

CHAMPION CHASE



The statistics as presented below are thoroughly researched and valid. They are, however, presented to augment and complement the analysis given in the other parts of the guide and we would hope they would be used in that way.

QUEEN MOTHER CHAMPION CHASE

10 Year Trends 1999-2009 (2001 abandoned)

The figures for all the various statistics are in date order, earliest first from left to right.

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Chase debut record reads:

1 1 1 F 1 F 5 1 1 1

Last time out record reads:

1 3 1 1 1 1 1 U 1 1

80% of winners won last time out.

Total career starts prior to chase debut reads (FLAT/NHF/HURDLE):

12 10 8 16 10 16 9 10 3 3

100% of winners ran sixteen or less times prior to chase debut.

Total career starts over fences reads (correlates in line to the above):

4 23 18 11 8 22 10 10 7 11

Strike rate over fences reads (correlates in line to the above):

100% 52% 56% 73% 62.5% 77% 33% 60% 43% 64%

Rounded up to the nearest percent.

Average % = 62%

Grade 1 wins prior to Champion Chase:

0 0 5 3 1 8 0 1 0 3

Graded wins over fences prior to Champion Chase:

1 2 8 7 3 15 2 3 1 4

Age statistics:

9 8 8 9 7 11 8 6 5 6

Days since ran record reads:

55 38 102 38 31 45 55 32 32 53

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90% of winners have run within fifty five days.

Irish record reads:

8 5 2 1 U 1 1 4 4 4

Fate of the favourite reads:

2 3 1 1 U 1 F F 2 1

SP of the favourite (correlates in line to the above):

3-1 11-10 7-4 7-4 5-6 6-4 2-1 Ev 5-2 4-11

Betting position of the Winner (asterisk denotes joint position in the market):

2 2 1 1 2 1 6* 3 2 1

80% of winners have come from the first two in the betting.

SP of the winner (correlates in line to the above):

7-2 7-2 7-4 7-4 15-8 6-4 16-1 5-1 3-1 4-11

BHB rating (where provided):

150 160 169 - 172 - - 167 170 186

Profile analysis:

Based on past statistics the following horses # best fit the profile.

Master Minded

Kalahari King

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POSTFILES

FORTRIA

- 8th NOV 2009

In winning the Grade Two Ladbrokes.com Fortria Chase at **Navan** by a hard held half a length, **Big Zeb** reinforced his ability to win small field chases in Ireland, on testing ground and against Grade Two horses. In beating the 146 rated **Made In Taipan** in comfortable fashion he achieved no more than one would have expected before the race and merely confirmed his ability to jump and travel well whilst tracking a single target horse. This victory merely proved his well being, and has little bearing on his chances of reproducing this excellent round of jumping in the bigger field and faster pace he is likely to encounter in the Champion Chase; furthermore, the better class rivals he will face at **Cheltenham** in March will offer a much sterner test than the one he faced here.

CONNAUGHT

- 15th NOV 2009

If we assume that **Master Minded** was injured and failed to reproduce his best form then the bare facts of this race are that **Well Chief** beat the 150 rated **Mahogany Blaze** by just over a length with the now in decline, 11 year old **Newmill** a further four lengths adrift. This would suggest that **Well Chief** has run to a mark below his previous best, whilst remaining in the mix for the Champion Chase alongside four or five fairly closely matched rivals. This is certainly the percentage call to make, especially given that the alternative view would suggest that, on his 18th try over fences **Mahogany Blaze** has suddenly developed into a Grade One Chaser capable of finishing nearly three lengths clear of the 178 rated champion chaser **Master Minded** whilst in receipt of ten pounds.

Master Minded will now have a break after being diagnosed with a stress fracture of his tenth rib and his next race, providing all goes well, could be in the Champion Chase in March. If he recovers quicker than expected he could be aimed at the Game Spirit Chase first. It is important to note that, after looking invincible in March 2008 he has since been beaten in two of his last six chases and looked vulnerable in two others. Nevertheless, his best form remains clear of his nearest rivals, none of which stand out as the obvious heir apparent at this stage.

TINGLE CREEK

- 5th DEC 2009

Twist Magic led all the way and put in a fantastic round of jumping to record arguably the best victory of his career. He is clearly the best two mile chaser in the country at **Sandown** with the probable exception of his stable companion **Master Minded**; however, the way that **Twist Magic** was travelling in the 2008 renewal of the Tingle Creek when he came down at the second last fence suggests that, at worst, he may not be too far behind his illustrious stable mate should they cross swords at the Esher track again.

