

Ten 3yo Handicappers for your 2020 notebooks...

With the jumps season packed away until at least the 1st of July, my attentions are fully and firmly focused on the flat game.

A significant part of my flat work/punting revolves around unexposed handicappers, primarily 3yo's that will be entering handicaps on what looks to be a mark below their handicap ceiling.

My own personal betting activities on 2yo's would be minimal at best but at the same time they are a group I watch extremely closely, with a view to pinpointing those that have managed to attain an eye-catching handicap mark (intentionally or unintentionally) for their 3yo season.

I've spent the last couple of weeks during the enforced lockdown period sifting through my mountain of notes from the 2019 flat season, cherry-picking ten unexposed (and as yet winless) 3yo's who I feel should be visiting the winners enclosure when entering handicap company this summer.

What follow in this free NTF guide are ten unexposed 3yo handicappers, all of whom caught my eye during their 2yo career with a view to a future handicap campaign.

I will be highlighting these youngsters in the **NTF Members Area** when they are due to run although I'd also suggest adding them to a tracker tool of your own personal choice so you are able to keep an eye on them.

Enjoy...

FINEST SOUND (S Crisford)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 82 | 2019 form - 333

Simon Crisford's Exceed And Excel gelding ran three solid races in his juvenile campaign, finishing third on each occasion.

The first of those runs came at Sandown on the 30th August, a race where he broke slowly before coming through to challenge the clear winner in the final 100yds, only losing second in the dying strides. The two that finished ahead of him that day both won next time out (their only other starts of the campaign) with the winner – Palace Pier – now rated OR 98.

Finest Sound turned up a Sandown again for his second start, again running third. The second horse that day – Never Alone – has won two of his following three starts and finds himself rated OR 87.

His final start of the season saw him rock up at Newmarket in a Class 4 Novice. He made a telling move that day between the 2-furlong and 1-furlong poles but found himself unable to cope with the finishing kick of the impressive Kinross (who won by 8L) and the Saeed Bin Suroor trained Raaeb. Kinross went on to start as 13/8 fav for the G1 Vertem Futurity Trophy Stakes next time out whilst Raaeb ran three more times, pulling in a form line of 1-4-2 and finding himself rated on the lofty enough perch of OR 97. Also worth noting that the fourth horse home – Al Qaqaa – was only beaten a head next time out and the fifth horse home – the Aiden O'Brien trained Vatican City – won next time out and now finds himself rated OR 93.

FINEST SOUND showed plenty of greenness and inexperience on all three of his starts so Crisford has wasted no time at all in giving his youngster the snip and I'd expect the 3yo to have his mind firmly on the job in hand this summer.

Looking at the horses he was mixing it with last term and the marks a few of them now find themselves on, it would be a disappointment should Finest Sound not manage to take advantage of his current rating of OR 82 when entering the handicap arena.

JELLYSTONE (R BECKETT)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 75 | 2019 form - 7546

Four starts as a juvenile for Ralph Beckett's son of Kodiak and although he failed to place on any of those starts there was enough shown from the youngster to suggest he one that's worth keeping on the radar for a future career in handicaps.

His first two efforts showed a mix of promise and greenness and he put those runs to good use of his third start of the campaign, with a strong finishing 4th over a mile at Kempton, beaten only a length come the line. The winner that day – First View – won again next time out and currently finds himself on a mark of OR 90, despite having a somewhat disappointing start to his 3yo career in four down the field runs at Meydan. The second horse – Stanford – also won next time out before firing in two runners-up efforts and is currently rated OR 79. The third horse – Lord Neiden – is now rated OR 78 and the sixth home – Ya Hayati – won his next two starts and is currently parked on OR 92. All in all the race has produced six winning performances (from 5 horses) and stands up well on the form front.

Jellystone's final start of the season came on heavy ground at Newbury and although he wasn't disgraced in 6th he probably wasn't really enjoying the testing conditions. The race has actually worked out strongly enough since, with the 2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th pulling in form figures of... 2-1-1-2-3-2 (6 runs – 2 wins, 4 places)... and the first four home now rated 89-84-101-78. So again, another solid piece of form to work with and more evidence that OR 75 looks a tidy mark for Jellystone to be starting the season on.

