

NTF Weekend Notes – 2019 Cheltenham Festival Days 1 & 2

Day 1 - Tuesday

1.30 Supreme Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 2m0.5f – Soft – 16 ran

I had a dig about to see how runners of this race fared when appearing again before seasons end (last 6 seasons). If you look at those that ran next time out under the following... hurdle race | DSLR 21-60 | 3-5 starts in current season | IRE-FR bred | last race was the Supreme Novice...you get the following...13/28 | 46% S/R | +£28.34 BFLSP – W&P 19/28 | 68% S/R – 49% above expectation. That covers things like Aintree, Fairyhouse, Punchestown (and of course anywhere else they may appear). (They were 0/6 last season under the conditions highlighted but 3 of them did finish 2nd)

1st – KLASSICAL DREAM (*Star performer)

I thought this one jumped immaculately throughout and could probably have been called the winner some way out. If he transfers his technique to chasing then he could prove to be a serious force in the novice chase scene next term. He's won all 3 of his starts for Mullins, all on various ground, and there is a lot to like about him.

2nd – THOMAS DARBY

Probably wasn't ridden to win this but even still it was a fine effort on his first run at graded level and on ground this soft. He's now run 1st & 2nd from 2 starts at the track and clearly enjoys the test of Cheltenham.

3rd – ITCHY FEET

Like his stable-mate (Thomas Darby) he probably wasn't ridden to win this but again it was a decent effort. This was a big run considering he had been off the track for 114 days and it was also a positive to see him handle soft ground (running on soft for the first time). I'm not 100% sure where he fits into the wider picture although I suspect he's maybe a future handicapper at best.

4th – FAKIR D'OUDAIRIES

Always a very tough race for a 4yo to win so although he did finish as a beaten fav I think he still deserves plenty respect for finishing 4th, he certainly finished his race off very strongly. He should be a force back against juveniles for the remainder of the season.

5th – FELIX DESJY

Probably a better effort than the bare results suggests as he came there with a chance 2 out and unlike a couple who finished a head of him he was ridden to win the race and that ultimately is probably what lost him his place chances. His jumping has improved throughout the season and he

could be an interesting type to go chasing with next term, there's a good chance there is a serious graded horse lurking within him.

6th - ARAMON

He travelled well into contention but didn't quite pick up going up the hill and he was also slightly impeded by Felix Desjy as they jumped the last and made their efforts to the line. He possibly doesn't want things as soft as this.

7th – ANGELS BREATH

I wonder if he just lacked the necessary race craft for this (only his third career start) but the effort probably isn't as bad as it looks as he seemed in trouble as the race heated up but dug in well enough to not be disgraced in 7th. There's no doubt he's a talented animal and he should show that to greater effect when he goes chasing next season. He remains an exciting prospect.

9th – VISION D'HONNEUR

Should make into a better chaser than he is a hurdler, it would be a disappointment should fences not bring about significant improvement for him.

10th – AL DANCER

Always tough to win a G1 Hurdle at the Festival off a Handicap prep (this lad won the Betfair Handicap Hurdle last time out) and you have to say he did fade badly when push came to shove. I'm not yet convinced he's a full-on graded performer in the making (out with handicaps).

2.10 Arkle Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 2m – Soft – 12 ran

Not that easy to make a profit from Arkle runners before seasons end. 4 of the last 5 Arkle winners did win next time out but they were all odds-on to do so.

1st – DUC DES GENIEVRES

For all this probably wasn't the strongest Arkle in recent memory this lad did destroy the opposition here and he's clearly a serious player. How serious a player isn't easy to decipher though as he's 'only' won 2 of his 9 starts since moving over from France, albeit it has been his last two and they've been by 15L & 13L. He's maybe just taken a while to get used to life over here and if that has been the case then he could go on a bit of a run now he's found the winning thread.

