to attack also helps with his come behind style (7/16 in fields of 9 or less – 0/5 in fields of 12+). He'll always be a slightly frustrating type but if he finds himself in a field of 9 or less on Soft or Heavy ground (form of 1322211111 – 6/10, 1p) and gets a decent enough pace to aim at then he's always capable of popping up in races such as this.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – SUPASUNDAE**

I like this horse and rate him highly but there's no doubt he's a shade frustrating as he's now 1/10 at G1/G2 level and seems to have a habit of finding at least 1 too good at the top level. He'll continue to run his races but I'd never be keen to take as short a price as this (11/10f) about him.

#### **4.40 RedRum Hcp Chase – Grade 3 Hcp Chase – 2m – Soft – 16 ran**

##### **1st – BENTELIMAR**

Looks like one who excels in the April-June period (1415111 - 5/7).

##### **2<sup>nd</sup> – THEINVAL**

Got squeezed out of things just as the race hotted up and that probably just cost him the chance to have a real good crack at the winner. The ground possibly went against him in the end as he's now 1/9 on Soft & Heavy compared to 4/18 on Good to Soft+ and I just wonder if they'd be better taken the cheekpieces off of him as he's now 0/11 when they are on compared to 5/16 when he wasn't wearing them.

##### **4<sup>th</sup> – DOITFORTHEVILLAGE**

Just wonder if he's maybe a shade high in the weights off OR 139 as he travelled well enough into the contest before flattening out when push came to shove. He's probably also just a shade better in fields of 10 or less as he's now 0/10, 1p in fields of 12+. He's running well at present but a small drop in the weights and a smaller field would be preferable for him.

##### **5<sup>th</sup> – BUN DORAN**

Continues to come up short at C2 level+ (0/7 at C2 level+ compared to 3/7 at C3 level & below). He seems to have been stuck on OR 139 for a bit now and a drop in the weights is surely needed before he gets himself back in the winner's enclosure.

##### **8<sup>th</sup> – VOSNE ROMANEE**

Ground will have been against him here (0/8 on Soft-Good to Soft – 7/15 on Good+) but he's worth keeping on the radar for when the ground dries out as he's still unexposed after only six chase starts.

##### **PU – BABY KING**

Will need a drop in grade before winning again I suspect as he's now 0/8 at C2 level+ compared to 4/12 at C3 level & below. I'd have prime conditions for him as... 2m or shorter, Soft or worse, C3 & below, DSLR 31+ = 2113311 (4/7, 2p - All 4 career wins).

##### **PU – ROBINSHILL**

Ground possibly went against him here as he's now 1/9 on Soft/Heavy compared to 5/14 on Good to Soft & better.

## **Day 2 - Friday**

### **2.20 Top Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 2m 0.5f – Soft – 13 ran**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> – LALOR**

Should turn into an above average chaser and seems to love the springtime (111 (3/3) in the March/April period compared to 232220 (0/6) in the Oct-Feb period).

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> – VISION DES FLOS**

Just took a bit too long to get going and a step back up to 2m4f/5f will probably see him to his best. The sharp track also maybe caught him out a touch and he may just be at his absolute best on a more galloping track.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> – MIND'S EYE**

Travelled like a dream for most of this contest but his finishing effort very much suggested that he'll be seen to better effect over 2m4f and longer trips. I think he'll really come into himself when sent chasing next season and he's possibly some way better than the finishing position of his last three efforts suggest.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> – MIDNIGHT SHADOW**

Just passing the time until he goes chasing next season and he could be interesting if they stick straight into handicap company off his mark of OR 134 as he's sure to prove better than that in time.

### **2.50 Mildmay Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 3m1f – Soft – 9 ran**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> – TERREFORT**

Another superb performance from the 5yo and he stayed this longer trip (3m1f) with ease. He remains an extremely exciting prospect for next season.

