

NTF Weekend Notes – 2019 Aintree GN Festival

Day 1 - Thursday

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

1st – KALASHNIKOV

Good to see him put that G1/G2 question mark to rest here and I'd be happy with the notion that his 'weak' point is going right-handed; 1111211U1 LH compared to 222 RH (never really looking happy in any of those 3 RH starts). Be interesting to see what the handicapper puts him up to after this as if he isn't too severe (won this off OR 148) then he could potentially bag a handicap next season before concentrating on the top class 2m4f/5f non-handicap contests.

2nd – LA BAGUE AU ROI

Has had a fantastic season but as I've mentioned previously she does seem at her absolute peak in the winter(ish) months (12/12 in Oct-Feb – 2/8 March-Apr) so it was no surprise to see her beat here (for all it was still a massive run). She can still run to a serious level in these months but her unbeaten record at other times of the year tells you exactly when she's bang at her peak.

4th – BAGS GROOVE

Just think he really struggles in these top-class races (0/5 in races worth 25k+) and his prime conditions very much look like... race worth 21k or less | Good-Good to Soft = 1111211151212 (9/13, 3p – all 9 career wins).

5th – SPIRITOFTHEGAMES

Wouldn't think he's a top of the tree performer (0/3, 0p at G1/G2 level) and a handicap at the start of next season (2019/20) may be the best place to catch him, given he is 4/4 off a break of 61+ days.

6th – GLEN FORSA

I thought he jumped poorly throughout this contest and never really met any of his fences on the correct stride. Just wonder if he's maybe more at home on a right-handed track (3/5 RH tracks – 1/4 LH tracks, failed to finish twice on LH tracks). May just be he was continually meeting his fences on the wrong stride and will be more comfortable the other way round.

2.50 Bowl Chase – Grade 1 Chase – 3m1f – Good to Soft – 6 ran

1st – KEMBOY

Just not a fan of Cheltenham? It's the only track he's ever really bombed out at (0/3) and I wonder if he'll just turn into one of those types that demolishes his opposition everywhere else but fails to produce the goods at the Cheltenham Festival.

2nd – CLAN DES OBEAUX

A disappointing effort here and he never seemed all that happy in truth. No obvious excuses for him here.

3rd – BRISTOL DE MAI

Spring/Autumn time again proving his Achilles heel and he's now 0/10 in the March-Oct period. He's easy enough to figure out and absolute prime conditions probably remain... Nov-Feb | carrying 11-07 or less = 9/14, 3p – all 9 career wins.

6th – ELEGANT ESCAPE

Simply not a G1 animal (0/8 in G1 races) and track probably doesn't suit him either (0/4 on flat tracks). At the end of the day they've no real choice but to run him in these races as he's rated OR 162 and he may just prove hard to place for the foreseeable.

3.25 Aintree Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 2m4.5f – Soft – 7 ran

1st – SUPASUNDAE

He's becoming a little bit hard to predict as to when he's going to find his way to the winners enclosure but it could be that Soft ground is bang ideal ground for him (form of 1122123131 when ground riding soft – 5 of his 8 career wins) for all he clearly acts on other ground as well. Interestingly all 3 of his G1 wins have come on Soft ground.

4th – SUMMERVILLE BOY

They surely have to go chasing with him now, there have been precious little signs of life from him over hurdles in his 3 starts this term. He's only has 8 hurdles starts so he would hopefully make the transition to fences without much hassle.

4.40 RedRum Hcp Chase – Grade 3 Hcp Chase – 2m – Soft – 13 ran

1st – MOON OVER GERMANY

Had only won 1 of his 13 previous starts then goes and wins a competitive G3 handicap at the Aintree Festival by 10L after being heavily backed all day... hard to have made a solid case for him pre-race. Ground is possibly the key to him though as he's now 1321 on Soft - Heavy (0/10 on quicker ground).

2nd – LADY BUTTONS

Probably just bumped into one here and she's got very reliable form under the following conditions...LH | Flat-Slightly-Undulating tracks | G2 level & below = 12/21, 5p – all 12 career wins).

3rd – CHAMPAGNE AT TARA

Seems best at these shorter trips (all wins over 2m1f & below) but I feel he maybe still needs to drop a bit from OR 141 before getting fully competitive. Absolute prime conditions look to be... OR 135 & below | 2m1f & below | C2 level & below | NOT Very-Undulating tracks = 5/11, 3p – all 5 career wins. He may not need to drop all the way to OR 135.