4th – CLONDAW CASTLE

Has improved as the season has progressed and he took this step up to G1 level in his stride. He was beaten 19.5L at the line (which isn't a true reflection of his ability) and that should keep his handicap mark from rising and although connections must be tempted to stay down the G1 route I would like to see them have a dart at a valuable handicap before seasons end. Flat tracks may just suit him best as he has appeared to fade up the hill on both his starts at Cheltenham to date.

7th – HARDLINE

I didn't really get the strength in the market behind this lad and he was well-beaten in the end. It looked a relatively weak G1 he won at Limerick and I'm not convinced he's a full on G1 player. His form does also seem to dip in the spring time (form of 0/5 in March-April).

PU – LALOR

He's better than this but for me his preparation was all wrong for a race of this nature and his non-completion wasn't of any great surprise. Would be no shock to see him bounce back at Aintree (won at the last 2 Aintree Festivals).

UR – KALASHNIKOV

Very unlucky here as he was all but brought down by a faller in front of him. He looked to be travel well within himself still, albeit there was still half the race to go so hard to make any hard and fast assumptions about the run. I'm willing to give him a chance to prove he's a G1/G2 player Left-Handed although I'm still on the fence about his true abilities (is he nothing more than a G3 level and below player or is it the LH-RH track bias that is the important factor?).

2.50 Ultima Handicap Chase – Grade 3 Handicap Chase – 3m1f – Soft – 24 ran

Overall not a race that is of a great source of next time out winners (when racing again in current season) with 6 years stats of 8/107 | 7% S/R | -£40.92 BFLSP – W&P 23/107 | 21.5% S/R – 25% below expectation. You can, however, find those 8 winners with a couple of filters...Last race was Ultima Handicap | Chase worth 10.5k – 100k | Aged 6yo-9yo | 4-7 starts in season | 5-8 starts last 365 days | 3-12 previous Chase starts...which gives...8/23 | 35% S/R | +£43.08 BFLSP – W&P 12/23 | 52% S/R – 123% above expectation.

2nd – VINTAGE CLOUDS

A big run on his first start off a wind-op and he is starting to look appealing for the (Aintree) Grand National (which you have to assume has been his main aim all season). He's just a genuine and tough handicapper and he seems effective an all ground and although he's yet to win in 12 attempts at Class 1 level he's placed 7 times and if he's still on his feet come the elbow you'd expect him to be staying on stronger than most.

3rd – LAKE VIEW LAD

I thought he was potentially anchored by the handicapper on OR 155 but this run gives a hint that maybe isn't quite the case. He's in the National as well and although there may be better handicapped sorts in the race it's not hard to see him running well.

4th – BIG RIVER

Had a bit of a stop-start season so far but this was a solid effort and he looks well handicapped on OR 140. The helter-skelter of a Cheltenham Festival handicap may not have been ideal for him but

he dug in well and finished strongly. He hints at having a decent staying prize in his locker somewhere and you wouldn't be surprised to see him run well in a Scottish National.

5th – FLYING ANGEL

Might have to give up trying to predict the ideal conditions for this one! Turning into one of those NTD horses who turns up everywhere and pops up unexpectedly (albeit the trends did point towards him running a big race here). His biggest asset is the fact he remains well-handicapped on OR 142 and he's probably just worth viewing on a race-by-race basis.

8th – UP FOR REVIEW

I suspect he was booked for a place until hitting 3-out and that just seemed to knock the stuffing out of him. I wouldn't be surprised to see him pick up handicap back on Irish soil before seasons end.

12th – O O SEVEN

Always likely to be too hot for him a race like this but this should see his mark drop back a couple (which he almost certainly needs) and his prime conditions remain... Class 2 level & below - 131111121 (7/9, 2p – all 7 career wins).

13th – SINGLEFARMPAYMENT

Always going to have needed this run (DSL 88) as he's 0/9 off a break of 46+ days. He remains a tricky bugger to catch right but may still be worth looking out for under the following 'rough' prime conditions... LH tracks | 3m+ | G3 level & below | 2+ starts in season | DSLR 16-45 = 252111 (3/6, 2p – all 3 career wins).