This performance was particularly pleasing to the eye and, as a result, **Twist Magic** had his Champion Chase odds reduced significantly. Nonetheless, as good as this effort undoubtedly was, his form at **Sandown** of: **1 F 1 1** – is in a different league to his record at **Cheltenham** which reads: **F 6 F** – and given the accumulation of evidence at our disposal it would be unrealistic to support a horse with his profile for a race at **Cheltenham** on the strength of

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another excellent performance at **Sandown**. The obvious post **Cheltenham** targets for **Twist Magic** in 2010 remain the Celebration Chase in April and the Tingle Creek in December.

Given the winner's obvious suitability to the conditions of the day, **Forpadydeplasterer** excelled himself by remaining in contention into the home straight whilst finishing clear of the rest despite being the only horse that tried to take on the winner. He has finished in the first two in all eight chases he has contested and, having already proved himself in a fast run, big field two mile chase at the **Cheltenham** Festival, there is every possibility he will reverse the placing with today's winner come March. Likewise, the third horse **Well Chief**, even though he may have finished a long way behind in this race, has an excellent record over fences at **Cheltenham** which reads: **2 1 2 1 2 F 2 1**. Although he is now a 10 year old and on the decline, his excellent course form gives him every chance of finishing in the first three or four in the Champion Chase.

Big Zeb did not jump well enough to stay in contention and his two runs in England both suggest we should hold causes for concern regarding his chances for the 2010 Champion Chase, especially as, despite the level of this performance he has maintained his position in the betting market. **Mahogany Blaze** reverted to type and ran like the solid Grade Two/Three Chaser that he undoubtedly is.

DESERT ORCHID

- 27th DEC 2009

Petit Robin made a winning start to his 2009/10 campaign by seeing off the determined challenge of the runner up **Well Chief**. The two of them finished five lengths clear of the 150 rated **I'msingintheblues** and are the two horses to take out of the race with a view to our analysis of the Champion Chase. **Well Chief** took up the running approaching the second last flight and, at this stage, looked the obvious winner. Unfortunately, he made life difficult for himself by jumping out to the left at each of the final two fences and handed the initiative back to **Petit Robin**. If he had jumped the last two straight the final outcome would have been much closer than the eventual three and three quarter length margin of victory held by **Petit Robin** at the line. Apparently, they both now head for the Victor Chandler Chase on January 23rd and no matter what happens at right handed **Ascot**, there probably will not be a lot between the two of them when they renew rivalry again at **Cheltenham** in March.

VICTOR CHANDLER

- 23rd JAN 2010

Twist Magic looked a little reluctant before the start but had his mind made up for him when Ruby Walsh urged him straight into the lead; a position he held all the way to the finish. As at **Sandown**, he again jumped extremely well out in front and his jockey never really had a moments worry and at this stage he is undoubtedly a two mile chaser in the best run of form in his career. If **Twist Magic** enjoys another relatively unchallenged lead at **Cheltenham** and is not put off by the preliminaries (as he has in each of the last two seasons) he could be a threat to all in March; nevertheless, he did show signs of temperament here at **Ascot** and it is important to remember that both Ruby Walsh and Paul Nicholls mentioned the preliminaries at **Cheltenham** as having caused his previous disappointing efforts and he will, no doubt, have to face something similar again this year. **Petit Robin** and **Well Chief** performed in such a way as to suggest that they will both be better off when they return to race on a left handed track and on the overall balance of their form, there will not be a lot between them should they renew rivalry in the Champion Chase.

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TIED COTTAGE

- 31st JAN 2010

Big Zeb was given another opportunity to prove his suitability to small field chases run on testing ground in Ireland. He certainly did not disappoint as he came home an impressive winner of the Grade Two Tied Cottage Chase at **Punchestown** from the Willie Mullins trained **Golden Silver** who, after some indifferent jumping, managed to hold onto the runner up spot from the 149 rated eleven year old **Mansony**. Connections of the winner must have been delighted with his fluent round of jumping, particularly after his disappointing efforts last time out at **Sandown** in the more competitive Tingle Creek Chase. The bare bones of this form do not amount to much, since his only danger on the book lost ground at several obstacles and did extremely well to renew his challenge in the home straight. The fact that **Golden Silver** was an impressive winner of a Grade One Chase last time out, yet in the Tied Cottage Chase, was all out to hold on to second spot from **Mansony**, strongly suggests that the three or four significant mistakes he made resulted in him running well below his previous form today. **Big Zeb** proved his well being and could do no more than win as he did, despite the lack of competition. However, on past evidence he is no certainty to reproduce such a fine round of jumping in a more competitively run race.

