



2021 CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL PREVIEW

A comprehensive preview with expert contributions from:

- **Steve Lewis Hamilton** - Professional backer
- **Donn McClean** - Racing writer and presenter

Steve (SLH) assesses the home challenge whilst Donn (DMC) analyses the Irish contingent. Prices shown correct at the time of writing.

- **Richard Hoiles**
- **John Hunt**

Top racing commentators provide their on-course insight.

- **Ten year trends**

The telling stats from Paul O'Hara

- **Exclusive horses to follow**

Direct from a variety of Lambourn trainers

The going is expected to be Good to Soft with dry, mild weather over the four days.

Tuesday 16th

1.20 Supreme Novices' Hurdle (Grade 1) 4yo+ 2m½f

SLH: Metier, Soaring Eagle and at big odds Grumpy Charlie are the pick of the British trained horses.

Metier was a decent performer on the flat in Ireland and has progressed from race to race over hurdles since moving to Harry Fry. He is a strong stayer who performs well on soft ground. It is taken as fact that the course will be prepared to ride no firmer than Good to Soft on the opening day.

Soaring Glory showed marked improvement when impressively winning the Belfair Hurdle at Newbury.

He appears to be less dependent on ground conditions than Metier and looks sure to figure.

On soft ground Grumpy Charlie could run better than his odds suggest if allowed to take his chance. Despite not being totally straightforward, he is improving with racing experience.

DMC: At the start of the season, it looked like Appreciate It was going to be Willie Mullins' Ballymore Hurdle horse, and that Ferny Hollow was going to be his Supreme Novices' Hurdle horse. Then Ferny Hollow was ruled out, and Appreciate It won two Grade 1 hurdles over two miles, and it was all change.

Appreciate It sets the standard, but Ballyadam is a talented horse who could get closer to Willie Mullins' horse than he did in the Chanelle Pharma Hurdle at Leopardstown last time. And if Blue Lord runs here instead of in the Ballymore, he could out-run his odds.

1.55 Arkle Challenge Trophy Novices' Chase (Grade 1) 5yo+ 2m

SLH: What a fantastic race in prospect, with the home trained Allmankind and Shishkin taking on a potential superstar in Ireland's Energumene.

On form achieved there is very little to choose between the three of them.

Allmankind is a quicker model than Shishkin, and on a flat track he may be the best.

However, it isn't difficult to imagine Shishkin being the stronger up that final hill at Cheltenham.

Whether either of them can beat the Irish horse will be fascinating to watch.

It promises to be one of the week's highlights.

DMC: This is a clash to savour, Shishkin v Energumene, one of the clashes of the Festival. Shishkin is a potential superstar, unbeaten under Rules when he has completed and as last year's Supreme Novices' Hurdle winner, he is proven at Cheltenham. Energumene has never run at Cheltenham, but he has been phenomenally impressive in all that he has done this season, including in the Irish Arkle last time.

Captain Guinness is interesting in the 'without the first two favourites' market. He fell at the second last fence last time in the Irish Arkle, but he is a talented horse, and he was travelling well in the Supreme Novices' Hurdle last season when he was taken out at the second last flight.

3.05 Champion Hurdle Challenge Trophy (Grade 1) 4yo+ 2m½f

SLH: An intriguing Champion Hurdle with reigning champion Epatante being below her best when being well beaten behind Silver Streak at Kempton on Boxing Day.

According to my ratings that was an improved performance from Silver Streak who was ridden more positively than in the past.

Silver Streak had looked to be thoroughly exposed, having finished beaten in the last two running's of this race.

But that Kempton performance impressed me, and at around four times the price of Epatante he makes some appeal.

If Epatante returns to last year's form she has an obvious chance, but at the prices on offer Silver Streak is preferred.

Goshen not only returned to form at Wincanton, he showed significant improvement when winning unchallenged.

If the ground is soft, he will have a major chance and may well be able to atone for last year's disaster in the Triumph Hurdle.

DMC: We thought that we knew all that there was to know about Honeysuckle, we thought that she was at her best over two and a half miles, but that she had the class to be very good over two. Then she danced home in the Irish Champion Hurdle, and we had to revise all that.

Henry de Bromhead's mare is now 10 for 10 under Rules, 11 for 11 if you include her point-to-point. She has won a Mares' Hurdle, two Hatton's Grace Hurdles, and now, two Irish Champion Hurdles, and she put up the best performance of her life last

time in winning her latest Irish Champion Hurdle by 10 lengths. We are still not sure where the ceiling of her ability lies, and she has the ideal partner in Rachael Blackmore. Epatante is top class, the reigning champion. They are two outstanding mares, and it is correct that they dominate the market.



Honeysuckle & Rachael Blackmore. Unbeaten under rules.

Abacadabras may be the value of the race though. He was only beaten a head by Shishkin in the Supreme Novices' Hurdle last season, despite being left in front too early. He has 10 lengths to make up on Honeysuckle on their running in the Irish Champion Hurdle, but the ground is going to be better on Tuesday than it was at Leopardstown for the Irish Champion Hurdle and, with Not So Sleepy, Goshen and Aspire Tower in the line-up, the early pace could be furious. That will suit Abacadabras well. He could pounce late.

3.40 Mares' Hurdle (Grade 1) 4yo+ 2m4f

SLH: As normal the home trained horses face an impossible task against the Irish challenge, and I will not be looking to take them on.

DMC: Concertista was seriously impressive in winning the Mares' Novices' Hurdle last year, and she has gone forward again this season. She was impressive in beating Minella Melody in a Grade 2 hurdle at Fairyhouse in November, and she was even more impressive in beating the same Minella Melody in a Grade 3 contest at Leopardstown at Christmas. She has two-mile pace, but she stays two and a half miles well, she is proven at the Cheltenham Festival and is a worthy favourite.