PU – SHANTOU VILLAGE

Never been one for large fields (0/8 fields of 15+) or indeed testing ground but this defeat should see his handicap mark continue to slide. He's worth looking out for under the following conditions... Good-Good to Soft | 13 or less runners | 21k or less to winner...where he is 11111111 (8/8 – all 8 career wins).

PU – MISTER WHITAKER

Not convinced he's a stayer (0/3, 0p 2m5.5f+) and I also suspect he's a shade high on OR 151. He'll hopefully go down for this though and somewhere mid to high 140's is probably about his ceiling.

3.30 Champion Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 2m0.5f – Soft – 10 ran

If we are looking for an angle to follow the Champion Hurdle runners on their next start, then this could be it... Running at Aintree Fest or Punch Fest (Hurdle) | Finished top 8 in Champion Hurdle LTO | Aged 6yo-9yo...which gives...11/23 | 48% S/R | +£40.20 BFLSP – W&P 14/23 | 61% S/R – 60% above expectation

1st – ESPOIR D'ALLEN

Visually this was extremely impressive but it's hard to accurately put a level to this performance in my mind, such was the fact the main players fell away long before it became a serious contest. That's taking nothing away from this lad, it's just not that easy to say where he fully fits into things. One thing I do think worth noting is the fact he won this as a 5yo, in a race that we know is notoriously difficult for 5yo's to win. The fact most 5yo's that try to win the Champion Hurdle ran in the previous seasons Triumph Hurdle, whilst this one avoided the spring festivals last season, hints that any high class 5yo that didn't run in a spring festival, or at least missed the Triumph, has a better chance of landing the Champion Hurdle than one that did take in all the top G1 juvenile races.

4th – LAURINA

Was always going to be tough stepping up to take on the boys for the first time, especially after two uncompetitive warm-up races this term, and she probably just found this a bit too much of a step. She could improve for the run though and I wouldn't completely rule her out of things based on this, far all you feel chasing is probably where she should be aimed at now (next season).

5th – VERDANA BLUE

Not her conditions – prime conditions are Flat/Slightly undulating tracks | Good or Good to Soft | DSLR 60 or less = 111311110 (7/9, 1p – all 7 NH wins) – and this was probably as good as could have been expected.

6th – APPLE'S JADE

I'd now be convinced she isn't as effective at Cheltenham as she is elsewhere, given she's been beaten on 3 of her 4 starts at the track and her RPR figures and speed figures recorded at Cheltenham are some way down the list of her best performances on the figures. She shouldn't be judged on this effort and could well bounce back at an Aintree or Punchestown before the season is out.

4.50 Close Brothers Novices' Handicap Chase – Listed Handicap Chase – 2m4f – Soft – 20 ran

Tough to find a solid angle for horses running again in same season after contesting this but the following is at least worth considering...Ran in Close Brothers Novice Hcp LTO | 2m-2m5.5f Hcp | Horse aged 7yo | 2-5 previous handicap chase starts | SP 8-1 or less...which gives the following...6/11 | 55% S/R | +£36.83 BFLSP – W&P 9/11 | 82% S/R – 173% above expectation.

1st – A PLUS TARD

Surely a Graded Chaser in waiting here, given he thumped this field by 16L off OR 144. He's only been out of the top 2 once in his 9-race career...and that was a 3rd of 15 in a valuable hurdle in France, he's simply a very exciting youngster to keep on the radar.

4th – THE RUSSIAN DOYEN

Hard to know what happened to him the last time he ran at Cheltenham (28L 5th of 5) but apart from that there's been plenty to like about his chase starts. He could have a decent handicap in him somewhere although it's hard to pick out any prime conditions for him at present.

5th – SPRINGTOWN LAKE

A decent enough effort but he's possibly at his absolute best in smaller fields (0/3, 0p in 16+ runner fields) and rough prime conditions look like they could be...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).

