

## **Cheltenham Festival Review: Day 1**

*Firstly I hope you and your families are keeping well.*

*What follows is my unique review of Day 1. It's a mix of 'horses to follow' (some obvious others less so, including collateral form-lines), 'hot form', stats and micro angles – including a look at Festival horses who won LTO at Cheltenham and Nicky Henderson – both his record at Newbury in Novice/Maiden hurdle races and his record with fillies & mares. It's a fairly long read but hopefully there's something useful for you to take away and ponder moving forwards.*

*Day 1 has been published in the free post, with the other 3 days to follow in the Members' posts.*

*Let's crack on...*

### **1.30 Supreme Novices Hurdle**

As you'd expect from many Festival G1s, especially for novices, they can be worth following into the next season and beyond. In the 'old days' you could, for example, just back the runners in the Champion Bumper on their next three starts for handsome profits – but I believe the market has long cottoned onto that (although I've made a note to double check that in a future review post). I suspect it was similar for the Supreme also.

Last year's renewal, won by Klassical Dream, has subsequently produced *69 runners / 19 wins / 35 places (inc wins) / -7.62 SP*

Of the 16 who lined up that day only 3 have failed to win. So, it's a race worth keeping an eye on, especially those who go novice chasing.

I suspect the front five from this year's renewal will do some damage moving forwards and fingers crossed they stay sound. The front two are 'obvious' ones to take from the race and obvious rarely pays but it will be exciting to see what they achieve next season, whatever route they go down. Shishkin really could be something special.

**Chantry House** – he looks to be the classic 'whatever he does over hurdles is a bonus' type of horse – I think he will take high rank in next year's novice division and he will stay further – you'd think The Marsh or The RSA could be longer term targets, if he takes to fencing. He started his career in Point to Points, in front of Monkfish when falling 3 out on his pointing debut, before winning his next start. He ran well here, on ground that may have been softer than ideal, and was visibly outpaced, but stayed on up the hill for a clear 3<sup>rd</sup>. He came into this off a mark of 140, the front two 153 horses, but clearly there's plenty more to come. He did cost £295k so connections will be hoping he improved in time/with fences. I doubt they will plot him for a handicap but you never know!

**Allart** – he had a stiff task here off 142 but again ran well, finishing 5<sup>th</sup>. Again, he may have found this going testing enough but he's another who's future could be over fences. I doubt he will rate anywhere near as high as the four in front of him, but he could be a similar type to Mister Fisher, who finished 8<sup>th</sup> in 2019s Supreme for the Champion Trainer.

Highlighting 'horses to follow' from Festival novice contests may be a tad futile and as such what follows are a few horses that didn't run at Cheltenham but who got close to Shishkin and Abacadabras earlier in the season, and could be well handicapped when we see them next....

#### **Shakem Up'Arry** (6YO/ Ben Pauling)

This horse was an 11L 2<sup>nd</sup> to Shishkin at Newbury on 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020, the rest even further back. He only gave out after the last there (Shishkin sprinted away), having led (with a strong headwind) and arguably over raced. He was sent off joint Fav which may give some indication as to what connections think of him. He's still plenty to learn. He received a mark of 127 after that and was pitched into The Ballymore at the Festival, sent off at 66/1. That was a stiff task. Ben Pauling's had an iffy season also. The general level of his bumper and novice hurdle form would suggest he should rate higher than 127 in time. Whether that's on better ground and/or over further and/or over fences, awaits to be seen. He has generally raced 'up in the van' and could be a horse for next season after another summer at grass. His owner, Harry Redknapp, will be hoping so.

#### **Shan Blue** (6YO/Dan Skelton)

Another who came an 11<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> to Shishkin, this time at Huntingdon. I suppose the market may not miss such horses next season but still, it's form worth noting and if added in trackers that 'head start' can help, before the market truly takes note. Obviously Shishkin won at Huntingdon with his head in his chest. However, Shan Blue would go on to run a decent 6<sup>th</sup> in The Ballymore. He still looks green to my eyes, with plenty to learn. He was also a 4 ½ L 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Chantry House in his bumper in March 2019 at Warwick (Edwardstone 2<sup>nd</sup> in that) and you'd like to think his mark of 139 is workable. He is a Point winner and could be another who's best days will be over fences next season and beyond. They've made plenty of use of him to date and maybe he will appreciate sitting off a stronger pace.