4.50 National Hunt Challenge Cup Novices' Chase (Grade 2) 5yo+ 3m 6f

SLH: Royale Pagaille will be at short odds if running here as opposed to the Gold Cup. He is a thorough stayer who does have the ability to quicken and would set a high standard if taking his chance.

Paul Nichols trained Next Destination would be the alternative option. He has had the three starts since moving to Nicholls from Willie Mullins after an absence. The latest Warwick win was a strong staying performance and he is completely unexposed over fences.

HORSES OF MOST INTEREST – Day 1

SLH: 3.05 Goshen 4/1 & Silver Streak 14/1

DMC: 3.05 Abacadabras 10/1

Wednesday 17th March

1.20 Ballymore Novices' Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo+) 2m5f

SLH: Bravemansgame has a realistic chance of overcoming a very strong Irish challenge. He is progressing from race to race and put up a striking performance when winning the Challow at Newbury on his latest start.

He looks a high-class horse already; with further improvement to come.

The softer the ground the better for Adrimel, who is worth keeping an eye on at big odds.

DMC: The top three have dominated the market for a while now, Bob Olinger, Gaillard Du Mesnil and Bravemansgame, but Bob Olinger could come out on top in the race.

Always highly regarded, he got to within a length of Ferny Hollow at Gowran Park in November on his hurdling bow, before going to Navan and winning his maiden hurdle by 14 lengths. Then he went to the Grade 1 Lawlor's of Naas Hurdle, and he was impressive in winning that, showing a fine turn of foot at the end of two and a half miles on heavy ground.

He still holds an entry in the Supreme Novices' Hurdle, but he stays this intermediate trip well, and he is the one they all have to beat.

1.55 Novices' Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 3m½f

SLH: Royal Pagaille would have a solid chance if Venetia Williams decides to run here instead of the National Hunt Chase or the Gold Cup itself. If he doesn't line up, then the home team look up against it to fend off a very strong Irish challenge led by Monkfish, who will be at short odds.

However, the JP McManus owned and Philip Hobbs trained Sporting John is a possible contender. After a disappointing return on his reappearance at Exeter, he burst back to form when beating Shan Blue over two and a half miles at Sandown. The manner of that victory suggested that a step up to 3 miles would suit, and he may well be capable of taking a further step forward here.

DMC: Monkfish is very good. He was a high-class novice hurdler last season, and he proved that he could handle everything about Cheltenham when he battled back up the hill to beat Latest Exhibition and Fury Road in a thrilling finish to the Albert Bartlett Hurdle.

And yet, it looks like he is going to be a better chaser than hurdler. Three for three over fences, Willie Mullins' horse jumps his fences fluently, accurately and efficiently. He has pace and he has stamina, and he is a hugely exciting young steeplechaser.

3.05 Queen Mother Champion Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 2m

SLH: A fascinating race, with very little to choose between five of these on this season's form.

Mullins trained Chacun Pour Soi has confirmed he retains his ability with three comfortable wins at restrictive odds and is currently odds-on favourite.

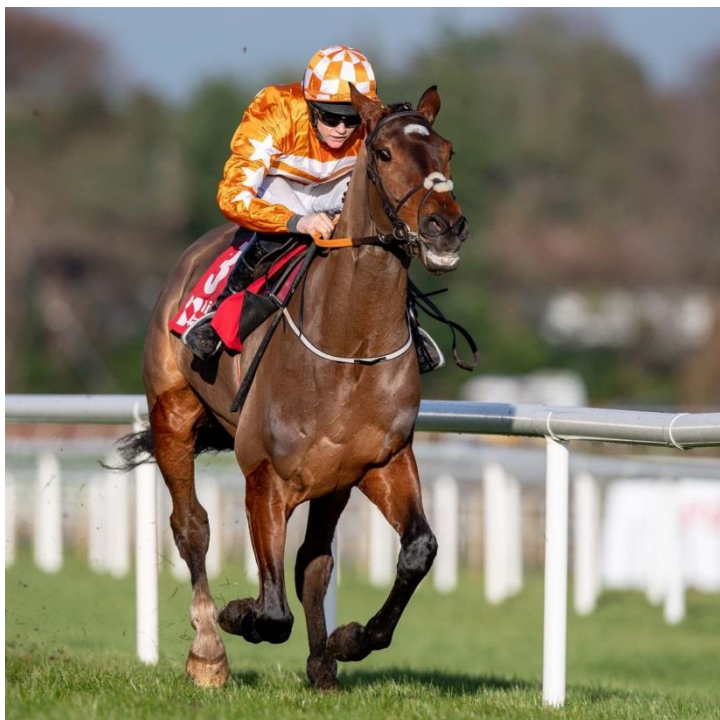
Altior has a 6lb pull at the weights for his beating by Nube Negra at Kempton at Christmas. I don't think there will be a deal between the two here, and that is reflected in their odds.

Last year's winner Politologue will need to recover from an underwhelming performance at Ascot, when being beaten by First Flow.

The horse that appeals at much bigger odds is Sceau Royal. He ran a shocker in this race last year, but in the 2019 race had finished third, beaten three and a half lengths behind Altior and Politologue.

I think it's debatable whether Altior or Politologue are performing to that level of 2019 performance this current season. However, Sceau Royal looked to confirm that he retains all of that ability when beating Champ on his latest start at Newbury.

On this season's form Sceau Royal has a very similar chance to Altior, Nube Negra and Politologue. He is of interest at big odds.