10th – HIGHWAY ONE O ONE

Reckon these races at this level are just too competitive for him and he'll probably be best suited to the following... Class 2 level & below | field of 13 or less = 2121112211 (6/10, 3p – all 6 career wins).

5.30 National Hunt Cup Chase – Grade 2 Novices' Chase – 4m – Soft – 18 ran

An interesting one, albeit possibly not that robust, for those that ran again next time out before seasons end...last run in NH Cup (4 miler) | DSLR 26-60 | Hcp Chase | 0 previous Hcp Chase wins | 3-7 chase starts | 1-3 chase wins...which gives...8/18 | 44% S/R | +£68.81 BFLSP – 262% above expectation.

PU – OK CORRAL

A very tough race to win off the back of only 2 starts AND as a 9yo and for me this wasn't the right race for him. He's better than this effort.

PU – CHEF DES OBEAUX

Really doesn't seem to enjoy large fields (P3PP in 13+ runner fields) and he'll be better suited to less runners around him. Things haven't really gone to plan for him this term but he's probably not really been running in races that are ideal for him and I'd be looking at the following as potential prime conditions... fields of 9 or less | DSLR 45 or less = 1U111 (4/5 – all 4 career wins). As a 7yo time is still very much on his side.

Day 2 - Wednesday

1.30 Ballymore Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 2m5f – Soft – 14 ran

Some decent stats for next time out runners (before end of season) from this one... Ran in Ballymore Novice Hurdle LTO | 2m4f – 3m | Horse aged 5yo or 6yo | 2-5 starts last 365 days | 3-5 previous hurdle starts...which gives the following...8/17 | 47% S/R | +£51.35 BFLSP – W&P 11/17 | 65% S/R – 88% above expectation. In all honesty it's been profitable to follow all Ballymore Hurdle runners on their next start, regardless of if it's before seasons end or start of next season, but for now I'm happy to concentrate on those appearing before end of current season.

Despite historically this being a strong race I'm not actually all that convinced that long-term, apart from the front 3 home, that this was all that strong of a renewal...

1st – CITY ISLAND

Done precious wrong in his career to date and there's every chance he'll take the step out of the novice ranks in his stride next season.

2nd – CHAMP

Not sure where I stand with this one at present. He's clearly above average but I'm not sure quite how good he'll turn out to be, I'm far from convinced he's a full on G1 performer (although obviously still very much open on that). Reminds me a bit of Yanworth.

3rd – BRIGHT FORECAST

Can't help but feel he could have won this had he raced closer to the pace, given the strength with which he finished the race. Not sure about his future but my first instincts are that he's possibly got more to give as a hurdler (rather than a chaser).

2.10 RSA Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 3m 0.5f – Soft – 12 ran

This has not been a great race to follow when runners appear again before the end of the season. In the past 6 seasons 44 RSA runners have run again that season and have returned the following...5/44 | 11% S/R | -£20.02 BFLSP – W&P 17/4 | 39% S/R – 41% below expectation. Those that have run in a handicap next time out before seasons end are 0/17, 5p.

1st – TOPOFTHEGAME

An impressive performance from the 7yo and you just get the feeling the penny hasn't fully dropped with him yet, with regards to chasing, which probably makes this effort even more noteworthy. Could be the further he goes the better – form of 1F121 over 2m6f+ - and it would be no surprise to see him as a Gold Cup player next term, once he's fully filled into his massive frame.

2nd – SANTINI (*Star performer)

I really like this horse and given the interrupted build up he had for this contest it's hard not to be impressed by his performance here. He looks a like a Native River style horse in the making, one who will relish staying trips on galloping tracks, making him a prime player for the 2019 Ladbroke Trophy (Hennessy Gold Cup). Given a clean season in 2019/20 it's easy to see him being one of the main contenders for Gold Cup honours come spring 2020. With a smoother preparation (held up by the flu-jab fiasco and a stone-bruise in the week leading up to the race) I think he wins this.

