



2023 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.

- **Francesca Altoft**

Official Cheltenham Festival course photographer special feature.

- **Ten year trends**

The telling stats from Paul O'Hara

- **Exclusive horses to follow**

Direct from a variety of Lambourn trainers including an extensive overview from Nicky Henderson

A mixed forecast for the days ahead: A dry and warm Sunday followed by light rain and a blustery wind on Monday. The present official going is Soft, Good to Soft in places on the old course and Good to Soft, Soft in places on both the new and cross country courses. Light rain is currently in the forecast for all four days of the festival.

Prices quoted correct at the time of writing.

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Tuesday 14th

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

SLH: As the market suggests, it would come as a big surprise if the Irish aren't successful in the Festival opener. Rare Edition looks the best of the home trained challenge.

Rare Edition's beating of Rubaud at Kempton on Boxing Day looks a strong piece of form. But I thought he was disappointing on his next start when turned over at short odds at Huntingdon. He would need to show dramatic improvement to beat the Irish.

DMC: A son of Quevega, Facile Vega remains favourite for the curtain-raiser, despite his defeat at Leopardstown last time. He is a hugely likeable horse, that was his first defeat, for which there was an excuse, and he is proven at Cheltenham, but he is short for a horse who was well beaten on his last run.

The winner of the Leopardstown race, Il Etait Temps, may be under-rated, and he is a second-season novice, fifth in the Triumph Hurdle last year, but the value of the race could be Marine Nationale. Barry Connell's horse is unbeaten in four, two bumpers and two hurdle races. He did well to win the Grade 1 Royal Bond Hurdle last time, on ground that was probably softer than ideal, and that race is working out well through the third and fourth. He hasn't run since then, but that was always the plan, he goes to Cheltenham a fresh horse, and there is no knowing how good he could be.

High Definition, winner of the Beresford Chase as a two-year-old, is a classy recruit to hurdle. Rated 119 on the flat at his peak, he could run well at a big price.

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

SLH: What to make of Jonbon, after a slightly underwhelming prep run at Warwick? He tended to jump to his right, and at one stage looked in real trouble before taking up the running going to two out and going on to win comfortably, as his odds of 1/16 suggested he should!

The form of both of his previous chase wins at Sandown and Warwick now looks solid rather than spectacular, and at this stage I would be looking to oppose him at short odds.

The remainder of the British trained horses have plenty to find.

DMC: There shouldn't be much between El Fabiolo and Jonbon. There was only a neck between them when they finished first and second in the Grade 1 Top Novices' Hurdle at Aintree last April. Jonbon came out on top that day, but there are reasons for believing that El Fabiolo could exact his revenge now.

That was just El Fabiolo's second run for Willie Mullins at Aintree. Also, he made a mistake at the final flight, but for which he might have finished even closer to Jonbon. As well as that, Willie Mullins' horse was very good in winning a red-hot Irish Arkle at Leopardstown last time. Dysart Dynamo is a player too, you know that he will set a lightning-fast pace, but El Fabiolo could be too strong for all his rivals.

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

SLH: I'm convinced that Constitution Hill can be one of the very best horses that I've seen and fully expect him to confirm that impression here. He has all the attributes required to be a horse of the highest class and anticipate he will win this with ease. Unfortunately, that view is all built into his odds!

DMC: State Man would be a worthy Champion Hurdle favourite in an ordinary year, but this is not an ordinary year. Constitution Hill is extraordinary. He is five for five over hurdles, he has won those five races by an aggregate of 77 lengths, and he has been clocking startling times. It appears that he has a temperament to match his talent too.

State Man was very good in winning the Irish Champion Hurdle last time and, last year's County Hurdle winner, he is a top-class two-mile hurdler. But you feel that Constitution Hill is going to have to under-perform if State Man is going to beat him.

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

SLH: Marie's Rock has had just the one start this season when impressively winning the Relkeel Hurdle on the New Course here on New Years' day. Her previous race had been at Punchestown last April when beating Stormy Ireland and Epatante in the Mares Champion Hurdle. That reappearance success confirms she is still progressing. She is the clear choice of the home trained horses and has an excellent chance of following up last year's win in this race.

DMC: This has morphed into a fascinating race, with Honeysuckle coming here now, and Epatante supplemented, which means that the winners of the last three Champion Hurdles are running in the Mares' Hurdle.

So is last year's Mares' Novices' Hurdle winner Love Envoi, and possible last year's Mares' Hurdle winner Marie's Rock and last year's Mares' Hurdle runner-up Queen's Brook and last year's Grade 1 Mares' Novice Hurdle Final winner at Fairyhouse, Brandy Love, who really needs to go left-handed.

Queen's Brook could be the under-rated horse in the race, but Honeysuckle still has the fire in her belly. The dual Champion Hurdle winner, the step up to two and a half miles should suit her and, winner of this race in 2020, it would be the right result on her swansong. She could bring the house down. Again. One final time.

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

SLH: Nicky Henderson's Mister Coffey looks the best of the Brits.

Although a solid and consistent handicap performer, Mister Coffey has yet to win a chase in seven attempts - hence he still qualifies for this Novice Chase. However, he isn't certain to stay.

Once again there is a very strong Irish challenge.

Wednesday 15th March

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

SLH: Hermes Allen is by far the pick of the home trained runners and is sure to run a massive race. He impressed when winning over today's course and distance in November, and then dotted up in the Grade 1 Challow Hurdle at Newbury at the end of December.

The Newbury form is very strong, certainly by the standards on this side of the Irish Sea, and he looks a high class hurdler. He races prominently, but doesn't need to lead, plus ground conditions are not an issue. However, with such a strong Irish challenge putting a price on his chance of winning is extremely problematic.

There a few collateral form lines that put the leading Irish horses on a similar level as Hermes Allen, and my feeling is the current 5/2 offers little value.