Put The Kettle On. 2020 Arkle winner.

Arkle last year, and the Arkle is unsurprisingly a good pointer to the following season's Champion Chase.

4.50 Weatherbys Champion Bumper (Grade 1) (4-6yo) 2m¹/₂f

DMC: Sir Gerhard has looked good in everything that he has done. Winner of his only point-to-point, he was seriously impressive in winning at Down Royal in October on his debut under Rules, and he looked very good again in beating Letsbeclearaboutit at Navan just before Christmas.

Kilcruit looked really impressive in winning the Grade 2 bumper at Leopardstown's Dublin Racing Festival. He is obviously a hugely talented horse, but he may have been slightly flattered by the manner in which that Leopardstown race was run, they went very fast, and he was able to cruise into the race. It could be some race between the two of them.

HORSES OF MOST INTEREST – Day 2

SLH: 1.20 Bravemansgame 7/2
3.05 Sceau Royale 16/1

DMC: 3.05 Put The Kettle On 11/1

DMC: Chacun Pour Soi was robbed of the chance to add the Champion Chase to his CV last year when a stone bruise on the morning of the race ruled him out. He looked good last season, and he has looked even better this season, winning his three races, two Grade 1s and a Grade 2, easily. We don't know that he will handle Cheltenham, he has never raced there, but we don't know that he won't. He sets the standard.

Put The Kettle On could be the over-priced horse in the race. She has eight lengths to find with Chacun Pour Soi on their running in the Dublin Chase at Leopardstown last time, but that was her first run at Leopardstown, we didn't know how well she would go there. By contrast, we know that she loves Cheltenham. She is three for three there, on the Old Course, over the Champion Chase course and distance. She may not have got the credit that she deserved for winning the

Thursday 18th March

1.20 Novices' Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 2m4f

SLH: It's difficult to be optimistic about the chances of the British trained horses beating the Irish runners here.

Shan Blue's form appears to have levelled off, after being beaten by Sporting John at Sandown. On form achieved Chantry House would have a similar chance to that of Shan Blue.

DMC: It will be great to see Envoi Allen at Cheltenham again. He has been there twice, for the Champion Bumper in 2019 and for the Ballymore Hurdle last year, and he has won twice.

Actually, he has never been beaten. Winner of his only point-to-point, he has raced 11 times under Rules, and he has won 11 times. As with Honeysuckle, until a horse gets beaten, you don't know how deep his or her ability runs. If the Cheveley Park Stud's horse wins the Marsh Chase, he will be 12 for 12 under Rules: four for four in bumpers, four for four over hurdles, four for four over fences. There would be a nice symmetry to that.

2.30 Ryanair Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 2m5f

SLH: Once again, the Irish field a very strong team. However, Mister Fisher, Dashed Drasher and Imperial Aura are three home trained horses that should acquit themselves well.

Dashed Drasher put in his best performance yet when beating Master Tommytucker at Ascot on his latest start. I got the impression he idled slightly on the run-in, and he may well improve further.

Imperial Aura had been progressing nicely, until losing his rider early on in a Grade 2 at Kempton on his latest start. That can be forgiven as he is an excellent jumper, and I expect a good run from him here.

Mister Fisher would be my preference, particularly if the ground is no softer than good-soft. He put up an excellent performance to win the re-routed Peterborough Chase at today's venue. That was his best performance yet and I expect him to run a big race.

DMC: Min gained his deserved Cheltenham Festival victory in this race last year, after finishing second twice at the Festival. Melon has finished second at the Festival four times now, so he would be an even more deserving winner of the Ryanair Chase this year. Add Allaho, and Willie Mullins holds a strong hand, and the intermediate distance of the Ryanair Chase is probably optimal for all three.

But Fakir D'Oudairies could be the value against the three of them. Joseph O'Brien's horse ran a big race in the Arkle last year to finish second to Put The Kettle On, 18 lengths clear of the third horse and just a length and a half behind the winner, and he would have finished closer had he not made a significant error at the second last fence.

He ran well for a long way in the Savills Chase at Christmas, but the three-mile trip just stretched his stamina beyond its limit, and he was ultimately pulled up at the second last fence. He was much better last time in the Dublin Chase over two miles and one and a half furlongs, when he chased Chacun Pour Soi home. He shaped that day as if he would be suited by a step back up in trip to two and a half miles, the distance over which he won the Drinmore Chase as a novice.

3.05 Stayers' Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo+) 3m

SLH: Paisley Park and Thyme Hill are the same horse on this season's form, and that is reflected in their odds as they dispute favouritism.

Thyme Hill's fourth in last year's Albert Bartlett was a cracking effort. He has continued that progression this season and is arguably less exposed than Paisley Park.

However, I do fancy Paisley Park to come out on top here.

After winning this title in 2019, he was a bitter disappointment when trying to defend his title last year, when a heart problem was subsequently diagnosed. His two performances this season show he has recovered from those issues, although I do feel he has yet to recapture his very best form.

Paisley Park's running style is very well suited to Cheltenham and he may well return to his very best, in which case he will take plenty of beating.



Paisley Park winning the 2019 Stayers Hurdle.

DMC: Fury Road could be the forgotten horse of the Stayers' Hurdle. He ran a massive race in the Albert Bartlett Hurdle last year when he went down by a neck and a nose to Monkfish and Latest Exhibition.

He was well beaten at Leopardstown over Christmas, but a lot of his yard's horses underperformed at Christmas, and he bounced back last time with a big run in the Boyne Hurdle, going down by just a neck to the talented Beacon Edge in a race in which the sedate early pace wouldn't have suited him. He had Thyme Hill over a length behind him in last year's Albert Bartlett Hurdle, and he is now more than five times Thyme Hill's price for the Stayers' Hurdle.