3rd – DELTA WORK

Not the best ride Davy Russell has ever given one round here, it must be said. In fairness the horse never looked 100% happy throughout, making scratchy errors throughout, but the fact he was still bang there as the race heated up tells you he's a horse that's chocked full of talent. He's only a 6yo and still looks to have a serious future ahead of him but you'd just want that jumping tidied up a little for him to make into a proper player next season.

4th – MISTER MALARKY

Easily brushed aside by the front 3 here and I don't have him as a Grade 1 player in the making, certainly not on ground with plenty cut as he's now 0/7 on Soft & Heavy (4/8 on quicker ground). Not sure exactly where he slots into the wider picture but given that he looks all about stamina I do wonder if a national of some sorts on decent(ish) ground could be in his locker somewhere down the line.

6th – DROVERS LANE

Another that won't have appreciated the soft ground (0/4, 0p on Soft ground) and he's better than the bare form suggests.

7th – COUNT MERIBEL

Doesn't seem to be a stout stayer (0/3 over 3m0.5f+) or a Graded animal (0/5, 05 at G1 or G2 level). All his wins have also come in October & November and he may be best caught at the start of next season (2019/20 season) in a G3 or less handicap back down in trip. If you look at him under the following... Oct-Nov | NOT G1 or G2 | 2m3.5f-2m5.5f...you get a form line of 11111 (5/5 – all 5 career wins), which obviously brings in things like the BetVictor Gold Cup.

PU – THE WORLDS END

Although he did win a G1 as a Novice Hurdler, I just don't think he'll reach those heights over fences (overall career record in G1's 1/7, 0p). His prime conditions may be... G2 level & below | 17k or less to winner = 13111131 (6/8, 1p – 6 of 7 career wins).

2.50 Coral Cup – Grade 3 Handicap Hurdle – 2m5f – Soft – 25 ran

Tricky one to get any sort of worthwhile angle to follow Coral Cup runners on their next run (before seasons end) but after a bit of fiddling I settled on...Ran in Coral Cup LTO & returning before seasons end | 2m4f-3m0.5f | race worth 4k – 30k | Aged 6-10 | DIDN'T win 1 of last 3 starts | SP 18-1 or less...which returns...9/23 | 39% S/R | +60.22 BFLSP – W&P 14/23 | 61% S/R – 100% above expectation

1st – WILLIAM HENRY

Lightly raced for a 9yo and the wind-op he had prior to this run clearly seems to have had the necessary impact. This win took his form off a break of 21-85 days to 144112111 (6/9, 2p – all 6 career wins) and that looks his ideal rest period.

3rd – BALLYANDY

You have to think they will remain hurdling with him now, given his flirtation with chasing doesn't seem to have knocked his hurdling technique any. Not the easiest to pin down to prime conditions but he does seem to enjoy galloping tracks and big fields.

4th – BRIO CONTI

Travelled and jumped well in this but he's maybe just at or near the ceiling of his abilities now after his win last time out. Wouldn't be 100% confident on that but it's something to keep in mind.

6th – APPLE'S SHAKIRA

Hard to know where's she at currently but this was at least a run that showed signs of life and if this does revitalise her then her mark of OR 140 is surely exploitable.

18th – VISION DES FLOS

Not convinced he fully stays these trips as he's now 0/4, 0p over 2m5f+. He only gave way around 2 out so that again suggests the longer trip maybe just isn't for him and the weak finish is easily enough explainable.

3.30 QMCC – Grade 1 Chase – 2m – Soft – 9 ran

Some interesting observations about next time out runners (in current season) from QMCC. Those that finished 5th or worse in the QMCC and ran again in current season are 1/23 | 4% S/R | -£21.51 BFLSP – W&P 5/23 | 22% S/R – 75% below expectation, as such it seems best to concentrate on those that finished in the top 4. If we look at... Top 4 finish in QMCC LTO | 8-17 previous Chase starts | Grade 1 & Aintree or Sandown...we get the following...8/11 | 73% S/R | +£45.48 BFLSP – W&P 9/11 |

82% S/R – 94% above expectation. Not a lot to work with but at least 1 winner each of the last 6 seasons and it was 2 from 2 last season.