6th – MOLINEAUX

Think it was worth exploring a drop back to 2m with him albeit he did end up being out-paced at a crucial time before staying on strong after the last. He'll have chase handicaps in him when put back up in trip (2m4f+).

7th – THEFLYINGPORTRAIT

Comes to life in the summer months so this run will have done him good as connections will need to get his mark of OR 142 down before he's winning again. He's worth looking out for under the following... June-Nov | Handicaps | OR 135 or less | 17k or less to winner | Good to Soft or quicker = 9/16, 3p – all 9 career wins.

9th – EAMON AN CNOIC

Surprised he was so short for this and I'd still be having his prime conditions as... LH Tracks | 13 or less runners | Race worth 15k or less | DSLR 31+ = 111F11 (5/6 - all 5 career wins).

Day 2 - Friday

1.45 MerseyRail Handicap Hurdle – Grade Handicap Hurdle – 2m 4f – Soft – 21 ran

1st – THREE MUSKETEERS

Now 5 from 6 on Soft ground (0/15 on all other ground) and it's possibly as simple as that for the horse. If he doesn't get harshly treated by the handicapper (won this off OR 132) then Elliott could well fire another handicap victory into him if finding another soft ground opening.

4th – STERNRUBIN

Probably better over shorter and on RH tracks but he's well handicapped at present and off this decent effort he'd be worth looking out for under the following... Chase-Hurdle | RH | 2m1f or shorter | OR 142 or less = 231111122224 (5/12, 6p – 5 of 6 NH wins).

12th – MOUNT MEWS

He's on a decent mark at present (OR 137, likely to go down for this) but he's just being aimed at the wrong races. Prime conditions for him look to be... 2m3f or below | race worth less than 25k to winner = 1311111 (6/7, 1p – all 6 career wins)

2.50 Mildmay Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 3m1f – Soft – 6 ran

1st – LOSTINTRANSLATION

This performance was always likely to be in his locker for when he was stepped up to 3m. He's hard to accurately assess as he's clearly been running over the wrong trip until now and he'll be easier to assess once we've seen him run over a staying trip for a second time. You'd like to think he's very good and I'd also like to think my previous worries about him not winning as much as he should have to date have been due to bumping into top class horses (Defi Du Seuil & La Bague Au Roi) over trips short of his best.

2nd – TOPOFTHEGAME

Never really seemed fully at the races here but there was always a chance the tighter track was going to be against him due to his size (he is 0/3 on tight tracks – 3/8 on more galloping tracks). I wouldn't say the run was anything to be too concerned about and I'd be happy to put it down to him prefer more testing/galloping tracks. The Newbury's and Cheltenham's of this world are always likely to suit him better.

4th – MR WHIPPED

Not a bad effort at all considering this was only his 3rd chase start and he'd been off for 121 days. Assuming he doesn't run again this season he'll enter next season on a very workable handicap mark (OR 145) and that's surely exploitable by Henderson. The Ladbroke Trophy (Hennessy Gold Cup) springs to mind (he does look like a stayer despite not yet winning in 3 starts over 3m+, he's only 6, his stamina boots maybe don't quite fit him yet) and he does look like a winter horse (13111 Nov-Jan compared to 2P4 Feb-Apr).

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

1st – MIN

Put his spring ghost to bed in scintillating style here (first win in 6 in the March-April period and also first win in 5 this side of Irish Sea). I do wonder, however, if this was a case of him slightly over-performing and the others all under-performing as I'm not sure he's really a 20L better horse than Politologue (who finished 2nd).

2nd – POLITOLOGUE

He jumped well in the main here but just seemed once paced when it mattered and had no answer to Min. I would be slightly concerned that he's become a little triplless (not a word but you get what I mean!) after his King George experiment as since his seasonal debut win over 2m5f at Ascot he's returned the following – 4th over 3m, 4th over 2m5f, 2nd over 2m & 2nd over 2m4f – he just seems to have lost something since that King George run.