4.15 Mares' Novices' Hurdle (Grade 2) (4yo+) 2m1f

SLH: Pretty modest form from the British representatives and I fully expect an Irish winner.

DMC: The Solerina Hurdle run at Fairyhouse last month, in which Roseys Hollow, Royal Kahala and Gauloise filled the first three places, could hold the key to the Mares' Novices' Hurdle, as it has in the past.

Roseys Hollow showed a fine turn of foot that day and ran out an impressive winner, and she is a big player, but there is a chance that Royal Kahala can exact her revenge. Peter Fahey's mare didn't travel with her usual verve that day, and she was a little wide throughout, so she did well to keep on as well as she did to take second place, just two lengths behind the winner. She will meet Roseys Hollow on 9lb better terms, and that could tilt the balance.

HORSES OF MOST INTEREST – Day 3

SLH: 2.30 Mister Fisher 8/1
3.05 Paisley Park 10/3

DMC: 2.30 Fakir D'Oudairies 8/1

Friday 19th March

1.20 Triumph Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo) 2m1f

SLH: Adagio and Nassalam are the pick of the home trained horses and their form ties them together.

Adagio beat Nassalam in the Finale Hurdle at Chepstow at the beginning of January.

Both horses impressed me in that race and I thought at the time that Nassalam may be able to reverse that form come Cheltenham in March.

Adagio hasn't raced since Chepstow, but Nassalam was subsequently beaten at Haydock by the Nicholls trained Monmiral, who misses this race.

I'm still of the opinion that there will be little between them, so the much bigger priced Nassalam makes more appeal.

But I have come to the conclusion that although these two may be best of the British, I doubt whether either are good enough to beat the Irish.

DMC: Zabahiyr has looked good in everything that he has done this year. He was impressive in winning at Fairyhouse in November off a fast pace, and he was able to cope with a slower pace last time at Leopardstown at Christmas.

Quilixios could be the value though. He was also impressive in winning at Down Royal in October, and he stepped forward from that last time to land the Grade 1 Spring Juvenile Hurdle at Leopardstown. That is a race that has been a really good pointer to the Triumph Hurdle in the last 10 years and, given that it was Quilixios' first run in over three months, he could step forward again.

2.30 Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo+) 3m

SLH: Paul Nichols has two realistic chances in Barbados Buck's and Threeunderthrufive.

They have a very similar form, conditions should be suitable for both, and both are capable of significant improvement.

I find it hard to split them-so at twice the price Threeunderthrufive is preferred.

Alaphilippe is the other to consider.He won well at Haydock when stepped up to three miles. The softer the ground the better his chance.

I may sound like a broken record - but the Irish are greatly feared.

DMC: Fakiera stayed on well to take fourth place behind Gaillard Du Mesnil in the Nathaniel Lacy & Partners Hurdle at Leopardstown last time, and he shaped like a horse who would be even better when stepped up to three miles. He should go well here.

Torygraph could also go well. He is not flashy, but he is tough and he is genuine, and he has an engine, as he proved when he stayed on strongly to land the W T O'Grady Memorial Novice Hurdle at Thurles last time over two miles and seven furlongs. That is the race that Monkfish won last year before he went to Cheltenham and won the Albert Bartlett.

3.05 Cheltenham Gold Cup Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 3m2½f

SLH: Al Boum Photo has every chance of winning a third Gold Cup, although that chance is fully reflected in his price.

He has little in hand of Santini and Lostintranslation on last year's running, although both of them would need to bounce back from disappointing runs this season.

On the other hand, Al Boum Photo dotted up on his one start since last year's Gold Cup.

That was at Tramore at the turn of the year, looking as if he retains plenty, if not all of his ability.

The horse that appeals, especially if the ground is at least soft, is 2018 champion Native River. An 11-year-old recapturing his crown from three years ago is fairy tale stuff I accept.

But Native River returned to form at the beginning of February, to put up a performance that was very near his best. That was on testing ground over three miles at Sandown.

He was ridden positively, jumped well and stayed on strongly, suggesting that he not only retained his ability, but also his enthusiasm. If the ground happened to be soft for Gold Cup day, I could see him going very close.

Champ has to be considered after his excellent comeback effort over two miles in the Game Spirit at Newbury. He is not so dependent on ground conditions.

He would need to improve further, but has had only five chase starts to date and the improvement required could be forthcoming.



Al Boum Photo (inner) clears the final fence on his way to another Gold Cup victory.

DMC: Al Boum Photo sets the standard. He is already a member of an elite group, a dual Gold Cup winner, and he could join Arkle, Best Mate and Cottage Rake in the annals as a triple Gold Cup winner. He did well to win last year off a sedate pace, and he should be better suited by the faster pace that he should get this season. And he has had his now trademark preparation this year again: win the Savills Chase at Tramore - on to Cheltenham.

But A Plus Tard could improve enough to get up to Al Boum Photo's level, and possibly beyond. He spread-eagled his field in winning the Close Brothers Chase at the 2019 Cheltenham Festival, and he ran well in the Ryanair Chase last year, finishing a

close-up third behind Min and Saint Calvados, when he shaped as if he might improve for a step up in trip.

He stepped up to three miles last time, and he won the Savills Chase. He had to stay that day too, he hit the line well, leaving the impression that another two and a half furlongs should be well within range. He is a progressive horse, he is only seven, and he has the potential to improve again. He is unexposed at the Gold Cup trip.