1st - ALTIOR

Always great to watch a champion at work but viewing the race from a purely form perspective I do just wonder if he ran a shade below par here, given the proximity of Politologue in second (who has proven in the past he doesn't handle this track all that well) and Hell's Kitchen in a 9.5L 4th. Certainly signs throughout the race that 2m is possibly just too sharp for him these days and it's his sheer class that gets him through to the winning line in front. Be good to see them at least test the waters over longer trips, sooner rather than later.

2nd - POLITOLOGUE

Easily his best effort at the track, which is odd considering it was coming off a below par run at Ascot last time out under prime conditions. I'd have him running pretty much to form here and Altior running below form. Regardless of that this was a solid warm up for the defence of his Melling Chase crown at Aintree.

3rd – SCEAU ROYAL

A huge run from the 7yo but he's now 0/7 in races worth 50k+ and I'd still debate whether he's really good enough to be landing one of the very top races. I'd still have prime conditions for him as... 7 or less runners | Oct-Jan | race worth less than 50k to winner = 11121111122 (9/12, 3p - All 9 wins).

4th – HELL'S KITCHEN

Not always the easiest to predict but no real surprise when he throws in a run good enough to grab 4th in a QMMC, he seems that kind of horse that will run above par without warning. Prime conditions would still look to be... Soft | DSLR 45 or less | field of 10 or less = 1113 (3/4, 1p – all 3 career wins) so he should come on for this run (first for 81 days).

5th – MIN

Never seriously involved in this and this was another defeat away from 'home soil' (now 0/4 this side of Irish Sea) and another defeat in the spring months (now 0/5 in March-April period). Prime conditions remain... Nov-Feb | Ireland = 111211111 (8/9, 1p – all 8 career wins).

7th – SAINT CALVADOS

Just not a G1 player as he's now 0/4, 0p at G1 level compared to 4/4 at G2 level & below.

4.50 Fred Winter Handicap Hurdle – Grade 3 Handicap Hurdle – 2m 0.5f – Soft – 22 ran

Interesting that when you look at those that ran again in same season it pays to follow those that go down the Non-Handicap route rather than the Handicap route, with the splits being... Handicaps – 4/43 | 9% S/R | -£18.50 BFLSP || Non-Handicaps – 10/46 | 22% S/R | +£19.97 BFLSP. Looking deeper we get the following angle... 4th or worse in Fred Winter LTO | Non-Handicap | Top 2 finish 1 of last 3 starts | 3-5 previous Hurdle starts...which gives the following...10/21 | 48% S/R | +£44.97 BFLSP – W&P 13/21 | 62% S/R – 150% above expectation.

2nd – COKO BEACH

A big race from the youngster and I wonder if they'll go Chasing with him next term. He makes a fine shape at his flights and he should jump fences without any hassle. Elliott isn't scared to put them over fences early in their careers and he could well pick off a few novice chases early in the season when getting the weight concessions.

5.30 Champion Bumper – Grade 1 Bumper – 2m 0.5f – Soft – 14 ran

Not all that easy to source profits from the Champion Bumper runners that run before seasons end but the following did catch my eye... Ran in Champion Bumper LTO | Aged 4yo-5yo | Won 1 of last 3 starts | 2-3 starts last 365 days | 0-3 starts in current season = 9/31 | 29% S/R | +£20.25 BFLSP – W&P 18/31 | 58% S/R – 23% above expectation. Won't make you rich but potentially worth keeping an eye on.

1st – ENVOI ALLEN

Looks a serious horse in the making and he could be something pretty special when going over hurdles. He's an unbeaten 4 from 4 in bumpers, his form stacks up well, he looks the part and he's not afraid to battle when needed...he's got the makings of a superstar.