3rd – WAITING PATIENTLY

Don't think the first-time cheek-pieces were needed and I also don't think they worked. The way I see it is for him this season is that he was unlucky in the King George (Un-seated but pretty much brought down) and then he bumped into Cyrname when absolutely nothing was going to beat that one that day. With that in mind I don't think the Cheek-Pieces were needed here and that probably contributed to his 29L defeat. He probably wasn't going to beat Min anyway given the way that one ran but nevertheless he is better than a 29L 3rd. This season hasn't really gone to plan, probably through no fault of the horse's, where he goes now, however, is hard to say. I'm not fully convinced he's a proper out and out Grade 1 animal in fairness, the G1 he won last season probably wasn't the strongest.

PU – TOP NOTCH

Out with his prime conditions - 7 or less runners | Nov-Feb | DSLR 11-60 = 111111111 (9/9) – so he was never likely to put up a huge fight here.

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

7th – SAN BENEDETO

He's probably climbed too high in the weights again (OR 154) and you wouldn't be convinced he stays all that well past 2m4f. He's a consistent sort when he gets his conditions, however, and I be looking at the following as probable prime conditions...2m-2m4f | Feb-Nov | OR 150 or less | DSLR 90 or less | NOT Very Undulating tracks = 1111132116335111 (10/16, 4p – all 10 career wins).

8th – O O SEVEN

Not a bad effort from the 9yo but he's now 0/15 in Class 1 races so he was unlikely to be a factor here. This run should see him continue to edge back down the weights. He'll be of interest when back at C2 level (Class 2 level & below - 131111121 (7/9, 2p – all 7 career wins).

11th – BIGMARTRE

A mistake at the Canal Turn probably halted any chance he had of sneaking into the places and it may just be that he really does want those slightly smaller fields to run in to show his best form. Prime conditions remain... NOT Very-Undulating tracks | 12 or less runners | carrying 11-07 or less = 121113121 (6/9, 3p – all 6 career wins).

16th – BALLYHILL

Went well for long enough but he's likely to have needed this run (DSLR 48 here) and he's another that prefers a smaller field. Prime condition for him remain as... 2m0.5f+ | 10 or less runners | DSLR 30 or less = 311F511 (4/7 – all 4 career wins).

18th – EQUUS SECRETUS

Bit short on experience for a race of this nature (only 8th career start and 4th chase start) but he only really back-peddled from around 3 out and the run was plenty better than the bare form suggests. His two wins to date have come on Good ground and he was only beaten half a length the other time he met with good ground and he could be one to pick up a couple handicaps over the summer if kept on the go for the better ground.

4.40 Sefton Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 3m1f – Soft – 12 ran

2nd - EMITOM

The slow and steady pace this was run at would not have helped this lad as much as it helped the winner (Champ) and a mistake 3 out and at the last also won't have aided his cause. With that in mind his 3L second is almost certainly some way better than it looks. If they can just tidy up his jumping a bit then they could have a serious stayers hurdle player on their hands for the 2019/20 season.

Day 3 - Saturday

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

2nd – TOMMY RAPPER

A solid run that was probably on the quick side for him. His current mark of OR 136 should see him remain competitive and prime conditions look to be... 2m5f+ | Soft or Heavy | DSLR 30 or less = 111 (3/3 – all 3 career wins).

11th – COOLE CODY

A bizarre change of tactics on this front-runner, setting off with him right at the back of pack and running him in the exact opposite style to that of which he excels. On the plus side this effort should see him drop back to his last winning mark of OR 136 (ran here off OR 138). Wonder if they maybe have some future target for him as the way he was held-up out the back here makes little sense.

15th – FLEMCARA

Just not up to these levels (0/5 in Class 1 contests) and they need to lower sights with him. He's on a winnable mark at present (OR 137 & likely to go down after his last 2 runs) and he's worth looking out for under the following... Handicap Hurdle | DSLR 30 or less | OR below 139 | C2 level & below = 1111 (4/4 - all 4 career wins).

3.00 Maghull Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 2m – Good – 6 ran

3rd - DESTRIER

A big step up into graded company from his previous starts but he coped well and maybe just couldn't sustain his effort on the Good ground (053 on good compared to 111213 on Good to Soft & softer). Providing the handicapper isn't overly harsh for this run (ran here from OR 142) then he could be interesting starting off in handicaps at the start of next season (2019/20).

4th – CLONDAW CASTLE

Time to exploit his handicap mark of OR 144 I feel (may go down for this) would be far from convinced he's a top-level performer in the making.

6th – LALOR

Hard to know what to make of him now as this was a drastically poor effort. No obvious excuses either and at end of the day he's maybe not quite a G1 chaser.