DMC: Hermes Allen is obviously a talented individual, but Challow Hurdle winners have a terrible record in the Ballymore. Zero for twenty in the Ballymore, they usually need a greater test of stamina than the Ballymore Hurdle provides.

Impaire Et Passe has pace and stamina. He won his maiden hurdle over two miles and three furlongs, and he won the Moscow Flyer Hurdle last time, showing enough pace to suggest that he could be a Supreme Novices' Hurdle candidate. But this is the race for him, as Willie Mullins plots the paths for members of his team, and you need pace to win a Ballymore Hurdle.

Champ Kiely was sent off at odds-on for the Royal Bond Hurdle, when he raced too keenly early on. He was very good in winning the Grade 1 Lawlor's of Naas Hurdle last time, and he could be a little under-rated by the market.

2.10 Brown Advisory Novices' Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 3m½f

SLH: With cheek-pieces fitted Thyme Hill appeared to show the level of form he had achieved as a hurdler when beating McFabulous at Kempton on Boxing Day. But subsequent events now make that form look suspect. If backing Thyme Hill, you also have to trust that the head gear will work again.

The Real Whacker is considered, having impressed when winning at Cheltenham over a shorter trip on New Years' day. Going back up to three miles will suit him and I am sure he will do his small stable proud. However, I do feel that this could be another one for the Irish.

DMC: We saw a new dimension to Gerri Colombe in the Scilly Isles Chase at Sandown last time. We knew that he could gallop and we knew that he went well on soft ground and we knew that he had grit and determination, but he showed pace last time at Sandown, over two and a half miles on good to soft ground at a park course, to win a Grade 1 race.

The step back up to three miles on Wednesday should see Gordon Elliott's horse progress again, Jordan Gainford gets on really well with him, and he is the one they all have to beat.

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

SLH: Edwardstone looked to still be progressing when winning the Tinkle Creek at Sandown. At the time that looked a career best by quite a margin, but subsequent events have made the initial merit of that performance questionable. Greaneteen, who was behind Edwardstone at Sandown has since been beaten at very short odds.

And then Edwardstone looked sure to beat Editeur Du Gite in the rearranged Clarence House run on the new course here at the end of January, but didn't!

The discrepancy in prices between Edwardstone and Editeur Du Gite looks to be too big. I don't believe the Irish have a stand out performer either, and I would certainly be wary of betting anything at shortish odds.

DMC: The rain is a positive for Energumene. He may be at his best on a right-handed track, but he is almost certainly at his best when he can get his toe into the ground and, the reigning Champion Chaser, further rain would enhance his chance of gaining his revenge on Edwardstone and Editeur Du Gite from the Clarence House Chase at Cheltenham in January.

That said, Gentleman De Mee could be the under-rated horse in the race. He was beaten in his first three races this season, but he is never at his best before the turn of the calendar. He is a spring horse. He won his three races in spring last year and, when he got on spring ground last time in the Dublin Chase at Leopardstown, he looked very good in beating Blue Lord easily. If he can get into a good racing and jumping rhythm early, he could run a big race.

5.30 Weatherbys Champion Bumper (Grade 1) (4-6yo) 2m½f

DMC: A Dream To Share is unbeaten in three. He was impressive in winning on his racecourse debut at Tipperary, he wasn't as impressive in winning at Roscommon next time, but he got the job done. Given a nice break after that by John Kiely, he returned at Leopardstown's Dublin Racing Festival, and was impressive in winning what looked like a hot bumper.

That race has been a really good pointer to the Champion Bumper in recent years. The last four renewals were won by, respectively, Envoi Allen, Kilcruit, Appreciate It and Facile Vega, who finished, respectively, first, second, second and first in the Champion Bumper. A Dream To Share has been bought by JP McManus since he won at Leopardstown, and he could keep his unbeaten record intact.

Thursday 16th March

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

SLH: The home trained horses really do look up against it here, with a very strong Irish challenge.

Joseph O'Brien's Banbridge was brought over to Cheltenham in November, where he comprehensively beat a useful field over two miles. On his next two starts he then finished well beaten behind Mighty Potter at Fairyhouse and by El Fabiolo at Leopardstown. Using Banbridge as a marker suggests the pick of our horses have a deal to find with best of the Irish.

I have Balco Coastal and Stage Star top on my ratings, but the level they have so far achieved doesn't look good enough.

DMC: Mighty Potter is a potential superstar. A dual Grade 1 winner as a novice hurdler last season, he was impressive in winning the Grade 1 Drinmore Chase at Fairyhouse in December, and he was more impressive in winning the Grade 1 novice chase at Leopardstown's Dublin Racing Festival.

He is short though, and Banbridge may be the value of the race. Winner of the Martin Pipe Hurdle last year, Joseph O'Brien's horse is already a better chaser than hurdler. He had the pace to win the Arkle Trial at Cheltenham in November, and he stayed on well to take second place behind El Fabiolo last time in the Irish Arkle. He is two for two at Cheltenham, and the step back up to two and a half miles should suit.



Banbridge (red cap) on his way to victory in the 2022 Martin Pipe

2.50 Ryanair Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 2m4½f

SLH: Shishkin come back to his best, in fact I rated it his best ever performance, when winning the Betfair Chase at Ascot. A second wind operation and the fitting of a tongue tie, allied to a step up in trip enabled him to put up a top class performance.

If reproducing that form, I can't see him being beaten. That's the positive summary of his chance, the negative is his price. He needs to go out and give his running a second time, which I think he will, but you will have to take very short odds about him doing that.

DMC: If Shishkin repeats the performance that he put up at Ascot last time, stepped up to the intermediate trip, his first run since a wind operation and fitted with a tongue-tie, then it will take a massive performance to beat him.

If Shishkin's performance falls a little short of his Ascot performance, however, Janidil could be the one to benefit. JP McManus' horse was good in winning the Red Mills Chase at Gowran Park last month on his debut this season. Weak in the market beforehand, he showed a fine turn of foot to go from fourth to first over the last three fences, and he kept on well up the run-in to win nicely.