Don't rule out Minella Indo either. He fell in the Savills Chase on his penultimate run, and he could only finish fourth in the Irish Gold Cup last time, but he should improve for that run, and we know that he loves Cheltenham. He won the Albert Bartlett Hurdle in 2019 and he was only just run down by Champ in the RSA Chase last year. He could be the forgotten horse of the race.

4.15 Mares' Chase (Grade 2) (5yo+) 2m4½f

SLH: Annie Mc has improved through this season and put up two excellent performances when winning at Doncaster and Warwick. The fitting of cheek pieces has certainly appeared to help. Soft ground would be preferable, but as long as there's some give, I would expect a big performance. She looks the best of the British trained runners.

HORSES OF MOST INTEREST – Day 4

SLH: 3.05 Native River (if soft ground) 14/1

DMC: 3.05 A Plus Tard 6/1



Annie Mc

Richard Hoiles

When sitting down to write the equivalent piece a year ago, it would not have been possible to even remotely contemplate events that were about to unfold. With Cheltenham 2021 confirmed as being behind closed doors, the absence of the traditional roar as the Supreme field are called forward will be one of the low points of these tumultuous twelve months.

The 2020 Festival is to many tainted by the belief that it contributed to the spread of the virus and this year the Gordon Elliott controversy of recent weeks has done little to make this year's any less straightforward.



Richard Hoiles: Racecourse & ITV lead racing commentator for this year's festival. Richard has commented on many of the world's biggest races

My personal belief however is that racing must not lose its nerve over images that whilst shocking are clearly not representative of the sport as a whole, and where the painstaking preparation in delivering these equine athletes at their peak of physical and mental powers underpins what lies behind success at the highest level.

Make no mistake, there is no higher level in National Hunt racing than the Cheltenham Festival and I am adamant that at the end of the four days it will be the performances of those on the track that will prove worthy of admiration, debate and praise as opposed to the travails of the last twelve months.

The most mouth-watering division right across the board look to be the novice chasers, where all three at the top of their respective markets, Shishkin in the Arkle, Envoi Allen in the Marsh and Monkfish in the renamed Brown Advisory (formerly RSA) are proven at the Festival having all won there last year.

All have credentials difficult to knock but the emergence of Energumene and the swift transfer of five year old Allmankind to the larger obstacles makes the Arkle for me the race of the week. Allmankind's tactics and the recalibration in recent years of the allowance given to the younger horses mean he is likely to set it up nicely for the other pair. Energumene has possibly got a better cruising speed than Shishkin and he may well be best placed to have first crack, whilst Shishkin will be looking to repeat his Supreme surge from the last where he overcame an error and being hampered to emerge victorious. It is a fascinating contest and I hope it comes close to the Anglo-Irish battle between Bobslime and Noddy's Ryde in this race which remains one of my all-time Festival favourites.



Bob Olinger

The Arkle market looks about right, so for a betting angle here are the horses that above all others will carry my personal Festival hopes.

The first is Bob Olinger in the Ballymore. With more Irish racing being covered on ITV it has been far easier for me to keep better tabs on the Irish form throughout the season than the usual crash course of videos previously undertaken on the build up to Cheltenham. No horse has impressed me more than Henry De Bromhead's six year old gelding. He has shown steady improvement in terms of both ability and equally as importantly the way he goes about things. A sound jumper, easy to position strategically,

he has come a long way in a relatively short space of time and as long as that slight inexperience doesn't find him out, he looks to have a leading chance and will be my main bet of the week.

The second at bigger odds is Saint Calvados in the Ryanair Chase on Thursday. This is predominantly built about the fact that things have not gone his way all season and so he could be considerably better than his bare form figures suggest. Splitting Min and A Plus Tard in last year's renewal his stable had already entered a barren spell, which saw them winnerless for a sequence of 65 runners spreading over a near two month period, at the time he reappeared in the King George where he finished a creditable fourth. Upped in trip and coupled with the freshness of a nine month absence he fought his rider and gave himself little chance of staying the 3m, a question that still remained unanswered when he got rid of his rider in the rescheduled Cotswold Chase at Sandown before the trip became an issue. That is probably a blessing as it became a stamina sapping slog with Native River's usual merciless approach ensuring nothing that completed had an easy race. Now the stable are in much better form he looks overpriced in his attempt to go one place better this time around. The one slight caveat is the ground not drying out too much as he is quite a heavy limbed horse.

As regards the Championship races, my inability to attach an accurate price to Epatante makes it difficult to price up the Champion Hurdle market. Will we see the dominant performance of twelve months ago or the damp squib of Kempton and the Mares Novices here two years ago? Honeysuckle undoubtedly impressed at Leopardstown and Goshen warmed the heart with a return to the winner's enclosure at Wincanton in the Kingwell but the possibility of a truly run race on drying ground could set things up for Sharjah to at the very least run into a place at a far bigger price.

The Gold Cup looks its usual minefield and the Champion Chase revolves around whether there is any reason that Chacun Pour Soi won't show his form at Cheltenham. He has dominated the division this season as others have fallen by the wayside and the race is his to lose.



Thyme Hill

The other clash of the week is in the Stayers Hurdle between Thyme Hill and Paisley Park. Connections of both have been brave enough not to duck each other during the season with the current score 1-1 and both with grounds to feel optimistic of winning the one that really matters. Thyme Hill has good tactical speed for a stayer and if the ground dries out that could prove a potent weapon. Paisley Park by contrast takes a while to pick up but then delivers a sustained burst which has resulted in him winning from the most unlikely looking

positions. One of the enduring memories of last year's Festival is the overhead batcam shot which showed Richard Johnson getting baulked every which way he tried to go on Thyme Hill in the Albert Bartlett and the cry and wave of frustration when he could finish only fourth. Expect him to be delivered later than at Ascot and this time Thyme Hill may not be for catching.

