

CHAMPION BUMPER



POSTFILES

MEMBERSHIP 2010

- 10th OCT 2009

This was a particularly slowly run national hunt flat race run on good going and **Tavern Times** deserves a lot of credit for winning in such emphatic style after being held up well off the pace for most of the race. **Old Macdonald** and **Ikidunot** certainly benefited from more advantageous trips than the one endured by the eventual winner and looked to have stolen the contest when going clear in the home straight. Nevertheless, having been taken wide on the final bend **Tavern Times** quickened round the field to move into third place inside the final two furlongs and at this point appeared to have been given a lot to do; however, the jockey's confidence was vindicated in scintillating style as he quickened once again to go well clear close home. The time of this race was very slow and it is difficult to know where to pitch the level of this performance; however, **Tavern Times** is apparently being aimed at a winner's bumper at **Leopardstown** over Xmas which should give us a much better idea of where he stands in the pecking order.

IRISH FOAL LEVY

- 26th DEC 2009

Elegant Concorde was confidently ridden out the back and brought wide of the field in the home straight to go a clear second with a furlong to go; from there, after briefly hanging in behind the leader he quickened for a second time and put two lengths of daylight between himself and the runner up at the line. This performance was as much about speed as stamina which augurs well for his chances on the good to soft ground which often prevails at **Cheltenham** in March; particularly as a lot of the other bumper races have been contested on heavy going.

How much he actually achieved in winning here is difficult to say at this stage; the runner up **Spill The Beans** ran here on the back of two placed efforts in lower quality bumper events and appeared to be a reluctant leader for most of the race, whilst the fifth horse **Acey** followed this run up by returning to **Leopardstown** to come home the comfortable winner of a relatively minor bumper race worth less than £6,000 to the winner. Whatever the rest of the field achieve in future **Elegant Concorde** was ridden with the utmost confidence to run out a most impressive winner of this contest and on the balance of probability, given the limited evidence at our disposal, he may well be a fair bit better than he has had the chance to show thus far.

ROCKVIEW

- 17th JAN 2010

Willie Mullins had, apparently, expressed some doubts before this race as to whether **Up Ou That** would be going for the Festival Bumper; presumably this convincing success over **Romanescu**, a highly regarded bumper horse from the Henry De Bromhead yard, will have gone some way to persuading him to head for **Cheltenham** in March. He certainly enjoyed the run of the race as the runner up was taken on for the lead a long way from home by **Sirius Bay** which may have resulted in both horses travelling a stride faster than ideal. **Up Ou That** was ridden patiently in behind before joining issue with the leaders inside the final two furlongs, from which point he stayed on strongly to go clear of the weakening **Romanescu**. The first two home ran here on the back of point to point wins over two and a half miles and three miles respectively, and only time will tell what relevance this four runner race run on extremely testing ground has to the possible challenge ahead at **Cheltenham** in March.

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LADBROKES CHELTENHAM

- 23rd JAN 2010

The fact that this race was for newcomers only means we have no way of knowing how to rate this form and the only comment we can make with any surety is that **Hidden Universe** put in a performance that marked him down as being in a different league to the rest of the field. Whether or not that adds up to form good enough to compete in the **Cheltenham** Bumper is another matter altogether. It is worth noting that **Hidden Universe** is only a four year old and the last horse from that age group to win the Champion Bumper was Dato Star in 1995. The strong word on course suggested that Dermot Weld's other good bumper horse **Elegant Concorde** is rated superior to this one at home so the fact that the trainer has gone on record as saying that only one of them will go to **Cheltenham** is a reason to hold fire with any ante post investments for the time being. We should have a better idea on where we stand with **Hidden Universe** after he contests a winner's race back at **Leopardstown** in February.