We know that he goes well at Cheltenham too, he finished second behind Allaho in the Ryanair Chase last year, and this intermediate trip is his optimum.

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

SLH: A top form Paisley Park would still be the best of the British horses. But it was 2019 when he won this race, and although he ran to a high level at Newbury, when just touched off by Champ and when winning the Long Walk at Kempton, I don't think that form is good enough to beat some of the Irish in this race.

You then need to explain a disappointing run in the Cleeve Hurdle here at the end of January. I can see him finishing in the first four, but not winning.

The Irish appear to have a complete strangle-hold on this race.

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

SLH: Market Leader Luccia has impressed in her wins, is progressive and is in the could be anything category. She is however at short odds on form achieved.

Of the other home trained horses, both Kateira and You Wear It Well have run to a similar level as Luccia, although both would ideally prefer a strong test at this trip.

The Irish form appears at least as strong as ours. All things considered, at this stage I would be looking to oppose Luccia at short odds.

DMC: Lot Of Joy is a classy recruit to hurdles. Winner of the Swedish St Leger as a three-year-old, she ran a big race to finish third in the Irish Cesarewitch on her second run for Willie Mullins. She was prominent from early that day in a race in which the hold-up horses came to the fore – the winner was last into the home straight – so she did well to keep in to finish third.

Rated in the high 90s on the flat, she was beaten in her first two runs over hurdles, but she was keen in both those races, and she was beaten on both occasions by good horses, both of whom are now rated in the high 130s. Willie Mullins' mare was impressive last time in winning her maiden hurdle, her jumping warmed up as the race progressed, and there is every chance that she will progress again. The fast pace that they usually go in this race should suit her.

Friday 17th March

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

SLH: The Irish, and in particular Willie Mullins have the race completely sown up. For what it's worth, I think that Blood Destiny could be very good.

DMC: Willie Mullins appears to hold the key to the Triumph Hurdle this year, and a lot of the preview evening talk centred around whether Paul Townend would ride Lossiemouth or Blood Destiny. But it may be that Gala Marceau has been under-rated as a result.

Blood Destiny has looked very good in winning his two hurdle races, but the Spring Juvenile Hurdle has been the best pointer to the Triumph Hurdle of late, with seven of the last eleven winners coming from that race. Lossiemouth did have a poor run through the race in the Spring Hurdle, but Gala Marceau beat her by two and a half lengths.

Willie Mullins' mare was keen through the early stages of that race too, as she had been when Lossiemouth beat her at Christmas, but she still had enough in reserve to repel the challenge from her stable companion. A faster pace in the Triumph Hurdle will suit her well and, if she can settle a little better, she could take another step forward. She shouldn't be as far behind Lossiemouth in the market as she is.

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

SLH: I expect Kim Bailey trained Chianti Classico to be suited by this test of stamina on decent ground.

He is a promising horse who connections can look forward to. However, his latest win came in a Wincanton handicap and that form isn't good enough against the Irish challenge he faces here.

DMC: Hiddenvally Lake was eased in the betting for the Albert Bartlett Hurdle after he was beaten by his stable companion Monty's Star at Clonmel last time, but there was mitigation. The early pace wasn't strong, and he had to make his own running, and the ground was soft and his jumping wasn't great, and he still only went down by a half a length.

That Clonmel race is a race that Henry de Bromhead has used as a springboard to the Albert Bartlett Hurdle for Minella Indo, who won it, and Monalee, who finished second, and there is every chance that Hiddenvally Lake will come on again for that run. He stayed on strongly to win a Grade 3 race at Cork on his previous run, and the test of stamina that the Albert Bartlett Hurdle invariably presents will suit him well.

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

SLH: I am expecting a big performance from Bravemansgame, who put up a career best when winning the King George on Boxing Day. This represents a very different challenge compared to Kempton. We have an extra 2f plus the hill to get up.

Nonetheless, I was taken with how this horse stayed on in the soft ground at Kempton, and good ground around here would suit ideally. I can see him traveling strongly, jumping well and have every chance turning for home. I think he has every chance of staying on up that famous Cheltenham hill.

Ahoy Senior returned to form when winning the Cotswold chase here in January. Although he has beaten Bravemansgame on a couple of occasions in the past, he has finished well behind him in two races, including the King George this season.

DMC: If A Plus Tard can put up a performance that is similar to the performance that he put up last year in winning the Gold Cup, then he will probably win. He obviously hasn't had the ideal preparation, but the vibes coming from Henry de Bromhead's yard have been positive of late, and it would be brilliant to see him win it again.

Galopin Des Champs is obviously the coming force, he would be unbeaten over fences but for that bizarre fall in the Turners Chase last year, and he has looked very good this season. He stayed on well to win the Irish Gold Cup last time, and there is every chance that he will stay the extra two and a half furlongs of the Gold Cup.

Noble Yeats would be an unconventional winner, a Grand National winner in the Gold Cup the following year, but then, trainer Emmet Mullins majors in the unconventional and, if it turns into a stamina war; that could bring Noble Yeats into it.

Stattler is a player, and Hewick could run a big race if the ground doesn't get too soft, but Conflated may be the most under-rated horse in the race. Gordon Elliott's horse was a good winner of the Irish Gold Cup last season, and he won the Savills Chase this season with lots in hand. He goes into the race a fresh horse, and we know that he can operate at the track. He was probably going to finish second in the Ryanair Chase last season behind Allaho when he came down at the second last fence.



Galopin Des Champs at last year's festival

4.10 Festival Hunters' Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 3m2½f

SLH: Just a brief word for Famous Clermont, who has been most impressive in his two victories this year. He is a horse that can produce a turn of speed at the finish of races, and good ground would suit. The Irish challenge is feared, but I expect Famous Clermont to run well.