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> – ELEGANT ESCAPE**

He was beaten far enough here that he definitely shouldn't be raised from his mark of OR 151, indeed there is maybe a small chance he gets dropped a little (beaten 13L at the line), both outcomes meaning he starts next season on a cracking mark for handicaps. He's now 0/6 at G1 level and again I'm left with the impression he's nothing more than a very good handicap chaser in waiting.

#### **PU – TESTIFY**

Not a G1 animal (0/2, 0p at G1 level) and a heavy ground handicap when the mud is flying (specifically in a field of 8 or less) is highly likely to be the best place to catch him in the future.

### **3.25 Melling Chase – Grade 1 Chase – 2m4f – Soft – 6 ran**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> – POLITOLOGUE (\*Star performer)**

His price was an insult to his chances here (11/1), given the fact he had won a Haldon Gold Cup, a tingle Creek and a Desert Orchid Chase already this season. These conditions bring out the best in him - 8 runners or less | Good to Soft or softer...for a form line of 21111211121 (8/11, 1p – all 8 career wins – the 2nds coming behind Barthers Hill, Waiting Patiently and Altior) – and this win confirms to me that it's Cheltenham rather than Left-Handed tracks in general that he doesn't enjoy.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> – MIN**

I don't think the 7yo can be faulted here and he pretty much ran to form. It's interesting to note that 3 of his 4 defeats have come on the 3 occasions he's raced this side of the Irish Sea (his sole Irish defeat came when he was demoted from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> so technically he's undefeated at home) and whilst I don't think he's a poor traveller or anything like that the facts are he's yet to win outside of Ireland. His defeats have all also come at G1 level (21222 at G1 level – 11111 at G2 level & below) and I'd always be happy to take him on at G1 level and/or outside of Ireland when he as short as this (11/10f).

#### **5<sup>th</sup> – CLOUDY DREAM**

Just not up to G1 level (0/4 at g1 level) and he's possibly not even a G2 animal either (1/7 at G2 level – 1/11 at G1/G2 level). Think he's probably caught between handicaps and graded races at the minute so a drop in the weights from OR 157 for this run would at least start to allow connections the option of Handicap Chases.

### **4.05 Topham Chase – Grade 3 Handicap Chase – 2m5f – Heavy – 27 ran**

#### **1st – ULTRAGOLD**

Just loves these fences, pure and simple (now 121 over them). He also seems to spark into life in April as well (form of 1211).

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> – THEATRE TERRITORY**

Just doesn't win enough and that continues to put me off her, especially when she's rarely giving value in the market, based on what she's done to date. It could be she wants a step up in trip as well as she does seem a tad one-paced at the end of her races.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> – BALLYALTON**

One that is probably best on better ground (0/7 Soft/Heavy – 6/13 Good to Soft+) so this run is worth marking up a shade. There's no doubt he's currently on a winnable mark (OR 138) and it was certainly interesting that they removed his usual headgear for this run, I wonder if that may just unlock something in him going forward.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> – CLARCAM**

Was cruising along as they turned for home and faced up to 2 out but he made a mistake at that fence and that just seemed to knock him out of his stride enough to finish his chances. Every chance his stamina was starting to ebb away anyway as he's now 0/11 over 2m5f+ but this was still a solid effort. Now he's on a sub 150's mark he's maybe just worth keeping on the radar for handicaps.

#### **10<sup>th</sup> – FLYING ANGEL (\*one to follow)**

Starting to slip down the handicap to an eye-catching mark (ran off OR 148 here, should go down another couple for this) but he's yet to prove he stays these trips (0/6, 0p over 2m5f+). He's also yet to win when carrying 11-05+ (now 0/7, 1p) so there was plenty against him here. If they tweak his conditions a touch then he surely goes close off his current mark and I'd have prime conditions somewhere around...2m4.5f & below | carrying 11-04 & less | Not Very Undulating tracks...which gives a form line of 111313321 (5/9, 2p – all 5 career wins).