Having highlighted Shan Blue I should also mention **Mossy Fen** (5YO/NTD) who was 5<sup>th</sup> in the Ballymore, and who beat Shan Blue at Warwick in a muddling affair. He's also a point winner and will no doubt do some damage over fences off a mark of 143. He looks a staying chaser in the making to my eyes and I doubt connections will stick to timber for much longer.

## **Turnpike Trip (6YO/C Byrnes)**

This horse ran a credible 8L 4<sup>th</sup> in The Royal Bond at Fairyhouse which is the best piece of Novice Hurdle form in Ireland this season. (1<sup>st</sup> – Envoi Allen, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Abacadabras, 3<sup>rd</sup> – Darver Star, 5<sup>th</sup> Embittered)

Given that form I'd be shocked if this one doesn't have a handicap in him off his current mark (146 when running at Ascot in December). He was sent off at 6/1 that day – the Betfair Exchange Trophy where he travelled well for a long way but didn't seem to pick up. It could be he got stuck in the heavy ground although it was his handicap debut and he's entitled to improve for that big field experience. He hasn't been seen since so I don't know if there was a problem or whether he was being plotted for a spring target back in Ireland. Charles Byrnes does love a plot/gamble and he's a horse worth noting as he's definitely got more races in him, and the market may well guide. It could be he will stay 2m4f but I suspect better ground may be key to his chance. You wouldn't discount him running back on the Flat either.

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The Supreme was some early indication of who would dominate through the week- Nicky Henderson training 3 of the first 5, Gordon Elliot with a 2<sup>nd</sup> and Mullins with a 4<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Nicky Henderson....***

Shishkin was another of Nicky's Novice hurdles to have won a Novice hurdle at Newbury. I think it's widely known that he runs some of his good ones there, but I thought I'd dig into the stats, having never done so.

- Nicky Henderson
- Newbury
- Novice Hurdles
- Horse had 0-1 hurdle runs
- 2003-

141 bets / 32 wins / 75 p / 23% sr / -29 SP / AE 0.98

Of those sent off 5/1 or shorter SP –

- 82 bets / 29 wins / 62p / 35% sr / +1.7 SP / AE 1.02

Of those who'd yet to win in their career (includes those making debut), 5/1< SP -

- 25 bets / 13 wins / 20p / 52% sr / +16 SP / AE 1.63

Actually... when you focus on Newbury Maiden Hurdles (as opposed to Novice hurdles) within those rules above, 5/1<...

- 26 bets / 11 wins / 19p / 42% sr / +13 SP / AE 1.2

Santini and Might Bite are a couple of the Newbury Novice winners since 2015, joining Chantry House and Shishkin in 2020. Those who didn't win their Newbury Novice but were sent off at 5s< within those rules above, include the likes of Ok Corral / Mister Fisher.

Newbury Maiden Hurdle winners include the likes of Oscar Whisky (2009), Josses Hill and...  
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So, something to ponder there – not necessarily a 'systematic angle' to follow but evidently plenty of Nicky's Newbury Novice/Maiden hurdlers should be noted for the future. Every now and then there's usually a G1 winner of the future, whether over hurdles and/or over fences.

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## **2.10 – The Arkle**

There are no 'notebook' horses from me in this race. However, a Mare was winning this race for the first time since 1980 and the success of mares at this Festival (in mixed sex races) is something I'll return to in another daily review post.

However, *Put the Kettle* was a Festival winner who'd won on her last start, which was at Cheltenham.... Leading me to research/ponder the following...