He's another that has had the snip in the off season, with Beckett looking to make sure the youngster has his mind firmly set on the job at hand, and it surely won't be long before his mark of OR 75 is left far behind.

NAIZAGAI (R Varian)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 80 | 2019 form - 322

Another poor bugger that has been given the snip in the off season...

The Dark Angel gelding was given three quick spins at the back end of last season (14th Oct – 1st Nov – 28th Nov), placing on all three and gaining a mark of OR 80.

On the first of those runs (a third at Yarmouth) he had the John Gosden trained Mishriff 1.25L behind him in 4th, with that one now rated OR 101 and holding entries for both the English & Irish 2000 Guineas (if we ever get to see those races!).

He improved on that effort on his next start with a second placed effort at Newmarket, with the third horse – Celestran – winning next time out to boost the form.

His third and final start was up in trip over a mile at Lingfield, where he just failed to reel in the pace-setting Transition from the Amanda Perrett yard, a horse that won next time out and finds itself on a handicap mark of OR 83.

It won't take much of a step forward in form for Naizagai to be winning in handicap company and Varian should be able to find an opening relatively easily.

DAMAGE CONTROL (A Balding)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 79 | 2019 form - 7425

Still a maiden after four starts as a juvenile and yep, you guessed, he was gelded during the winter months!

Balding squirreled in four relatively rapid runs for this son of Zoffany at the back end of the season, with his first run on the 5th of September and the final run on the 23rd of October, standard handicapping practice whilst all the time making sure the youngster was gaining enough experience for a tilt at some handicap pots in his 3yo season.

He was never really put into things on his racecourse debut at Salisbury but he wasn't beaten all that far in 7th (5L) and the race itself has a very solid form look to it, with 20 subsequent runs producing a hefty TEN winners and a further 3 placed efforts, two of those victories coming at G3 level. The winner that day – Kenzai Warrior – is now rated OR 102 and the second home – Max Vega – is rated a rather lofty OR 110, so Damage Control getting to within 5L of that pair suddenly looks alright!

He next found himself taking in a C4 Novice at Bath, a race where he ran green and could only finish a 3.5L 4th. The form of that race has been boosted since, however, with the second – So I Told You – and the fifth – Midnights Legacy – both winning next time out (their only other starts of the season).

Damage Control put in an improved effort on his next run, finishing 2L second to the Charlie Fellows trained King Carney in a C2 Maiden at Nottingham, with the Fellows horse winning next time out in a Listed contest at Pontefract and now finding itself rated OR 102.

Balding decided to get one more run into his youngster but a mix of a change of tactics (they went from the front) and a step up in trip (up 2f to 1m2f) played against him and he finished a 7L 5th.

Given the ratings some of the horses he's been mixing it with now find themselves on it's surely only a matter of time before he breaks his maiden and finds himself in the winners enclosure, especially when Balding decides to head down the handicap route and take advantage of what looks a very attractive mark.

REEHAAM (J Gosden)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 72 | 2019 form - 490

I noted this Kingman filly after her debut effort at Ascot in July, a race where she finished 9L 4th.

Since then the three ahead of her have backed up the form nicely and now find themselves on the following marks...

Cloak Of Spirits – OR 106

Queen Daenerys – OR 103

Game And Set – OR 88

...whilst Reehaam sits on OR 72...

The filly wasn't actually seen on the racetrack again for another 104 days, when Gosden decided to give her two quick 'down the field' spins at Chelmsford to secure a favourable handicap mark for the youngster (something you'd have to say was firmly 'job done').

It would be unthinkable to image Gosden not managing to get this daughter of Kingman winning when entering handicap company and although she's unlikely to be mixing it with the best, she's almost certainly going to prove better than OR 72.

TOMMY ROCK (C Cox)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 68 | 2019 form - 304

Three runs as a juvenile for the Society Rock colt during the 2019 season but no wins to show for his efforts.

He was fancied on his racecourse debut at Bath on the 21st of August (started as 2/1 fav) but he could never quite get into contention from his wide draw and the win never really looked on the cards at any stage. Adam Kirby accepted that in the final furlong and gave the youngster a hands and heels finish, managing to snatch third in the dying strides.

The race does, however, look like a solid piece of form...