#### **PU – MIDNIGHT SHOT**

A shade unlucky here as he missed the break on the re-start (standing start) and was always on the back-foot throughout. He also found trouble twice as he was trying to work his way back into things. He took to the fences well enough though and he'd be worth another shot over them in the future.

## **Day 3 - Saturday**

### **1.45 Gaskells Handicap Hurdle – Grade 3 Hurdle – 3m 0.5f – Soft – 20 ran**

#### **4<sup>th</sup> – DEBECE**

Shame we hadn't seen him since Aintree last season but there was plenty evidence in this run that he still holds plenty promise and ability and hopefully he comes out of this race sound and they can start planning a chasing career for next season. I suspect they may get a novice chase or two into him once the new season kicks in after the Sandown and then put him away for the summer (that's what I would do anyway!).

## **2.25 Mersey Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 2m4f – Soft – 12 ran**

### **1st – BLACK OP**

Continues to look a serious horse and his form is really stacking up and he rates an exciting prospect for the chasing game next season (2018/19). He'll need to show his fences plenty more respect than he has his hurdles but I'm sure George will work on that at home.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – LOSTINTRANSLATION**

A lot to like about this Flemensfirth gelding and he's another to stick in the notebook for chasing next term. He looks a much smoother traveller away from Heavy ground and this longer trip also played to his strengths better and 2m4f/5f+ chases should be prime for him next season, and beyond.

### **4<sup>th</sup> – AYE AYE CHARLIE**

Made some strong late headway in this and this was comfortably a career best effort. If they stay hurdling with him next season he should be interesting in handicaps from OR 134, especially if they step him up to 3m trips.

### **5<sup>th</sup> – WESTERN RYDER**

Looked to be travelling along sweetly enough but he made a mistake 4 out and that just knocked him out his stride enough to put him on the backfoot for a bit. He fought back well down the home straight but just didn't have enough in the tank to mount a serious challenge. He looks decent though and could pick up races next season.

### **6<sup>th</sup> – ON THE BLIND SIDE**

Probably just needed this run (first for 127 days) and he should make an impact novice chasing next season (2018/19).

## **3.00 Maghull Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 2m – Soft – 6 ran**

### **1<sup>st</sup> – DIEGO DU CHARMIL**

A smooth victory here for the 6yo and he's now 5/9 over 2m0.5f & below compared to 0/3 over 2m1f although he could well stay longer trips as he matures. Wouldn't have had him as a potential G1 animal prior to this but the figure he recorded in victory here certainly puts him in the picture now.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – PETIT MOUCHOIR**

Not convinced by him as a chaser and I'd always be willing to take him on at short-prices. He's now 0/6 this side of the Irish Sea compared to 5/10 in Ireland.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – SHANTOU ROCK**

Went well for a long way here before hitting a flat spot and then staying on again late in the day. This was his first run for 77 days so he maybe just needed the run and at the end of the day he's maybe just not quite a graded animal (0/3 G1/G2 level – 4/10 at C3 level & below).

### **3.40 Betway Handicap Chase – Listed Handicap Chase – 3m1f – Soft – 16 ran**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> – THOMAS PATRICK**

Now won 3 of his 4 starts over fences and he's fired in two very eye-catching figures on his last two starts. Be interesting to see what mark he's put on after this run (ran off OR 139 here) as he is starting to look like he's potentially a 150+ horse, my only worry for him is that he gets put up above his ceiling before he gets into one of the really big races (Ladbroke Trophy, Welsh National, etc...). Hopefully, however, he's not put up too much for this.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> – IBIS DU RHEU**

Starting to become very frustrating and I just wonder if he needs a breathing op or something to sort him out. He's is surely better than his current mark of OR 140.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> – HOLLY BUSH HENRY**

Seems to do all his winning in the Sept-Feb period (9/18 in those months compared to 0/10 in the Mar-Aug period). He possibly would have finished closer but for a mistake at the last but I suspect he needs to drop a couple of pounds from OR 135 before getting competitive again.