Four fantastic days of action to proudly showcase the very best that National Hunt racing has to offer. Enjoy.

Summary:

Bob Olinger – Ballymore

Saint Calvados – Ryanair

Sharjah – Champion Hurdle (EW)

Thyme Hill – Stayers

John Hunt

The most exciting horse at this year's Festival is without doubt Monkfish, who put hairs on the back of my neck when winning at Leopardstown during the Dublin racing festival in February. I could not take my eyes off him and I knew after just a couple of fences that he would be exhilarating to watch. I must admit that when he scraped home in last year's Albert Bartlett Hurdle, I didn't think we had seen a star in the making but I am convinced that he is now. He reminded me of Vautour in terms of his rhythmic dismantling of his fences, so much natural talent. He will always come out fighting when the going gets tough, as he has displayed great courage on more than one occasion. Make sure at 1.55 on Wednesday afternoon you are strapped in because he is capable of doing something mind-blowing in the Brown Advisory Novices' Chase.



John Hunt: Racecourse & BBC Racing/Sports commentator and presenter. Racing to school ambassador.

Of course Monkfish will be a tiny price but a double with Bob Olinger in the Ballymore Novices' Hurdle could easily reap rewards. For me, he is the outstanding novice hurdler in Ireland this year and I'll be surprised if Bravemansgame or Gaillard Du Mesnil can match his talent. It was certainly one of the performances of the season when Bob Olinger took his field apart winning the Grade one Lawlor's Hurdle at Naas in spectacular fashion. He really showed off his jumping technique there and is one of several leading Festival chances for Rachel Blackmore, who looks set for a brilliant week.



Monkfish

Blackmore has realistic prospects of becoming the first female rider to win either the Champion Hurdle or the Cheltenham Gold Cup, indeed she could win both! Now that would be a fairy tale but although I'm not overly taken by A Plus Tard's credentials in the Gold Cup. The Champion Hurdle could come her way as the remarkable Honeysuckle has looked better than ever this season. Remember, she won the mares hurdle at the Festival last season, proving her liking for the course, but the way she destroyed her opposition in the Irish Champion Hurdle suggests that Epatante will need to be right back to her best to retain the crown. Honeysuckle for me.

I know handicaps are really tough to solve but I'm convinced that Houx Gris is thrown in for the Fred Winter, now the Boodles Handicap Hurdle for four year olds. I get the distinct impression that Paul Nicholls has been protecting his attractive handicap mark as we haven't seen him since he finished a remote third to Adagio and Nassalam at Chepstow in the Finale Hurdle. That form is really trustworthy; David Pipe thinks that Adagio has a great chance in the Triumph Hurdle itself and Houx Gris travelled well in that race, not given a hard time at all when it became clear that he couldn't match the front two. Indeed, he only started to lose ground when he blundered at the second last. Nicholls has a superb record in this race having won it three times and Houx Gris will hopefully make that four.

I'm a big fan of Venetia Williams and although Royal Pagaille is her big hope for the week, I've been impressed by two of her horses in particular this season and they both head to the Festival in tip top order. Achille has been 'on it' all season and confirmed his rise through the handicap ranks with a terrific run in the Grand National trial at Haydock behind the teak tough Lord Du Mesnil. He is a very hard horse to pass so there was no disgrace in that and if he were to run in the Kim Muir I'm sure Charlie Deutsch would give him another patient ride. He could easily run into a place, or better still win the last race on Thursday afternoon.

Stablemate Ibleo is also in fantastic form. He is a two mile specialist and has caught the eye with the easy style of racing he has shown at both Sandown and Doncaster in recent weeks. He didn't come off the bridle to win both those events and thoroughly deserves a chance at a nice prize.

He has got lots of entries at Cheltenham, the Grand Annual Chase would appear to fit the bill most of all but I will still back him even if Venetia Williams decides to really go for glory in the Champion Chase itself.



Ibleo

Her runners often step up at this meeting when few expect them to. Something Wells and Kayf Aramis both won at Cheltenham at 33/1 and 16/1 respectively and just two years ago Aso ran second in the Ryanair Chase at 33/1. Don't be put off by a big price. Venetia did win the Grand National after all with 100/1 chance Mon Mome!

Good luck and safe home to them all.

Summary:

Monkfish - Brown Advisory Novices' Chase
Bob Olinger - Ballymore Novices' Hurdle
Honeysuckle - Champion Hurdle
Houx Gris - Fred Winter
Achille - Kim Muir
Ibleo - Grand Annual Chase / Champion Chase

Cheltenham Trends 2021 from Paul O'Hara...

Well what a difference a year makes! Last year, I was looking forward to my annual pilgrimage to the Festival and this year, like most people will be watching from the comfort of home! No crowds, but at least we have a Festival to enjoy! We'll still have those epic renewals, the emotional comebacks and hard luck stories. Wouldn't be a Festival without them! Hopefully that's whetted your appetite and now it's time for the main event, this year's trends! I've reviewed the previous ten years for the 'Big Four' races and hopefully it finds you a winner or two! Whatever you're backing, good luck, and let's hope it's yet another Festival to savour!