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

SLH: Irish trained Jeremys Flame won at Huntingdon on her latest start, easily beating a few of our top mares. There are a couple of other Irish mares that are at least as good as her, so unless the weather takes a turn for the worse it looks an Irish dominated race again.



Jeremys Flame defeating Zambella at Huntingdon

Richard Hoiles

Everything changes, everything stays the same. Last season at the Festival it was very much the latter with three of the five major races going to the same horses, Honeysuckle, Flooring Porter and Allaho and the front two in the Gold Cup, A Plus Tard and Minella Indo just swapping places. In recent months however everything has changed. It is by no means certain that any of the above names will be even there to defend their crowns and plenty of perceived Festival bankers such as Jonbon, Lossiemouth, Facile Vega and Energumene all seeing their prices extend rather than contract of the back of unconvincing performances. By contrast Shishkin and Blazing Khal have made Lazarus like returns to currently head their respective markets for the Ryanair and Stayers Hurdle respectively.



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

From a personal perspective a couple of factors have influenced my betting patterns at the Festival. The first is the increased number of Irish runners in the handicaps. Whilst it does not change my approach of specifically looking for horses that have run well at the meeting in the past and are off similar marks, my lesser knowledge of the overall form on the other side of the Irish Sea makes it harder to assess the blots like State Man who are so far ahead of the handicap as to render such an approach worthless.

The second is Willie Mullins dominance. Mullins currently has more than double the number of ante-post favourites than all of the UK trainers put together and it is quite possible he could reach a century of Festival winners, needing another twelve to reach that landmark. The yard are notorious for only deciding actual running plans at the last minute which makes assessing value prices extremely tricky even with a Non Runner No Bet (NRNB) safety net. With that in mind here are a few angles I am currently considering.

Ultima Handicap Chase

The Irish have a shocking record in this so it is one that the adage of running well in the race previously still carries weight. Un Temps Pour Tout and Vintage Clouds are both recent examples of horses who consistently performed with credit and this time around Happygolucky and Fantastikas are two that fit the bill.

The claims for Happygolucky are more obvious. Second when favourite in 2021 his career has been frustrated by injury but for which, and the quiet year for the yard, his rating may have been much higher. A creditable return at Newcastle was followed by a below par run last time but this trip looks as if it suits him better these days. He may not be risked if the ground comes up fast – he was a non-runner for ground at the track earlier on in the season.

Those for Fantastikas are less obvious but he ran far better in the race last year than the finishing position being one of a very few up with the pace to even be remotely in touch approaching two out. His mark has plummeted this campaign now standing at 132 versus the 144 he carried behind Corach Rambler last season. He has not been in much form but expect a bolder show this time and the big odds mean you don't have to risk too much.

BACK Fantastikas NRNB 25-1 or more, HAPPYGOLUCKY NRNB 10-1 or more.

Brown Advisory

My main angle here is opposing Thyme Hill who I would lay for a place. He has never looked a natural jumper to me, to such an extent that my only ante post Festival bet earlier in the season was to back him for the Stayers hurdle. After his defeat at Newbury I was rubbing my hands only for them to persevere, apply cheekpieces and see him win the Kauto Star at Kempton over Christmas. There look to be plenty of holes in that form with Galia Des Liteaux's errors ending her

chance and Macfabulous subsequent heart issues possibly also accounting for a tame finish at Kempton as well.

Whenever you are thinking of laying, it is important to consider what you have running for you and it is not as much as I would like unless Gerri Colombe runs and Gaillard Du Mesnil turns up here rather than the National Hunt Chase for which he is currently a short priced favourite. Third to L'Homme Presse and Ahoy Senor in a stronger renewal last season, he has lots of chasing experience including being placed in as gruelling a race as the Irish National. Connections also have Ramillies as a back up in both races and hopefully the lure of a weak Grade 1 will persuade Willie to press the right button just before entries close.

LAY Thyme Hill for a place. BACK Gaillard Du Mesnil NRNB.

Glenfarclas Cross Country

A small interest at a big price here in last year's third Plan of Attack. Delta Work sets a very high standard but with the prospect of fast ground, as the whole track is not easy to water, it could make the field size smaller than usual. Split stakes between EW with and without Delta Work. The latter market is not yet up but in the conventional market Plan Of Attack is 50-1 in a place NRNB and more generally 40's and 33's. He needed more of a test than he got in the handicap behind Back on the Leash on trials day and his two previous runs had been over hurdles so presumably were just to keep him ticking over. His chance is better than his long odds suggest.

BACK Plan Of Attack EW NRNB at 33-1 or over, and EW in market without Delta Work at 10-1 or over.

Gold Cup

I have been pretty much convinced all season that I want to be with Stattler for the Gold Cup and there is nothing that has happened to change my mind. His defeat to Galopin Des Champs at the Dublin Racing Festival was far more of a speed test than the usual demands of a Gold Cup where the ability to stay is paramount. He reappeared in the same race that Mullins used to prep Al Boum Photo and comes here relatively fresh. Physically he has always looked the type to progress both with age and over fences and he appeals as a bet at around 8-1 at the time of writing.

BACK Stattler at 6-1 or more NRNB

Best bet of the week would be if Gaillard Du Mesnil lines up in the Brown Advisory. Please Willie, you know it makes sense !

Wishing you all the best of luck for the Festival.

John Hunt

Here we go for 2023. Let's hope we survive....

Four marvellous days racing kicks off with Champion Hurdle day itself and I've no firm view on the first two events. I am not convinced about Facile Vega in the opening Supreme Novices' Hurdle and will find a way to be against him whilst the Arkle looks a super race which I will enjoy without investment.