Winner – Brad The Brief – ran three more times, winning two of them and closed out the season on a mark of OR 90.

Second home – Sand Diego – ran once more, recording a cosy victory in a C4 Maiden at Sandown and ending the season on a mark of OR 79.

Fourth home – Big Impact – switched yards after the race, had the remainder of the season off and then returned with a second and a first at Southwell in February, seeing his mark rise to OR 73.

Fifth horse – Barking Mad – managed to find a victory in one of his next seven starts and now sits on OR 70 and seventh home – Aweemaweh – had a break of 206 days before returning at Wolverhampton in March, where he won a C5 maiden over 6f and was given an opening handicap mark of OR 76.

Five horses that finished in and around Tommy Rock on that debut run and ALL are now rated higher than the Cox horse...

Tommy Rock himself ran at Newbury on his second start but that's a race I'd be happy to put a line through. He was drawn in stall 13 that day and nothing from the near side (high drawn runners) was able to get into the contest, with all the action happening up the middle of the track and the first five home being drawn in stalls seven and below. He was simply drawn out of it and didn't, at that stage of his career, have the race craft to be able to work his way into things.

His third and final start, only 50 days after his debut effort, came over 6f at Kempton but he made a slow start that day and could never really make any impact until late in the day. In all fairness he was always likely to struggle with the three that finished ahead of him...

Premier Power (R Varian) – recorded RPR figures of 86 & 100 on his two starts

Tom Collins (D Elsworth) – Won his next start and is now rated OR 84

Well Prepared (R Hannon) – Ran second next time out behind a 1-2 shot and is now rated OR 78

Essentially plenty more evidence to suggest that the mark of OR 68 that Tommy Rock starts this season on looks very workable indeed.

Tommy Rock looks a compact sprinting power-ball and that is exactly the type of beast that Clive Cox gets the best out of, and some.

JAUN LES PINS (E Walker)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 76 | 2019 form - 732

Ed Walker didn't introduce this one to the racetrack until the 21st of September, where the Invincible Spirit youngster was asked to tackle a C4 Novice over 7f at Newbury. He ran green that day, looked a bit unfurnished and weakened into 7th of 9 come the line.

He next appeared on the All-Weather at Kempton in October, firing in a much improved and polished effort to finish a 4L third of ten.

The winner of the race – Smokey Bear – has career form figures of 3-2-1-1 and sits on a mark of OR 87 whilst the fifth horse home – Badri – won his next two starts and sits on a mark of OR 84.

On his third and final start of the season Juan Les Pins again showed improved form, finishing a 3.25L second to the promising Charlie Appleby Dubawi colt Boccaccio. JLP travelled through on the slipstream of the winner when that one made it's burst for home and although he was no match for the Godolphin horse he was the only runner to show any level of ability to attempt to lay down a challenge. The winner is now rated OR 95 and holds/held an entry in the Irish 2000 Guineas.

Union, who finished fifth in the Kempton race, boosted the form by winning next time out and then finishing runner up on his only other start, gaining a handicap mark of OR 81 in the process.

Ed Walker wasted no time in gelding JLP after that Kempton run and with improvement likely this season as a 3yo, I doubt it will be long before the youngster finds his way into the winners' enclosure.

VULCAN (H Dunlop)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 75 | 2019 form - 54423

Another youngster without a win in his juvenile career, also resulting in a gelding operating during the off season.

Despite entering his 3yo season without any wins on his own CV he did regularly finish alongside horses that recorded victories later on in the season, some of whom that now find themselves sitting on marks that make the Dunlop horse's own mark look very attractive indeed.

His debut effort at Sandown in June, where he finished a close up fifth of five, is a prime example, with his four opponents now finding themselves rated...

Shared Belief (A Watson) – OR 93

Riot (J Gosden) – OR 92

Visible Charm (C Appleby) – OR 86

King's Caper (M Johnstone) – OR 99

Vulcan only finished 2.75L off the winner that day but yet is only rated OR 75...

His next start saw him run fourth of nine at Salisbury, with the three that finished ahead of him all winning at least once before the end of the season and finding themselves rated...