Champion Hurdle - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran between 23 and 80 days ago

10/10 - won in season

10/10 - age 5 to 9

10/10 - had their prep run at Sandown, Kempton, Wincanton, Leopardstown, Naas or Punchestown

9/10 - 12 runs or fewer over hurdles

9/10 - top 2 finish time out

In a very competitive renewal, the trends point to six horses, engagements elsewhere. They are: **ABRACADABRAS, ASPIRE TOWER, GOSHEN, CONCERTISTA, HONEYSUCKLE, EPATANTE**, although Concertista likely to run in the Mares Hurdle, where she's a hot favourite

MY SELECTION – This a heart and a head race for me. The heart would love to see Goshen win and gain redemption for last year's agonising fall with the Triumph at his mercy. In what could turn out to be a battle of the mares, I'm going marginally for **EPATANTE** to retain her tiara.

Champion Chase - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 32 days ago

10/10 - Top 5 finish last time out

10/10 - age 7 to 10

10/10 - SP no bigger than 11-1

10/10 - had their prep race at Cheltenham, Ascot, Kempton, Newbury or Punchestown

9/10 - ran in the same calendar year

Trends here point to two horses only and that's last year's winner **POLITOLOGUE** and **FIRST FLOW**

MY SELECTION – Cheltenham form always important here and something hot favourite Chacun Pour Soi lacks. Sentiment kicks in and the ground is coming right. **ALTIOR** to do a Moscow Flyer, and win at the ripe old age of 11.

Stayers' Hurdle - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 46 days ago

10/10 - age 6 to 9

10/10 - finished in the top four on last completed start

10/10 - had their prep race at Cheltenham, Newbury, Naas, Leopardstown or Punchestown

9/10 - between 2 and 5 runs that season (exception Penhill)

9/10 - top finish of 2nd in that season (exception Penhill)

Trends here point to four horses. They are: **BLOORING PORTER, SIRE DE BERLAIS, ROKSANA** and **VINNDICATION** although Roksana and Vinndication are likely to take up engagements elsewhere

MY SELECTION – Paisley Park had an excuse for last year's failure. He's now appears to be back to his best and is 1-1 in races against the young pretender Thyme Hill this season. However, **THYME HILL** could be open to more improvement and gets my vote, especially after finishing an unlucky fourth to Monkfish in last year's Albert Bartlett.

Gold Cup - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 33 days ago

10/10 - age 6 to 9

10/10 - Won Grade 1 chase

10/10 - had their prep run at Kempton, Newbury, Leopardstown, Thurles or Tramore

9/10 - won last time out

There are four horses that fit the trends and these are last year's winner **AL BOUM PHOTO** followed by **A PLUS TARD, FRODON** and **KEMBOY**

MY SELECTION – Irish look to have this. It's **AL BOUM PHOTO** all the way for me!

Finally, five horses that are declared in the handicaps and could go well at a price.

Al Dancer

Botox Has

Éclair De Beaufeu

Mrs Milner

Thyme White



Altior

Lambourn Trainers Horses to Follow

A mixture of National Hunt and flat with a few comments directly from the trainers worth noting:

Michael Blanshard

Accomplice

Winner of 5 races since June 2020 (the most of any horse in Lambourn!). A Lingfield course specialist who has improved by 22lbs on BHA ratings in that time.

Famous Dynasty

A very consistent handicapper who won 3 races last year and has been placed twice already in 2021.

Wisper

Three year old who was placed twice at two and shows promise at home.

Henry Candy

Twilight Calls

Unlucky to still be a maiden. Has ability and should improve.

Run To Freedom

Won at Kempton in December. Tall horse who should improve with time.

Dominic Ffrench Davis

Call My Bluff

Wintered well and looks sure to make his presence felt in staying handicaps when there is cut in the ground.

Harry Dunlop

Honours

Nice 3yo staying filly

Mirique

Speedy 2yo

Warren Greatrex

Bob Mahler- Cheltenham Thursday

Finished 3rd in this race last year and galloped strongly to the line. He loves better ground and returned to form last time out. Comes into this race in great order and with a big chance.

Emitom

Has had an interrupted season and ran way below par in the Rendlesham. Ran very well at Aintree last year and I think he could do the same again.



Nicky Henderson

The Cheltenham squad is starting to take shape. The obvious ones being Epatante (Champion Hurdle), Altior (Champion Chase), Champ and Santini (Gold Cup). Of the others I do like the chance of Chantry House in the Marsh Novices' Chase, although he has to take on Envoi Allen, and also Shishkin in the Arkle. For something at better prices; in the handicaps I think Caribbean Boy could have a good chance in the Paddy Power Plate, Champagne Platinum in the Pertemps Final and Birchdale in Coral Cup would all have chances at reasonable odds.

For the rest of the season we still have quite a lot of horses to run. Balco Coastal was impressive winning his Bumper at Kempton and will hopefully go to Aintree. Fable has been performing well and will hopefully win again. Hurling Magic should be winning a Novice Hurdle in the near future. Tweed Skirt looks a talented filly and will hopefully go to Sandown for a Listed Bumper next weekend and maybe Aintree after that. Precious Cargo is being aimed at the Aintree Topham Chase. On The Blindside could go to Aintree too for the three mile hurdle.

Richard Hughes

Brentford Hope,

4yo Bay Gelding (Camelot x Miss Raven) He is heading to the Lincoln on 27th March. I am very happy with him.

Karibana (Ire), 4yo Bay Gelding (Hallowed Crown x Queen Wasp) – He is a lovely horse, one for some good Saturday handicaps. He is made for Ascot.

Calling The Wind (Ire)

5yo Bay Gelding (Authorized x Al Jasrah) and **Prince Imperial (Usa)** 4yo Bay Gelding (Frankel x Proprtional) are both lovely types for staying handicaps this year.