BET TOTEPOOL AT TOTESPORT.COM

- 13th FEB 2010

This race at **Newbury** is traditionally one of the best bumpers of the year and with no less than seven last time out winners in the race, this renewal may well prove to be up to the usual standard. The first three in this pulled well clear in a decent time and all look useful prospects. This was said to be **Al Ferof's** only attempt at a bumper race; however, the way that he stayed on to record a very solid five length victory has led to his connections having a change of heart and apparently, he is now more likely to head for the **Cheltenham** Festival. The runner up **Made In Time** was bought by J.P. McManus on the recommendation of A.P. McCoy; he was quite keen early on and the way that he ran on into second spot suggests he may already appreciate another half mile. The big disappointment of the race was the favourite **Dragon's Roost** who was never competitive here after turning over the highly regarded Nicky Henderson horse **Cucumber Run** on much softer ground over the same course and distance in January.

ROCKVIEW INH

- 20th FEB 2010

Day Of A Lifetime was clearly well fancied by the Willie Mullins stable for his racecourse debut as he was supported in from his morning odds of 4/5 to his starting price of 2/5. He did the job well and came right away from another newcomer in **Oscars Well** from the Jessica Harrington yard. The ground was testing and the standard of the opposition that had run previously was nothing to write home about; nevertheless, the winner hails from a top class stable with plenty of National Hunt Flat horses to choose from. **Day Of A Lifetime** did everything that was asked of him and he now heads for **Cheltenham** as the second favourite for the Champion Bumper.

LADBROKES SERIES

- 28th FEB 2010

This **Leopardstown** bumper was arguably one of the stronger national hunt flat races of the season and was won in scintillating style by the Edward O'Grady trained **Shot In The Dark** by three lengths from the mare **Araucaria**. The latter had previously won a valuable **Punchestown** bumper by no less than 24 lengths. The third horse home **Acey** was also a previous winner having been successful in a similar race over the same course and distance in January. **Old Charm** was travelling as well as any on the turn for home but was left behind very quickly by the first three home. He adds further substance to the quality of this race having won his previous race at **Cork** by four lengths and it may be that all **Old Bridge** requires is a sounder surface to be shown in his best light.

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THE GUIDE

AL FEROF

The original plan for **Al FeroF** had been to put him away until next season for a novice hurdle campaign after his run at **Newbury** in February. However, after he stayed on stoutly to record a very solid five length victory in a decent time, his new connections had a change of heart and he may well now take his place in the **Cheltenham** bumper. One can understand this change of plan, particularly as the bad weather has resulted in very few clear form lines in the bumper division; leaving the possibility that **Al FeroF's Newbury** win could be on a par with anything we have seen so far. He had previously recorded an easy ten length win from **Shuil Dearg** on heavy ground at **Fairyhouse** when trained in Ireland; as a result of this performance, he was bought by John Hales and sent to be trained by Paul Nicholls. It is worth mentioning that the runner up at **Fairyhouse** has done little for the form having finished well beaten in two subsequent bumpers. **Al FeroF** has already been successful in a three mile point to point race run on very soft ground and will be ideally suited to further than two miles; consequently, his chances will not be inconvenienced and may even improve, in the event of this race being run on testing going.

DAY OF A LIFETIME

Day Of A Lifetime is a King's Theatre gelding who won on his racecourse debut at **Fairyhouse** in a bumper race run on soft ground. He was heavily backed in the morning and was clearly strongly fancied on the day. Due to the cold winter, there are even fewer form lines than usual to go on with the current crop of bumper horses heading to **Cheltenham**. Although **Day Of A Lifetime** could do no more than win impressively, he is, nevertheless, one amongst several horses heading for the Champion Bumper with a comfortable win on testing ground to his name. His breeding would suggest he might be better on a sounder surface though, clearly, he is yet to prove it on the track. The strongest point in his favour is that he now appears to be the number one contender from the Willie Mullins stable and that, far more than the level of his form, suggests he is likely to be competitive at **Cheltenham**.