### **4.20 Stayers Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 3m0.5f – Soft – 10 ran**

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> - WHOLESTONE**

This was his chance for a Grade 1 I feel, if he was ever going to land one, but he's just starting to look like one of those that will always find at least one too good for him at the very top level and the fact he's still to break the 160 RPR figure (recorded 159 for second time in his career here) again just goes to hint he's just a smidge below the top level. Granted he would have won this comfortably had Identity Thief not been in the line-up but they may find it difficult to find another G1 as weak as this one.

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> – SAM SPINNER**

Must now be a line of thought that his win in the Long Walk Hurdle at Ascot was a bit of a one-off (a bit like Cole Harden's World Hurdle win) and he's probably been over-rated for that victory. I suspect he'll run with credit at the top level but he won't be a multiple G1 winner. He could also benefit from a jockey with more top grade experience and a bit more of a tactical brain in the saddle.



#### **4<sup>th</sup> – THE WORLDS END**

A waste of a season for me and they really need to go chasing next term now, I see no other option. The down-side of that is they may have left him hurdling too long and he'll struggle to fully make the transition to chasing.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> – OLD GUARD**

Now 0/5 at G1 level and these simply were not his conditions. He's never at his best in the spring either (0/6 in March/April).

#### **PU – THOMAS CAMPBELL**

Another that's not up to Graded level (0/6, 1p at Graded level) and he'll likely prove hard to place.

#### **PU – LIL ROCKEFELLER**

Now 0/7 at Grade 1 level and he was always likely to struggle here. He's also yet to win over further than 2m3.5f (0/10 over 2m4f+).

### **5.15 Grand National – Grade 3 Handicap Chase – 4m2.5f – Heavy – 38 ran**

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> – PLEASANT COMPANY**

Still very lightly raced for a 10yo and he travelled strongly throughout this and he was very unlucky not to get up in the shadows of the post. I wonder if they will just kick him on a bit sooner next year now they know he quite obviously stays the trip without any issue. I'd assume everything will be about a repeat bid for this next year and if it turned up heavy again he'd have to be on the radar (131P2 form on Heavy).

#### **4<sup>th</sup> – ANIBALE FLY**

A very hard mark to win the National from (OR 159) but he travelled like the class horse he is until around 2 out when either his stamina or his weight begun to tell. Be a surprise if he could better this effort next year as he'll be much higher in the weights (OR is actually 168) and I'm still not totally sure where he fits into the wider picture in the staying chase division.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> – MILANSBAR**

A fine effort from the 11yo but he maybe does just struggle in the really big fields as he's now 0/10 in fields of 16+

#### **8<sup>th</sup> – VALSEUR LIDO**

Actually not a bad effort from the 9yo although I suspect in the end he just didn't quite stay the trip. He ran off his old mark of OR 158 here but his actual mark is OR 153 and that could make him interesting in handicaps back in Ireland.

### **9<sup>th</sup> – VIEUX LION ROUGE**

Just not convinced he stays these trips as he's now 6967 over 4m+ trips, never finishing closer than 20L. He's on a decent enough handicap mark though (OR 147) so he's worth considering in handicap company.

### **11<sup>th</sup> – SEEYOUATMIDNIGHT**

Was still bang there 4 out but it's never ideal coming to the National off just the 1 starts and I wonder if he was just a shade short on race fitness in the end. He certainly took to the fences well enough so he could be of interest next year if they manage to get a smoother prep run into him.

### **PU – WARRIORS TALE**

Probably just didn't stay the trip. Jumped the fences fine though so could be interesting in a Becher Chase or a Topham maybe.

### **PU – TOTAL RECALL**

His jumping probably just isn't good enough for a race of this nature. He won the Munster National & Ladbroke Trophy as a well-handicapped horse but he's maybe just now at the ceiling of his handicap powers (OR 156).