4.20 Stayers Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 3m0.5f – Good – 15 ran

1st – IF THE CAP FITS

I think this backs up the comment from Harry Fry that the 'flat' nature of his last run (National Spirit Hurdle) was due to having to be given a flu booster shot in the lead up to the race. Whether he's up to Stayers Hurdle level I'm yet to be fully convinced but I wouldn't be surprised to see him land more graded hurdles next season.

4th – WILLIAM HENRY

Suspect he stayed the trip well enough (first try at 3m+) but whether he stays it well enough to be a player at the top level I'm not convinced. It was a decent run, but he may well prove a little tricky to place.

5th – LORD NAPIER

Considering he needs testing ground to show his best this was a pretty decent effort. He's actually unbeaten in the Feb-April period when meeting with Soft ground (1111 – 4/4, all 4 career wins).

7th – AGRAPART

Not had his conditions all season - Heavy-Soft | G2 level & below = 1211122 (4/7, 3p – All 4 wins) – and you suspect he may have to wait until next term before having a chance to visit the winner's enclosure again. He's slipping down the weights at present (ran here off OR 153 and likely to go down a pound or two for this run) so he could be interesting in a handicap at some point next season (2019/20).

9th – THE WORLDS END

Not his conditions here - G2 level & below | £17k or less to winner = 13111131 (6/8, 1p – 6 of 7 career wins) – and in all honesty I'm not sure they have much clue what they are doing with the horse at present. I actually think he's been poorly campaigned most of his career.

4.20 Betway Handicap Chase – Listed Handicap Chase – 3m1f – Good – 18 ran

3rd - OLDGRANGEWOOD

On a winnable mark at present (OR 137) and he was probably just a tad unlucky to bump into two unexposed novices here. These conditions suit him although a small drop in grade for absolute prime conditions would work even better... DSLR 75 or less | C2 level & below | Flat-slightly und tracks | OR 145 or less = 111B1314 (5/8, 1p - all 5 career wins).

4th – GOLD OPERA

A massive run under conditions that were almost certainly far from ideal (and his saddle also slipped late in the day). He's worth looking out for under the following... Hcp Chase | LH track | Soft/Heavy |

Field of 8 or less | DSLR 45 or less | 2m0.5f-2m5.5f = 2211313141 (5/10, 3p - All 5 career wins)
although this effort does suggest he maybe doesn't need all those boxed ticks to get the job done.

6th – WILLIE BOY

Not convinced there's 3m+ worth of stamina in this lad and he's actually now 0/7, 0p over 2m4.5f+ trips. They tried 3m the last 3 times and he's never really looked like winning but the up side of that is he's slipping back down the weights. Prime conditions for him remain... flat/slightly undulating tracks | 2m3.5f-2m4f | 10 or less runners = F11621 (3/6, 1p – all 3 career wins).

7th – SOME BUCKLE

Solid enough effort but he'll appreciate a smaller field and a drop in grade, with prime conditions remaining... LH track | Flat-Slightly Undulating | 11 or less runners | C2 level & below = 131P1213 (4/8, 3p – all 4 career wins). There is enough in the way he's running at present, however, to suggest his new yard can get a win into him at some stage.

PU – TOUCH KICK

Just does not appear to go anywhere near as well Left-Handed (0/7) as he does Right-Handed (5/10).

PU – SPRINGTOWN LAKE

A smaller field and a drop in class should see him more competitive and prime conditions remain... 11 or less runners | race worth 10.5k or less | not very undulating tracks = 11F12 (3/5, 1p – all 3 career wins – fall came when clear at the last).

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

4th – WALK IN THE MILL

Clearly enjoys these fences/track although was maybe ridden a shade too forcefully in the mid part of the race and that just left him empty for the final push. Possibly would have preferred a bit more cut underfoot as well (1/8 on Good to Soft – 3/6 on Soft). He warrants plenty respect for future Nationals, providing they keep his handicap mark in tact (Walford seems keen to do that considering he ran twice over hurdles between this and his Becher Chase victory back in December).

PU – WARRIORS TALE

Just doesn't stay this trip, probably as simple as that. They'd be better aiming for the Grand Sefton (won this season) and Topham as he does seem to enjoy the track until stamina becomes an issue.

PU – RAMSES DE TEILLEE

A hard task for a 7yo and you feel they should have just had patience and given him another year of racing before targeting the race.