- Cheltenham Festival
- Ran at Cheltenham LTO
- WON LTO
- 16/1< SP (0/19,0p bigger)
- 2011> (last 10 Festivals)

88 bets / 21 wins / 38p / 24% sr / +26 SP / +39 BSFP / AE 1.27

- 8/22, 10p, +42 BFSP last two Festivals.
- 5/1< SP ... 37 bets / 16 wins / 26p/ 43% sr / +26 BFSP / AE 1.37
  - Chases: 7/15, 12p
- Nicky Henderson: 5/12, 8p, +16
- Paul Nicholls: 3/10,4p, +10

Such horses are clearly worth plenty of focus at The Festival.

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## **2.50 - The Ultima Handicap Chase**

This was a race for in-form horses / strong form-lines through the season/ course form / festival form. There was nothing surprising in this result and which horses came to the fore, but it felt like a competitive renewal.

*Looking ahead...*

**Vinndication** – it will be interesting to see how high he can climb up the ranks – this was a very good run off 159 and top weight, not beaten far. He'd also had an imperfect preparation. He could progress further into next season, but he will need to. It's not impossible that he develops into a G1 performer – or he becomes a Black Corton sort, who's a bloody good horse but not quite top class and becomes hard to place from marks in the low 160s – especially in handicaps. There's still a niggle about him going LH I think – well his jumping was ok here but not as fluent as some in the race. I believe Kim Bailey thinks he's potentially the best horse he's had for some time and it will be fascinating to see how he's campaigned next season. He is the one horse from this race who 'could' be more than just a handicapper.

**Discorama** – he's becoming frustrating for supporters. I left him in this at his price when it became apparent connections planned to ride him cold/patiently – which is rarely a good thing in a chase, let alone at Cheltenham. In the end he was only beaten 2.4L but there is the odd question over him now, especially when under pressure/in a battle. His last win was in November 2018. Given his various form lines/efforts he should have a staying handicap in him and does shape like an Irish National type. I do wish they'd ride him more prominently though. He is worth close attention in any staying handicap chase but doesn't look like a win-only proposition to my eyes. You can only keep making excuses for horses for so long.

**Big River** – another good run in this race from him on 'only' his 12<sup>th</sup> chase. This 10-year-old definitely has a decent staying handicap chase in him, especially back up north. If he were mine I'd aim him at the Borders National at Kelso, in December. I'd consider blinkers but more so a change of jockey, and a more aggressive ride.

Derek Fox never seems to be active enough on him, letting him drift back through his races – it could be he's just not quick enough and he's riding to instructions but if he were able to hold a more prominent position through this race, he'd have gone closer to winning (only beaten 2.7L).

In Class 1 & 2 handicap chases Derek Fox is now 4/62, 11p in the last 5 years. His mounts perform 27% below market expectations. In fact, if you strip out his success in 2017 (inc the Grand National) he's 0/49, 11p. In fairness he doesn't ride many fancied ones but there is now a niggle over his ability at the top level/big races.

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### **3.30 – The Champion Hurdle**

*Epatante – this is an opportunity to dig into Nicky Henderson's record with fillies and mares...*

- Nicky Henderson
- National Hunt
- Class 1 & 2
- Filly / Mare
- 2010-
- Any odds

212 bets / 47 wins / 87p / 22% sr / +87 SP / +157 BFSP / AE 1.13

Within this starter set of data...

In Mixed Sex races: 99 bets / 25 wins / 46p / 25% sr / +71 SP / +123 BFSP / AE 1.37

- Of those, 0 runs at distance: 39 bets / 14 wins / 17p / 36% sr / +62 SP / +78 BFSP / AE 1.67

Again this isn't necessarily an angle to back systematically but more so to be aware of and to consider in any punting deliberations. It should be noted that nearly all of the SP 'profit' came in 2012. There have been some big priced winners but those sent off 13/2 or shorter: 51 bets / 21 wins / 34p / 41% sr / +28 SP / +37 BFSP / AE 1.43

Given that Nicky's win SR with geldings in C1/2 NH races is around 13% I think his handling of the ladies is significant. As is the fact that in mixed sex races his 25 winners are far higher than any other trainer in the period. The next in is Willie Mullins with 8 and no other jumps trainer can match his superiority.