The Champion Hurdle is the day one highlight and my bet is already down. It's I LIKE TO MOVE IT, each way in the 'without Constitution Hill' market.' I simply cannot see him being out of the first four (a massive deterioration in ground conditions would be the only thing to concern me) and I really think we only have State Man to beat to scoop a nice pot. Nigel Twiston Davies has been second in the Champion Hurdle twice before. Fair enough The New One was seriously talented but his other placed runner was Khyber Kim. And if he can get in the mix so can Nigel's latest hurdling star. I Like To Move It looked sharply progressive when winning the Greatwood Hurdle in November but looked spectacular when galloping clean away from his talented rivals in the Kingwell Hurdle at Wincanton. He absolutely pulverised good horses like Knappers Hill and First Street, really impressing with the zest and elan of his one man show. A proper horse who will be there to expose any chinks in the armoury of the market leaders. I'm sure we will land the place part of the bet, here's hoping we scoop the lot!!

My other main bet on day one will be PERSEUS WAY who runs in the Fred Winter Handicap Hurdle, now the Boodles. Gary Moore always finds Cheltenham contenders (Goshen, Sire De Grugy, Tikram etc) and this horse has a real chance. He ran a remarkable prep race in the Adonis Hurdle at Kempton last month. Jumping beautifully there (which hasn't always been the case), he was brought to a standstill by a faller ahead of him at the third last. Incredibly it seemed to galvanise him rather than put him off. He held a clear lead at the second last where he unfortunately blundered and did so again at the last as Nusret came to take him. I was still impressed with his attitude as he ran on strongly all the way to the line. The handicapper was impressed too as he put him up 7lbs but even off his new mark, Perseus Way will be competitive. I really fancy him.

Day two and the highlight is the Champion Chase and although he's not much of a price, I think that Energumene will retain his crown.

The two Coral Cup fancies I have may both squeeze into the weights. PARTY BUSINESS ran a screamer in the Martin Pipe last year; take a look back and see he was nearly brought down at the second flight, hampered again at the fourth before coming from way back to finish fifth, just six lengths behind Banbridge. He's only a couple of pounds higher now and this will have been the target all year. If he doesn't get in watch for him in other races.

San Salvador will be my bet here if Party Business isn't in the line-up. He is lightly raced and unexposed over this type of trip. He can improve enough to make an impact. If they both get in I'll split stakes them and hope for the best.

GALVIN will be one of my main bets of the week in the Cross Country Chase. Rider Jamie Codd said he schooled over the fences really fluently recently and I cannot believe that the ground will go as soft as it did last year. Galvin has so much class, he could bolt up. I'm looking forward to that as well as the same days Grand Annual Chase where GEMIRANDE will be my bet if he squeezes in at the foot of the weights. He is thriving at present and was unlucky to be pipped at



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

Newbury last weekend. That form I'm sure leaves him with a bit to find, form wise, but so fast is he improving, I'm happy to stay with him. Like Party Business, if he doesn't get into this, he has other entries so keep watchful. A rapidly improving horse.

The bumper is a bit of a lottery with so little concrete evidence yet, having been watching the Dublin Racing Festival bumper on the running rail, FUN FUN FUN made a deep impression on me and I can't believe there are many better than him in the line-up.

On to Thursday and if the rains continue then my confidence will only grow and grow in DASHEL DRASHER in the Stayers Hurdle. He is so wonderfully tough and really made his name as a top class chaser, especially around Ascot. But he made the French star Gold Tweet pull out all of the stops on trials day at Cheltenham and Jeremy Scott his trainer said there and then that he's looking forward to the rematch. Dashel Drasher heads to the Festival unheralded but make no mistake, he can make his presence felt and remains at a massive price. I'll probably not have any other bets on the Thursday but fully expect Shishkin to toy with his rivals in the Ryanair Chase.

So to Gold Cup day and in the big race itself, I'm firmly invested in PROTEKTERAT in the belief that he is a better horse this year but still ran a fantastically brave race to finish third to A Plus Tard in last year's race. He looked the business when returning to winning ways in the Betfair Chase at Haydock and as a result, was a hot favourite for the Cotswold Chase. He finished fourth there but it's worth remembering a couple of things. Firstly, he tanked down the hill there, trading big odds on in running before tiring late on. That was explained by Dan Skelton who told the world straight afterwards that in hindsight, the horse was 'undercooked' for which Skelton took responsibility. He also vowed that would not be the case on Gold Cup day. I believe him and feel his chance would be enhanced if we get a nice drop of rain in the week beforehand. I'm sure he will run well.

Last and by no means least, the Mares Chase, the penultimate race of the meeting and my best bet of the week JEREMYS FLAME who, unlike the two favourites, Impervious and Allegorie De Vassy has masses of experience over fences, has had the year of her life this season and put up a dazzling display at Huntingdon thrashing the highly talented Zambella as she liked. I was worried about how Allegorie De Vassy jumped right last time out at Thurles and feel that would be her downfall and Impervious will be dangerous. However Jeremys Flame remains great value and I'm going to make sure I have still got a few quid aside for her in the 27th race of the week.

As ever, the best of luck!

Betting summary with current prices:

Champion Hurdle: I Like To Move It - 16/1

Boodles Juvenile: Perseus Way – 11/1

Coral Cup: Party Business – 33/1

San Salvador – 16/1

Cross Country: Galvin – 9/4

Champion Bumper: Fun Fun Fun – 8/1

Stayers Hurdle: Dashel Drasher – 25/1

Gold Cup: Protekterat - 14/1

Mares Chase: Jeremys Flame – 5/1

Francesca Altoft

Cheltenham is a week that I feel incredibly lucky to do the job that I do. It's very stressful and hard work, and I perhaps don't appreciate it until it's over, but despite the guaranteed blisters, headaches and sore back I wouldn't change it for the world. In the build up to Festival week I often start to doubt myself a little bit. What if I miss an important winner? Of course, there's absolutely nothing you can do if a winner comes from fourth or fifth over the last, or is covered up by another horse, but you still do blame yourself if you are in that situation for a feature race.

As one of the accredited photographers at The Festival, and working for Cheltenham themselves, I guess you could argue that I am as close as you can get to the racing action without actually being on the back of one of the horses. It really is a front row seat for "the greatest show on turf".