ELEGANT CONCORDE

Elegant Concorde was elevated to favouritism for the Champion Bumper after his comfortable win at **Leopardstown** on Boxing Day; he has remained at the head of the market ever since, despite his trainer stating that he would probably not run if the ground at the festival was testing. The form of his win was given a timely boost when the third horse home, **Frawley** returned to the same course in February and stayed on strongly to take a bumper worth nearly £6000 to the winner. Unlike many of his rivals, **Elegant Concorde** has proven his suitability to racing in Ireland on ground officially described as yielding and will be perfectly at home should the ground ride good to soft at **Cheltenham**, as his Boxing Day win was as much about speed as stamina. On the very limited evidence available to us at this moment in time, **Elegant Concorde** will be one of the stronger contenders for the Champion Bumper, especially if the ground is no worse than good to soft. Whether or not his price of about **6/1** is a fair reflection of his true chances in such a difficult race to call is another matter altogether.

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UP OU THAT

Up Ou That won his only National Hunt Flat race to date in convincing style from the well regarded **Romanesco** on heavy going at **Fairyhouse** in January. Willie Mullins described his performance as that of a 'proper bumper horse' and although the current market may suggest that he is at best the second string from the yard for the **Cheltenham** Bumper, it is worth bearing in mind that the stable usually have more than one runner in the race and the betting market is often an unreliable indicator of their relative merits. At this stage all **Up Ou That** has achieved is win a four runner race on heavy ground from three other rivals and quite how that performance equates to the challenges awaiting at **Cheltenham** is difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, what we know for certain is that he is another contender with a wide margin win to his name and, in an impossible race to call; the biggest factors in favour of supporting **Up Ou That** are that he hails from a powerful yard and is still trading at a double figure price.

SHOT FROM THE HIP

Shot From The Hip was trading as short as **8/1** for the festival after his super impressive victory at **Leopardstown** at the end of February. The second, third and fourth horses home were all comfortable winners of their previous races and this performance was a huge step up on his debut win at **Clonmel**. In common with several of his rivals, both of his successes to date have been gained on testing ground so, as things stand, we have no idea how **Shot From The Hip** will cope with potentially faster conditions at **Cheltenham**. Nonetheless, his most recent win has a fair amount of substance attached to it and was as visually impressive as any of the main protagonists for the Champion Bumper; consequently, he should be marked up as one of the strongest contenders.

HIDDEN UNIVERSE

In his one run to date **Hidden Universe** ran out an impressive looking ten length winner at **Leopardstown** in a race run on testing going. The fact that the race he won was a contest confined to newcomers gives us very little to go on when assessing the relative merits of this form; furthermore, the only three horses from the race to have run again have all finished well beaten. His stable mate **Elegant Concorde** is the current favourite for the Champion Bumper and is likely to be the number one hope from the Dermot Weld yard, providing the ground is good to soft or faster. **Hidden Universe** has less substance to his form than several of his rivals and may only run in the race should the going be too testing for the favourite; furthermore, he is only a four year old and that age group have a dreadful record in this event.

TAVERN TIMES

Tavern Times has remained prominent in the ante post market for the **Cheltenham** bumper despite not having run since making a winning racecourse debut at **Fairyhouse** in early October. Apparently, the intention was always to run him at **Leopardstown** around Xmas time before making a decision regarding his participation at **Cheltenham**. The form of his one run has worked out well as the second and fourth horses have both won since; in addition, **Tavern Times** is one of few contenders with winning form on good ground. The **Fairyhouse** race was a particularly slowly run race and **Tavern Times** did especially well to run out such a comfortable winner after being left with quite a lot to do on the turn for home. He clearly has a lot of speed and, unlike many of his rivals, will be suited to racing on a sound surface; on the other hand, the fact that he has not raced since October is a cause for some concern.

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Please bear in mind that many of the horse profiles were prepared well in advance of the conclusions. I decided not to edit them as they represent my thinking at the time of writing.

CONCLUSIONS

This is a wide open race with not enough information to be able to come to any strong decisions regarding the possibility of having a financial investment. On good or good to soft ground the chances of **Elegant Concorde** and **Shot From The Hip** would be preferred. Of the outsiders, either **Drumbaloo** or **Old Charm** could run above the level that their current place in the market indicates.