Positive (C Cox) – OR 113

Hexagon (R Charlton) – OR 85

Owney Madden (M Meade) – OR 88

Vulcan's next start came in September at Kempton, finishing a 3.25L fourth behind Acquitted, who finished fourth and first on his next two starts and ended the season on OR 89. Third home – Stanford – ran four more times, recording a form line of 2-1-2-2 and finding himself on a mark of OR 79. Further down the field was

the Richard Hughes trained Tafish (7th) who won next time out and ended the season on OR 78.

Vulcan's final start of the campaign saw him fire in a career best on the figures, finishing third at Bath despite hanging right under pressure. The second home that day – So I Told You – won next time out, as did the fifth horse Midnights Legacy.

In short, plenty of future winners finishing alongside the Dunlop gelding during his four juvenile starts and all of them now sitting on marks that strongly suggest it won't be long before Vulcan is joining them in the winners enclosure.

HOT SUMMER (R Hannon)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 84 | 2019 form - 242

Three starts in a 23-day spell then put a way for the winter very much suggests handicaps were firmly in mind for this one from the outset.

And you don't really need to look much past his neck second on racecourse debut, behind the now 110 rated Royal Crusade, to see that he's unlikely to take too long to brush aside his current mark of OR 84. The fact it was another 3.25L back to the now OR 87 rated Never Alone again points to OR 84 looking a more than winnable mark for the Hannon horse.

His next start at Kempton, where he finished a 2.25L fourth, also points to what is likely to be a lenient enough opening mark for the Hot Streak colt, with the winner that day – Riot – now sitting on OR 92.

His final start of the campaign at Ffos Las, a mere nine days after his Kempton run, was probably nothing more than a spin to get a mark, but nonetheless it's turned into a hot piece of form, with the horse that beat him that day – Night Colours – running a close second at Epsom next time out and then winning a G2 in Italy, finding herself on the lofty perch of OR 101. Hot Summer had been giving the filly 5lbs at Ffos Las, a task that now, with hindsight, was probably out with his capabilities (certainly at that stage of his development).

I don't think it's too far of a stretch to think that based on his limited form to date we could be looking at a horse that starts the 2020 campaign at least 10lbs ahead of the ceiling of his abilities, at least 10lbs...

STAR OF WELLS (W Haggas)

Opening Handicap Mark - OR 74 | 2019 form - 542

Three runs during his juvenile season, no wins and then gelded in the off season...starting to think I've 'got a type'...

This well-bred gelding – by Sea The Stars out of a Dansili mare – was well-fancied on all three of his racecourse appearances last season, starting at an SP of 7/2 or less on all three runs, and although he failed to collect on any of the three starts he did show improvement each time and left me with the feeling that there should be plenty more to come from him as a 3yo.

His debut effort looked very much like an educational effort but even still, an 8.75L fifth to Kameko reads not too shabby now, given that one followed this run with a 2nd in the Solario Stakes, a second in the Royal Lodge Stakes and a G1 victory in the Futurity Trophy, giving him a mark of OR 118 and a general third favourite slot for the Derby (around the 14-1 mark). The second horse – It's Good To Laugh – also boosted the form of this race by winning next time out and ending the season on a mark of OR 87.

Star Of Wells' next start came at Wolverhampton in August, finishing an unremarkable fourth of eight. The three ahead of him all ran well in subsequent starts, however, and find themselves rated...

Dubai Souq (S bin Suroor) – OR 96

Mass media (J Gosden) – OR 78

Dark Heart (M Johnston) – OR 87

Dubai Souq & Dark Heart both securing victories on one of their next two starts.

Haggas then decided to rest Star Of Wells for 54 days before looking for a suitable place for the horse to achieve his handicap mark, which came at Kempton in October, where he finished a comfortable 4L second behind the odds-on Higher Kingdom from the Archie Watson yard. Fourth horse home – HMS President – boosted the form next time out by winning easily at Newcastle and securing himself a rating of OR 82.

Everything looks in place for Star Of Wells to properly kick on with his career this term (solid form, well-handicapped, gelded...) and I'd be expecting wins to come from the Sea The Stars youngster sooner rather than later.

I'd be very hopeful of all ten of these 3yo's managing to pick off a Handicap or two at some stage this season, whenever that season breathes its first signs of life, and all of them should be capable of leaving their current handicap marks well behind.

Ben (NTF)

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