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*No views on the mares hurdle...*

#### **4.50 – Northern Trust Novice Handicap Chase**

*Some observations from this race...*

Imperial Aura – this one ticked plenty of boxes and was obvious enough – sometimes obvious is best and he did make 5s look decent. (alas!) Like a few handicap winners during the week (including Simply The Betts who's form tied in with this one) his RPR was some indication that he was well handicapped. I

n these Festival handicaps you do need to be asking yourself which horses you think are 'chucked in'. There are many ways to do that of course, including 'hot form' but the RPRs can be some guide – he achieved a 153 LTO, and came into this off an OR 143. His RPR on the day for the race was 161. As always, such ratings are only ever a guide but, in this example, it was a good one for how well handicapped Imperial Aura was – even more so in the context that he was an unexposed horse with plenty more to come. It was great to see Kim Bailey with another Festival winner and as with Vinndication there should be more to come from this one next season. He did dot up here, beating a Gordon Elliot horse who was also thrown in.

I couldn't find any 'under the radar' horses to follow from this race.

Whether any of the top 5 can step forward next season we shall see, but I wouldn't be saying anything revelatory when suggesting there should be future winners to come from this race, although it has a mixed record in throwing up masses of future winners the following year.

**Hold The Note** is held in high regard by his trainer and has been talked about as one for next season, especially over 3m. Anything this season was seen as a bonus. I'd like to think there's more to come from the likes of **Champagne Court and Whatmore**.

#### **'Hot Form' Race...**

One final thing I'll say from this race, especially for next season, is to keep track of The Silver Trophy (handicap hurdle) run at Chepstow at their season's curtain raiser in October.

Those horses who contested this race in 2019 to have run since are now... 65 runners / 14 win/ 28 places. The 2018 renewal has produced 19 subsequent winners and 2017 produced 22.

Champagne Court was 2<sup>nd</sup>, Imperial Aura was 3<sup>rd</sup>, Indefatigable was 5<sup>th</sup> (she stayed over hurdles and is 2/5,4p since this run, inc her Festival win).

This is one of those early season handicaps to track. It's often packed with unexposed handicappers and if a trainer runs a horse in this it's possibly a sign of how highly regarded they are/how well handicapped they may turn out to be. It's usually a competitive affair (and maybe even more so in 2020 given the early end of the Jumps season) and horses will learn plenty from such an experience. A race to watch.

### 5.30 – National Hunt Chase

Again, not too much for me to ponder here – maybe unsurprisingly in hindsight given the gruelling conditions, the 1-2 were hardier sorts, who had some solid big field handicap chase form to their name. As opposed to the light raced/small field experienced novices.

Ravenhill took this – 6s>12s SP– and was winning on his 3<sup>rd</sup> start for my chase Eye-catchers. Sadly I didn't have anything on. These 'eye-catchers' are a relatively new part of my members' club and the idea of finding 'eye catchers' and 'hot form' horses/races is something I'll be focussing more on this year and beyond.

So far in 2020 my eye-catchers are : 64 bets / 12 wins / 24 / 19% sr / +6.73 - nothing too spectacular as yet but a foundation for me to build on. I track said eye-catchers for 3 runs, stopping at a winner or discarding . These a few horses mentioned above that will be added to eye-catchers pile and tracked in the daily members' posts, but such thinking is a great 'way in' to any race.

In terms of horses to follow from this race...

**Newtide** (7YO/K Bailey)– I liked this horse going into the race at the odds, but in the end this unique test appears to have come too soon in his career. He went well until 3 out, lobbing along, before falling in a hole. He is a fine big strapping horse – a giant of a chaser to the eye – and this was only the 8<sup>th</sup> race of his life. I suspect he will strengthen up plenty over the summer and there should be more to come next season and beyond. He was going to be 2<sup>nd</sup> behind *Boldmere* (another chaser for the notebook) at Wetherby before that one fell at the last, but that was solid form. Kim Bailey thinks he will be a 4 mile chaser in time and if he progresses you could see him being aimed at something like The Eider. They've given him plenty of time to grow into his giant frame. Hopefully that patience is rewarded next season.

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That's it for Day 1. With any luck you found something of interest to take away and ponder moving forwards,

Josh