

NEPTUNE HURDLE

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.

NEPTUNE INVESTMENT NOVICE HURDLE

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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Hurdle debut record reads:

1 1 1 1* 1 1 F 2 1 10

80% of all winners in the first two on hurdle debut.

* Hardy Eustace disqualified on debut.

Last time out record reads:

1 1 1 2 2 1 1 3 1 1

90% in the first two last time out.

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

2 4 4 4 7 14 5 2 3 0

90% of all winners have had seven or less runs prior to hurdle debut.

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

5 5 1 4 2 3 4 9 1 7

100% of winners ran less then ten times over hurdles.

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

100% 100% 100% 75% 50% 67% 25% 22% 100% 57%

Rounded up to the nearest percent.

Average % = 69.6%

Grade 1 wins prior to Baring Bingham hurdle:

0 1 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 1

Graded wins over hurdles prior to Baring Bingham hurdle:

3 3 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 3

Age statistics:

6 6 6 6 6 5 5 6 6 5

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100% of all winners were aged five or six.

Days since ran record reads:

46 24 18 31 17 60 46 46 29 38

100% of winners ran within sixty days.

Irish record reads:

7 11 2 1 6 3 1 3 1 1

Fate of the favourite reads (asterisk denotes joint position in the market):

1 1 4 2 2 7* 2 5 13 1

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

2-1 5-4 5-1 2-1 7-4 9-2 11-10 5-2 4-1 5-2

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

1 1 5* 3 5* 4 4 8 4 1

90% of winners in the first five of the betting.

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

2-1 5-4 12-1 6-1 12-1 17-2 17-2 20-1 7-1 5-2

BHB rating (where provided):

- - - - 142 - 138 131 155

Profile analysis:

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

Peddlers Cross

Rite of Passage

Quel Esprit

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POSTFILES

CLEANEVENT

- 15th NOV 2009

With **Tell Massini** well supported in the Albert Bartlett and **Reve De Sivola** and **Bobby Ewing** being aimed at that race or the Neptune, this race could hold major significance for both the staying novice hurdle races come **Cheltenham** in March. **Tell Massini** made most of the running with **Berties Dream** who ran a tremendous race in defeat and kept on well to finish in third place; Sam Thomas kicked the eventual winner into a clear lead from the third last fence and he never looked like getting caught thereafter as he powered up the hill in the style of a really good stayer. He has only ever raced on soft going and connections voiced some concerns as to whether or not the good to soft ground which often prevails at the festival would be testing enough for him.

Bobby Ewing ran like a horse that failed to see out this trip on such testing ground and, at least on this evidence, the Neptune looks the more suitable target. The four year old **Reve De Sivola** boasts a lot of experience for a novice at this time of year and as a consequence of his previous exploits and the conditions of this race was forced to concede seven pounds to the year older **Tell Massini**; in finishing eight lengths behind in second he ran well enough given the circumstances and is still one to consider in March, especially given the winner's specific ground requirements.

CROWNHOTEL – BAWTRY.COM

- 11th DEC 2009

This race could have some significance in more than one race at the **Cheltenham** Festival. **Menorah** raced far too keenly over this extended trip and paid the price in the home straight; still travelling well in the lead after the third last he stopped very quickly two from home which allowed **Bobby Ewing** to take up the running and stay on strongly to the line. Whether or not **Menorah** will stay this near two and a half mile trip when he learns to settle is open to debate, however, at least for the time being, a return to racing over two miles should show him in a better light. **Bobby Ewing** was ultimately an impressive looking winner of this race as he finished 10 lengths clear of his tired rival and will no doubt have either the Neptune or the Albert Bartlett as his **Cheltenham** target.

LAWRENCE EQUINE

- 29th DEC 2009

This was won by yet another potentially high class novice hurdler from the Nicky Henderson yard. Where **Quantitativeasing** stands in the pecking order is difficult to say as what he actually achieved here is prove that he can win a minor novice hurdle race run on desperate ground very easily from, what may well turn out to be, inferior opposition. What relevance this has on the challenges he would face in a big field, fast pace race run on better ground in March is difficult to see; nevertheless, he could do no more than win in the impressive way that he did and we should get a better idea of where he stands in the grand scheme of things after his next race.

CHALLOW

- 29th DEC 2009

This looked a very competitive renewal of this Grade One Hurdle and so it proved, as four horses were still in with a chance with just 50 yards to run. The gallant **Restless Harry** belied his odds of 40/1 by going down narrowly with all guns blazing after making most of the running in the gruelling conditions. He had previously won easily at **Towcester** in similarly desperate

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ground and was, perhaps the horse to benefit most from the testing going. **Any Given Day** challenged well before the last flight but failed to get home in the conditions and was eased once his chance had gone. He could be a fair bit better than the bare result suggests and is one to remember when he races on quicker ground.

Finians Rainbow travelled like the best horse most of the way up the home straight, only gave best near the line and would be well fancied to reverse this form if racing in less testing conditions. **Reve De Sivola** was outpaced and under pressure from some way out before wearing down his opponents on the run in. On this evidence he would come up a little short against the best two and a half milers on better ground and a step up in trip might be called for.