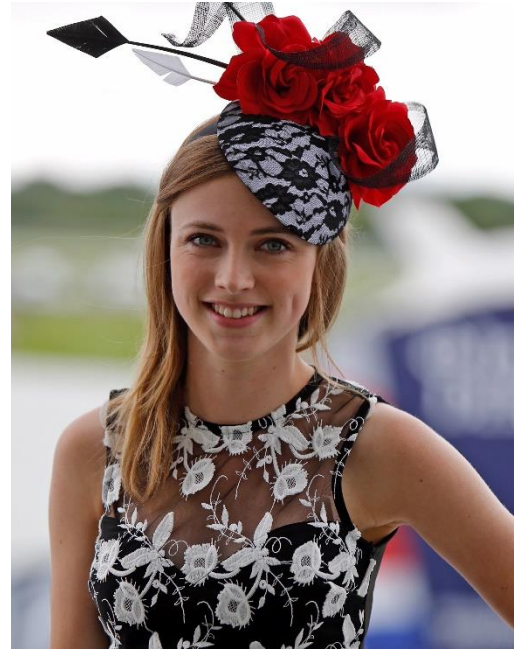
One of the reasons that it is such a stamina testing week is that my Festival is actually six days, rather than four, as I go out on the gallops with the international horses every morning from the Sunday onwards. In all honesty, I prefer this part of the job to the racing itself. You get to see the horses (mostly the Irish) as they stretch their legs each morning and in the past I've been lucky to spend a bit of time getting to know the personalities of the superstar racehorses and watch their relationships with their doting grooms and work riders. Horses I've been lucky enough to capture out on the gallops in recent years include the likes of Energumene, Tiger Roll, Al Boum Photo and Honeysuckle. All of these horses have completely different personalities and ways of going about their day, but however they do it works for them when they produce the goods on the racecourse in the afternoons.

I get to the course each morning at around 7am and wander down to the gallops which are situated out in the middle of the cross country course. I try to vary my position on the gallops each morning, and sometimes for each trainer's string, so that I'm not churning out the same thing every day. I know how much these photos mean to the people riding the horses, so I like to make sure there's a range of photos for them to view. It's not every day you get a photo of yourself riding your pride and joy against the iconic backdrops of the Cheltenham grandstand or Cleeve Hill.

Once I've finished on the gallops, usually about 10am, I'll head back to the media centre to do a bit of editing (and probably warm up with a hot chocolate!) Once racing starts it's all go but my usual routine is to head out to the track to do the horses cantering to the start, do the last hurdle or fence before running back to the winners enclosure as fast as you can with two heavy cameras. In the time I have available between races I'll have to edit as many photos I can and get them sent to the racecourse and to press. There's not much time to think, but by the end of the week it does often run like a well-oiled machine. Once racing finishes on the Friday, I can usually take a deep breath and start to reflect on the week's action.

In a normal day at Cheltenham I'd take about 2000 photos on the gallops and 4000 during racing. I'll narrow these down to usually about 200 on the gallops and 300 from the racing. These images all get individually coded, named and edited. The editing from the week usually takes me about 5 or 6 days to get through as identifying the horses on the gallops is usually quite tricky as they're not carrying numbers or silks to help!

One of the most difficult things photographers have to contend with is the weather, which as we all know is extremely unpredictable! I think the Wednesday last year was without a doubt the worst weather I have ever worked in – I think a lot of us photographers were trying to see the funny side. It was the old "if you don't laugh you'll cry!" Cameras unfortunately while they are 'weather proof



Francesca Altoft: Official photographer at Cheltenham Racecourse

they are not waterproof, yet you also need to have full access to all parts of the camera, so towels are what we tend to use to try to keep them dry. On that day, there was absolutely nothing you could do to stop the cameras getting wet. It was a case of doing the best you could, but largely we just had to hope and pray that our cameras were still working at the end of the day. Fingers crossed that this year there's no extreme weather like that!

This year's racing does look to be largely favouring the Irish yet again, but as I get to know the horses and stable staff so well every year that's not a negative for me. I am of the opinion that Willie Mullins and his team thoroughly deserve every bit of success they have on the biggest stage in National Hunt racing. Willie and his team are always an absolute delight to work with. They are welcoming, helpful and absolutely meticulous in the work that they do with their top class horses. Energumene has to be one of my favourite horses in training. It helps that he's a real poser to go with his talent on the track. Last year, some of my best photos on the gallops were of this lad. There were photos of him standing with his head up and his ears pricked, photos of him completely relaxed having a roll, and photos of him galloping with his ears pricked. I was made up to see him win the Champion Chase on the Wednesday afternoon and I would love to see him win the race again this year.

It's also pretty unoriginal but I would love to see Galopin Des Champs win the Gold Cup. I'm pretty sure if you look closely enough at the replay of last year's Turners, you will see me in absolute despair on the stand on the far side of the last fence when he fell while looking like he was going to bolt up.

I'm not one for betting so I'm never going to be caught giving tips, I just like to see the best horses shine on the biggest stage. Whatever happens at this year's Festival, the most important thing is that all horses and jockeys come home safe and sound. Hopefully I'll be sharing some spectacular photos when the week is over!



Energumene – ‘a real poser to go with his talent on the track’

Cheltenham Trends 2023 from Paul O'Hara...

I've trawled through the previous ten years running's of the 'Big Four' races and hopefully there's a winner or two in there. So good luck with whatever you're backing and let's hope it's yet another Festival to remember, with all the horses come back safely!