GAME SPIRIT

- 13th FEB 2010

Master Minded won the Grade Two Game Spirit Chase by a very easy 13 lengths from **Mahogany Blaze** despite an almighty blunder at the last fence. This performance was right up there with some of his better ones and suggests that he is back to somewhere like his best for the first time since winning the Victor Chandler Chase at **Ascot** in January 2009. He is now trading at odds on for the Champion Chase and deservedly so, as he is one of the stronger short priced favourites of the week. This two mile speed test was a particularly difficult challenge for **Voy Por Ustedes**, having previously failed to get home in testing ground over three miles in the Lexus Chase. He jumped extremely well out in front and appeared to be really enjoying himself; however, he clearly needs further than two miles and it is more than possible that he finished tired due to taking the favourite on

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THE GUIDE

BIG ZEB

Big Zeb has finished first or second in all bar one of the ten chases he has completed and last time out he was given another opportunity to prove his suitability to small field chases run on testing ground in Ireland; he certainly did not disappoint as he put in a very fluent round of jumping before coming home an impressive looking winner of the Grade Two Tied Cottage Chase. Nonetheless, on past evidence he is no certainty to reproduce such a fine round of jumping in a more competitively run race. He did not jump well enough to stay in contention in this season's Tingle Creek Chase at **Sandown** and fell in last season's Champion Chase; both performances suggest we should hold causes for concern regarding his chances this year, especially as, despite the evidence of his two performances in England, his position in the betting market has strengthened due to another small field chase win in Ireland.

TWIST MAGIC

Twist Magic is a multiple Grade One winning chaser and has won eight from fourteen completed starts over fences. He is in the best form of his career and comes here on the back of two impressive all the way wins at **Sandown** and **Ascot** respectively and if he were to bring the level of that recent form to **Cheltenham** and enjoy another relatively unchallenged lead he would be a threat to all. Nevertheless, as good as his latest two performances have looked, his form at **Sandown** in particular, is in a different league to his record at **Cheltenham** in March which reads: **F 6 F**. Given the accumulation of evidence at our disposal it would be unrealistic to support a horse with his profile for a big field competitive chase at the **Cheltenham Festival** when he is priced up on the strength of two excellent performances in small field chases at **Sandown** and **Ascot**. Furthermore, it is important to remember that both Ruby Walsh and Paul Nicholls have mentioned the preliminaries at **Cheltenham** as having played a significant role in his previous disappointing efforts at the festival and he will, no doubt, have to face something similar again this year.

MASTER MINDED

Master Minded proved his well being and strengthened his place at the top of the Champion Chase market when he overcame a last flight blunder to record a runaway success in the Grade Two Game Spirit Chase at **Newbury**. He has now won eight out of nine completed chases run over a trip of about two miles and the only time he has lost in this sequence was when he finished behind both **Well Chief** and **Mahogany Blaze** at **Cheltenham** in November. He was diagnosed with a fractured rib after that race and it may well be the case that the injury impacted on the level of some of his previous performances, as his form had looked regressive since beating **Petit Robin** at **Ascot** in January 2009. If he is back to something like his best, and on the evidence of his win in the Game Spirit there is a good chance that he is, then he will be a particularly tough nut to crack at **Cheltenham** and appears to be a worthy odds on favourite.

KALAHARI KING

His impressive victory in the Blue Square Handicap Chase at **Doncaster** in February elevated him to second favourite for the Champion Chase with most books. He won the race in

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scintillating style off a mark of 159 and has now finished first or second in all of his eight chases to date. He was arguably a little unfortunate not to win the Arkle Chase last year as he came from a long way back to be touched off in a photo finish by **Forpadydeplasterer**. This was the second year running that he has performed well at the festival having previously finished a staying on fourth in the 2008 Supreme Novice Hurdle behind **Captain Cee Bee** and **Binocular**. If there is one horse that could be described as a danger to **Master Minded** then he is probably it; however, he is certainly not a horse to support in the ante post market for two reasons. First of all his chances will decrease significantly if the ground is soft in March and secondly he will almost certainly be held up on the rail at the back of the field in the Champion Chase and therefore will very likely be trading at bigger odds than his starting price after three or four fences.