Charlie Mann

Defi Des Carres

The Glen Farkclas Cross Country Chase. An each way chance. He's won four cross country races in France and he was beaten by a short head on his run at Cheltenham in December.

William Muir

Pyledriver

Aiming for Newmarket on the 4th May (Jockey Club Stakes) He is in great form and has done well over the winter. Looking forward to the season ahead.

Firepower

Recently joined Linkslade. Big strong sprinting type. At the moment relaxed and moving great, aiming for handicaps and maybe progress to black type.

Mitrosofire

Took time to come right last season. We always thought he was a nice horse and ended last season well. Hoping for a lot more to come!

Galiac

He has a tough strong attitude which we like. Great moving horse that is taking training well and looks a good sort.

Dark Angel x Ballymore Celebre

Half-brother to Anjaal. Looks a big strong good moving type. He is showing signs that he could potentially be a class act.

Oliver Sherwood

Ocean Drifter

Very consistent early, has had a break and running in EBF final at Sandown on Saturday. Might go up to 3m by end of season, definitely an improver.

Cossack Dancer

Ran OK early on but I wasn't seeing on the track what I was at home. Found to have a wind issue which has been rectified and on better ground I am expecting to see a marked improvement.

Oliver Signy

No Word Of A Lie

Rangy 5 year old by Milan, he's well related, half-brother to Lieutenant Colonel. He finished second by a head in a gruelling bumper at Exeter last month. We will try and better that performance in his third bumper run before he heads over hurdles.

Sambezi

Lovely 5 year old by up and coming French sire Rajsamman. After placing twice in bumpers he finished 2nd on his debut hurdle run, he will have learned a lot from the race and we are excited to see him out again in the coming weeks.

French Paradoxe

6 years old and a chaser in the making, running for the Mick Fitzgerald Racing Club. French Paradoxe is a talented horse who has produced some mixed performances, winning at Newbury before Christmas but struggling to keep consistency with jumping on the track. He is continuing to grow into himself and do his homework, ready for another effort but chasing next season is where he is likely to come into his own.

Dave And Bernie

6 year old Papal Bull with bags of attitude. He won his first race for us at Ludlow, but was disinterested at Taunton where all but two hurdles were removed for low sun. He's had a quiet few months with a bruised foot but is back to his usual, disruptive self and has entries at the moment.

Jamie Snowden

Kiltealy Briggs

Paddy Power Plate Handicap Chase over 2m4 on the Thursday. He has been a progressive horse over fences this season but didn't stay 3m on heavy ground around Sandown last time, so the drop in trip should help.

Anythingforlove

David Nicholson Mares' Hurdle on the Tuesday, but will only run if the going is very soft. She won the Grade 2 Jane Seymour novice at Sandown well, and is an exciting horse going forward with, but I'd not want to run her on good ground.

Hogan's Height

Hogan's Height is in the Ultima and the Glenfarclas Cross Country and the plan is for him to follow in Tiger Roll's footsteps and go from the Cross Country to the Grand National

Ga Law

Our final entry is **Ga Law**, who is entered for the Arkle, the Marsh and the Brown Advisory Novices' Chase. We'll see how he is over the course of the next week and then decide if he goes there or more probably waits for Aintree.

I'd have thought we'll have a few more entries for the Aintree Festival, where the likes of **Chapmanshype**, **Thistle Do Nicely** and **Stoney Mountain** will go. We've always liked **Datsalrightgino** and he might take his chance in the Grade 2 bumper at Aintree and **Rose O'Hara** might go for the mare's equivalent. Whilst **Hogan's Height** is all set to take his place in the big one over the National Fences.

Mark Usher

2 Year Olds

Adaayinourlife

A lovely action Adaay colt, looks promising for mid-season

Arlecchinos Gift

If all goes well he is a forward 2 year old who is showing a fair bit of speed already

Picota

His early work is very promising and should be one to follow early season

3 Year Olds

Blue Galaxy

At the right end of the handicap and he is going the right way, one to follow

The Bay Warrior

3 year old who should be worth following. A huge backward 2 year old he starting to strengthen up and is well handicapped.

Tom Ward

Raging Rascal

Lovely colt who was second last year at Glorious Goodwood. He should be one aiming for some decent handicaps this summer.

Mishal Star

A filly we think a lot of and should be more than capable of getting black type this season.

Farasi Lane

Won impressively last time out at the back end of last year and will make up into a very exciting three year old for this season.

The Peter O'Sullivan 2021 Lambourn Virtual Open Day

Each trainer will have a page with a 360-degree stable tour, with horses of interest listed. There will be a Silent Auction and a Raffle with some great prizes, and some interesting articles. All of this will be viewable on this site a few days before April 2nd.

From Good Friday onwards on this site, there will be some 6-7 short films with interviews about Lambourn and racing.

There will be no charge to see everything on site. However, when everything is up and running, we do hope that you might be generous and donate via the Donate buttons, and/or support the Silent Auction and Raffle.

The money raised will go towards helping our hard-working Racing Staff and their families. Depending on the amount raised, we may also donate to The Thames Valley Air Ambulance and other needy Lambourn based organisations, as we do in normal years.

For more information, visit: <https://www.lambournopenday.com/>

A quick word on betting value. For me it is the key element in all betting decisions. I would strongly recommend that you have a variety of betting options, including the exchanges. Getting paid out a bit extra because you looked for value makes a big difference in the long run.

Finally, my thanks to all the contributors to this preview and to you for supporting the stable staff through your donation to the Lambourn Valley Housing Trust.

For more information about Donn's work, go to: www.donnmcclean.com.

Best of luck for the days ahead.

Steve Lewis Hamilton