Champion Hurdle - 10 Year Trends

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

8/10 - Placed in the first four at a previous Festival

The trends point to three horses, all of which won at last year's Festival. They are:

CONSTITUTION HILL, STATE MAN and LOVE ENVOI (also declared for the Mares Hurdle)

MY SELECTION – Love Envoi more likely to line up in the Mares Hurdle, which leaves one of the most mouth-watering clashes of the meeting. On paper it's a duel, Constitution Hill v State Man. Both have been impressive this season with State Man comfortably beating the two time champion Honeysuckle last time, but as yet no horse has got within twelve lengths of Constitution Hill. He impressively won last year's Supreme and in doing so broke the track record as a novice. Potentially one of the bankers of the festival and has to be **CONSTITUTION HILL** for me.

Champion Chase - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 32 days ago

10/10 - Grade 1 winner

10/10 - SP no bigger than 11-1

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

9/10 - No more than 13 career chase starts

Two horses fit the trends and that's last year's winner **ENERGUMENE** and last year's Arkle winner **EDWARDSTONE**

MY SELECTION – Cheltenham form always important and the two trend horses have it here. Both were behind Editeur Du Gite last time with Edwardstone looking all over the winner but out battled up the run in. **ENERGUMENE** gave a below par performance back in third but last year's winner is dangerous to discount and with positive vibes from the Mullins yard is my choice to repeat.

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

Three horses make the cut and they are: **BOTOX HAS, HOMES BY THE LEE and MARIE'S ROCK**

MY SELECTION – This looks a wide open renewal and Homes By The Lee may be the only one to turn up here. He has showed improved form winning his last two starts and the best of the Irish on current form. Two time champion Flooring Porter has had an interrupted preparation, but will be a massive danger if he lines up fit and well. If Marie's Rock turns up here rather than the Mares, she would also rate a danger, but I'm pinning my hopes on the French raider **GOLD TWEET** (needs to be supplemented). He was an impressive winner of the Cleeve Hurdle last time.

Gold Cup - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 33 days ago

10/10 - age 7 to 9

10/10 - Won Grade 1 chase

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

9/10 - won in last two completed starts

9/10 - top four finish last time out

A trio of horses fit the trends and they are: **BRAVEMANSGAME**, **CONFLATED** and **GALOPIN DES CHAMPS**

MY SELECTION – The Irish as in previous years hold a very strong hand including the last two winners. From this side of the water Bravemansgame looks to be a cut above, although there remains stamina doubts over this longer trip. Conflated was a faller in last year's Ryanair and again stamina may be a question here. A Plus Tard was a shadow of himself first time out and reported not right. Given plenty of time to recover and if ready to run last year's winner could still be a major player. Finally, **GALOPIN DES CHAMPS** an unlucky loser at the festival last year, looked to relish the step up in trip last time despite being ridden with more restraint. He continues to improve and he's my selection.

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

Fastorslow
Ballyadam
Thyme White

An Tailliur
Coeur Serein



The nose-banded Cleeve Hurdle winner **Gold Tweet** ready to go past Dashed Drasher

Lambourn Trainers Horses to Follow

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

Owen Burrows

EIRaaed

Dubawi 3 year old colt which had one run last year where I managed to find him heavy ground in what was probably our hottest and driest summer for years!! He still ran okay but didn't enjoy the ground and wasn't quite right afterwards so didn't run again. His work pleased me last year so I'm looking forward to getting him back out this year.



Mantoog

Kingman 3 year old filly which had one run where she finished second at Kempton at the backend last year. Probably beaten by a very smart one of John Gosden's but ran a race full of promise. Bred to come into her own more this year over 10 furlongs, so again, I'm looking forward to seeing what she can do.

Harry Derham

Shared

Runs in the Boodles Juvenile Hurdle on Tuesday. He's progressing well this season and won nicely at Doncaster last time out. A fast gallop should suit him and he jumps quickly, so if the ground comes up on the dry side he'd have an each way chance.

Warren Greatrex

Bill Baxter

Progressive Novice Chaser who has won 3 of his 5 starts since switching to the bigger obstacles this season, most recently winning the Class 3 Bet365 Novices' Handicap Chase at Kelso last Saturday. Although he won't be heading to Cheltenham, I think the Topham at Aintree could be right up his street. He is a great jumper and the step up in trip shouldn't be a problem.

Daniel and Claire Kubler

Forest Demon

Won on his fourth and final start as a two year old; he was always going to be a better horse at three and we are looking forward to his progress this year from a mark that gives him every chance.

Stan Moore

The Wizard of Eye

A high class horse who has been competing in high class races. Got his act together at the end of last year winning a competitive listed race at Kempton. He stands at 17.3hh which probably makes him the biggest flat horse currently in training. A lovely 4 year old horse, be one to follow this year.

Queues Likely

A big strong 2 year old filly there is plenty to like about her. She goes nicely, has a good pedigree, hopefully an exciting proposition this year.

Hieloray

Good looking 2 year old grey colt, he's pretty eye-catching. Looks a lot like his sire, first season; Phoenix of Spain, we hope he's half as good! We are thinking at the moment he will likely be best of 6-7f

Go Your Own Way

A 2 year old bay colt by leading 2 year old sire last year; Havana Grey. He is showing good paces, should be speedy and we expect him to be an early type.

Jonathan Portman

Three worth looking out for starting with a pair of 3 y.o.'s and then the as yet unraced Brinton.

Enochdhu
Puntarelle
Brinton

Oliver Sherwood

Queen's Gamble

Only runner at Cheltenham runs in the bumper on Wednesday. Who knows if she is good enough to beat the boys but she is in good form at home and has solid course form, so fingers crossed.

Ed Walker

De Bruyne

It took me three efforts to get his distance right and I think he is a well handicapped horse.

Perfect Prophet

Achieved a lot in three starts as a 2yo. She is a very attractive, good moving, and talented filly. We hope she could make into a smart middle distance filly.

Random Harvest

Did nothing but improve last year and she will start in the race that Dreamloper won last year on seasonal debut, the Dahlia.

Yotarid

Second on debut behind a smart horse of Karl Burke's. He could be a smart 3yo colt.

Tom Ward

Capote's Dream

Talented sprinter who lost his way last year but seems back to his best and down to a winnable mark.