WELL CHIEF

Well Chief is now an eleven year old and, though he has retained a lot of ability, he is certainly on the decline. His first time out win at **Cheltenham** gives him a similar chance to most in the Champion Chase; conversely, his three races since, all on right handed tracks, offer less encouragement. He ran well below form last time out at right handed **Ascot** behind **Twist Magic** and **Petit Robin** and has a lot to find on the strength of that one run; however, that was his third race in less than 50 days and, as he has always run best when fresh, we can expect an improved performance in March. Whether or not he will improve enough to be placed is difficult to predict, though his strong **Cheltenham** form is massively in his favour. He beat **Petit Robin** fair and square at the festival last season and there will probably not be a lot between them again this year. His connections are unlikely to have pretensions of beating **Master Minded** which probably gives him more chance in the 'without the favourite' market than he would otherwise have. As we witnessed recently in the Game Spirit Chase with **Voy Por Ustedes**; trying to keep pace with **Master Minded** is not often a recipe for obtaining the best possible finishing position. **Well Chief** has been described as having 'legs like glass' so, that being the case, is no ante post proposition; on the other hand, his current price of **20/1** without the favourite, could be an interesting each way investment if it is still available nearer the day of the race.

PETIT ROBIN

Petit Robin is a consistent chaser who has managed to finish in the first three in all eight chases he has contested over a trip short of two and a half miles. He has jumped badly left in each of the last two renewals of the Victor Chandler Chase at right handed **Ascot** and should be more suited to racing at **Cheltenham**. He is currently trading at **30+** on the exchanges which is probably a bit too big; conversely, he is as short as **7/1** in the 'without the favourite' market, which is less than half the price of his old adversary **Well Chief** who finished two lengths ahead of him in the 2009 Champion Chase. If Barry Geraghty opts to ride **Big Zeb** in the Champion Chase then the price of **Petit Robin** is likely to drift further; we should not let this put us off, as there is a strong possibility that he will finish close up with the Pipe horse again this year and there respective profiles suggest he has more chance of completing the course than **Big Zeb**; consequently, **Petit Robin** holds a reasonable chance of being placed again.

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FORPADYDEPLASTERER

Forpadydeplasterer has won two from eight of his chases and finished second in all the others. He has travelled well and jumped well in his races, but perhaps, it can be reasonably judged, has not always found more when asked for an extra effort. A fast run two miles should help carry him into the race for longer and with his guaranteed stamina there is every chance he will be still going well in the later stages of the race. He jumps very well and has showed good form at the festival in each of the last two years. In 2008 he finished fourth in the Ballymore Properties Novices' Hurdle, which is the only time he has been out of the first two in 13 career starts; last season he won the Arkle Chase over this course and distance beating **Kalahari King** in a close finish. He recently suffered a set back in training and appeared to be in danger of missing the race; however, his connections have had a change of heart and there now looks to be a strong possibility that this half brother to Moscow Flyer will take part. Although his record indicates that he will be difficult to keep out of the first three, his recent setback is a little off putting. Nevertheless, if he lines up on the day in top form his profile strongly suggests he will be one of few horses particularly suited to the conditions of the race.

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

Well Chief is obviously not quite the force of old; nevertheless, he has still shown enough this season to suggest he can still be competitive in a race like the Champion Chase. His last three runs have been a little disappointing, but the fact that they were all run on right handed tracks was not to his advantage. At **Kempton**, in particular, he threw away a winning chance by jumping badly left at each of the final two fences. His connections are not likely to have many pretensions about beating **Master Minded** and therefore, rather like last season, **Well Chief** is likely to be given a considerate ride with a view to completing the race in his best possible finishing position. Trying to match strides with **Master Minded** can often be a recipe for looking very tired in the later stages, as we witnessed with **Voy Por Ustedes** in the Game Spirit Chase at **Newbury**; subsequently, although horses like **Twist Magic** and **Kalahari King** have a better chance than the Pipe horse of winning the Champion Chase, this does not necessarily mean that they have a better chance of finishing in the first four. **Well Chief** is yet to finish out of the first two in seven completed starts at **Cheltenham** and now that the non runner no bet rule has come in he looks an interesting each way investment at **16/1** in the market 'without the favourite'.