Garrick Painter

Won well on his last start and looks to have a bright future as a three year old this season

Intricate Pillar

Won her last start and has done well for a good break. Looks an exciting prospect for this year

Shady Bay

A nice 2 y.o. by New Bay who has been showing all the right signs at home. She is one to watch in the second half of this season.

Finally a highly comprehensive overview from Nicky Henderson:

Our probable runners and comments for the Cheltenham Festival.

Champion Hurdle – **Constitution Hill** – obviously he has done nothing wrong to date winning all his five starts very impressively and appears in very good form.

First Street – he finished only two lengths behind Stateman in the County last year and Stateman is probably the biggest danger to Constitution Hill. First Street is a genuine two miler and has little alternative so may well run in the Champion.

Mares Hurdle – **Marie's Rock** won this last year and was equally impressive at Punchestown and then in the Relkeel (Jan 1 Cheltenham). She loves Cheltenham and seems in very good order. She is also in the Stayers Hurdle and it has not yet been decided which race she will run in.

Epatante – she is in the Champion Hurdle as well as the Mares Hurdle. She was second to Honeysuckle in the Champion last year but she has shown she stays two and a half miles so she might run in this race if she doesn't in the Champion Hurdle.

Theatre Glory – she was very impressive when winning a good listed race recently and deserves to take her chance in this race.

The Arkle – **Jonbon** – he has won all his three starts over fences to date and is in good form. This will be his sternest test to date but we are hopeful.

The National Hunt Chase – **Mister Coffey** – was second in the Kim Muir last year and now moves up in distance which should suit but the Irish challenge is very strong in this race. Soft ground would help us.

The Coral Cup – We have nine entered in this, most of which are in other races as well. **Call Me Lord** has been consistent all season and usually runs well at Cheltenham. **Captain Morgs** is more likely to run in the Pertemps Final but we would be competitive in whichever race he runs, having run impressively last time.

Impulsive One – he won nicely at Wetherby when stepped up in trip and would have a chance in this.

No Ordinary Joe has the option of this or the two mile County Hurdle. He ran well enough in the Betfair at Newbury and I think a bit further will suit.

The Turners – **Balco Coastal** – he was second to one of the better Irish novices in the grade 1 novice Scilly Isles at Sandown recently and I think can improve on that and despite a very strong Irish challenge, I could see him running very well.

The Pertemps Final – we could be mob handed here. **Steal A March, Walking on Air, Captain Morgs** have all won their most recent starts and come into this in very good form and they would be hard to split. **Call Me Lord** would run in this or the Coral. **Mill Green** was third in this race last year and could easily be placed again. We could easily run all of these in this race.

The Kim Muir – **Emir Sacree** would have an outside chance.

Stayers Hurdle – **Marie's Rock** if not the Mares.

Mares Novice Hurdle – **Luccia** has been very impressive in all her starts and must have a great chance. **Ahorsewithnoname** was second in this race last year and has been kept specifically for it.

The Ryanair – **Shishkin** was very impressive recently in the Ascot Chase over the same distance as this race and if all goes well should have a good chance.

The County – as mentioned **First Street, Impulsive One, No Ordinary Joe** are all possibles

The Martin Pipe – we have seven entries but have mentioned them all under previous entries.

As for the rest of the season, I hope that some of these will be able to go on to Aintree which is four weeks later. We have a number of young horses to bring out – **East India Express** will hopefully go to Newbury for the £100,000 Sales Bumper having won very impressively at Kempton and there are a few more like him that might be worth following such as **Gentleman's Relish, Strutter, Fresh As A Daisy**.

Hope you all have a good Festival and enjoy what will be some great racing (I hope).

All the best

Nicky



Constitution Hill leading the way in preparatory work at Kempton

Lambourn Open Day - Good Friday 7th April 2023

Easter Weekend in Lambourn Valley starts by opening its doors to the public for The Peter O'Sullivan Lambourn Open Day. Racing fans can go behind the scenes at some of Britain's top racehorse training establishments where they can meet the trainers, staff and, of course, their equine heroes.

More than 25 racing yards and horse exhibitions will open on the morning of Good Friday to give the public the opportunity to get first-hand experience into the running of top yards such as: multiple Champion Trainer Nicky Henderson, Charlie Hills, Clive Cox and Grand National winning trainer, Oliver Sherwood.

In the afternoon, the central arena opens with a full programme of equine shows and demonstrations of country skills. There will be a Show Jumping competition with several leading horse racing personalities; past and present National Hunt jockeys will also be schooling horses over fences and there will also be the Shetland Grand National plus a quite unique sheepdog display. As usual, there will be a Parade of Equine Heroes which features Cheltenham Festival winners from years gone by as well as Lambourn's best flat horses from recent years.

The Lambourn Open Day also gives an opportunity to check out the brilliant facilities at both the Lambourn Valley Equine Hospital and the Injured Jockey's Fund rehabilitation centre, Oaksey House. There will also be a vast array of trade stands and food stalls to add to what is a great fun Easter day out for all the family.

Tickets cost £15 on the day for the whole day, £10 for afternoon entertainment only. Children under 12 can enter for free. Car Parks are free and open at 7.30 a.m. Yards will open from 8.30am until 1 p.m. All money raised goes to Lambourn's registered charity, The Lambourn Valley Housing Trust, which works tirelessly for the welfare of its stable staff, The Air Ambulance and worthy local organisations.

Full coloured programmes, featuring all information on the day including a map, information on all trainers and timings of events will be available in all car parks and yards.

Visit www.lambournopenday.com to buy tickets and for more information.

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.

On a personal note I have just been informed that a great character of the betting ring, Johnny Lights, has passed after a long illness. My thoughts are with his loving wife and daughters.

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

Francesca Altoft photography: www.francescaaltoft.co.uk

Best of luck for the days ahead.

Steve Lewis Hamilton