SYNERGY SECURITY

- 24th JAN 2010

A surprise result for most watchers as the long odds on favourite **Quel Esprit** ridden by Ruby Walsh was turned over by the Barry Geraghty ridden **Coole River** who was trying two and a half miles for the first time. Conversely, the favourite was stepping back in trip having won over three miles on similarly testing ground at **Cork** in December and the obvious conclusion to come too is that he was out speeded and maybe could have done with a faster gallop. Where they go from here is difficult to judge as **Quel Esprit** will no doubt appreciate the likely faster pace of the Neptune, but may need the extra half mile of the Albert Bartlett on good or good to soft ground.

This was only the second time he has been beaten on the track, the first being behind **Dunguib** in the Champion Bumper, and whichever way we analyse this race cannot disguise the fact that this defeat will have been a huge disappointment to his connections, particularly as it may well be **Quel Esprit's** final race before **Cheltenham**. The level of this form is difficult to gauge at the moment but if **Coole River** runs in the Deloitte Hurdle over two miles and two furlongs on 7th February we may get a better idea of where the first two home in this race fit into the bigger picture.

FRANK CONROY

- 24th JAN 2010

Rite Of Passage made a perfectly satisfactory start to his hurdling career by readily disposing of the Gordon Elliot trained maiden hurdler **Grey Soldier**. The outcome looked in doubt for a few moments as **Rite Of Passage** was carried wide by a loose horse entering the straight; nevertheless, his jockey soon got him back on line and pushed him out to go three lengths clear on the run in. On the evidence of this performance, the fact that he won over two miles on heavy ground on the flat and the way he was easily outpaced by **Dunguib** in the Champion Bumper last year, one would assume that connections of **Rite Of Passage** will be giving serious consideration to stepping him up in trip and aiming him at the two and a half mile race at **Cheltenham** in March.

CLASSIC

- 30th JAN 2010

This Grade Two trial was contested by a couple of highly regarded novices from two of the top yards, in **Royal Charm** the short priced favourite and **General Miller**. Nevertheless, the Henry Oliver ridden **Restless Harry** put them firmly in their places with a thoroughly deserved all the way victory. The two big guns both got within a couple of lengths of the leader after the second last but never really looked like pegging back the courageous front runner. **Royal**

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Charm was probably a bit too keen for his own good and looked a tired horse on the run in whilst **General Miller** was able to maintain his challenge for longer to finish in second spot fully eight lengths behind the worthy winner. According to trainer Robin Dickin his horse is more likely to head for the Albert Bartlett over three miles at the festival; by winning so comprehensively, **Restless Harry** certainly paid some sort of compliment to **Reve De Sivola** and **Finians Rainbow**, the two horses that finished either side of him at **Newbury** in the Grade One Challow Hurdle. This was yet another festival trial run on winter soft ground and it will be very interesting to see how reliable it proves if the going at **Cheltenham** in March is nearer to good.

BETDAQ POKER

- 12th FEB 2010

Quantitativeasing started a very short priced favourite at odds of **8/13** and ran a perfectly reasonable trial for the Neptune Investment Hurdle despite being beaten in a close finish by the all the way leader, **Phidippides**, trained by Evan Williams. The fact that **The Betchworth Kid** was closing in fast and only beaten a further length suggests that, although this form maybe of a high standard, the chances of all three of these being top class are not good. **The Betchworth Kid** was the first to come under pressure off the home turn and was probably the most inconvenienced by the steady pace; he stayed on strongly after the last and would have gone very close in another 100 yards. He will appreciate the faster pace he is likely to benefit from at **Cheltenham**, although his connections have yet to confirm his festival target. The winner was not entered for **Cheltenham** and may stick to racing on a flat track for the time being, whilst **Quantitativeasing** remains on target for the Neptune Investment and may not need to improve to be involved in the finish.

BOOK YOUR FESTIVAL TICKETS

- 17th FEB 2010

Rite Of Passage made it two out of two over hurdles when winning the Book Your Festival Tickets hurdle race at **Punchestown** in a common canter. The race was run in a slow time on testing ground and although the manner of his victory could not have been more impressive; how relevant this test was in comparison to the challenges awaiting him at **Cheltenham** is difficult to quantify. Nonetheless, he appeared to be more suited to the extra half mile of this race and now heads for the festival where the Neptune Investment Hurdle appears to be the logical target.

HOPE SAFE T-BAR

- 20th FEB 2010

Finians Rainbow cemented his prominent position in the betting market for the Neptune Investment Novices hurdle with an excellent round of jumping and a silky smooth victory at **Ascot** over a trip of two miles and three and a half furlongs. The **129** rated runner up **Arkose** had previously been beaten nine lengths by the **143** rated **Possol** when giving that rival six pounds, whilst the third horse, beaten seven and a half lengths, was the Alan King trained **Spirit of Adjisa** who runs off a mark of **119**. On the bare bones of this one piece of form it would be difficult to give **Finians Rainbow** a mark beyond 140; nevertheless, the quality of this performance was more than just about pounds per lengths and he now heads to **Cheltenham** in the best of form and as a leading contender for the Neptune.

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THE GUIDE

RITE OF PASSAGE

Rite Of Passage has now won both his starts over hurdles in impressive style and appeared to improve for the step up to two and a half miles on his latest start at **Punchestown**. Here he beat the 144 rated **Healys Bar** in a common canter and if this form were to be taken literally then **Rite Of Passage** would have to be rated 150+ which, on ratings at least, would make him a worthy favourite for the Neptune Investment Hurdle. However, the runner up **Healys Bar** acquired his elevated mark on the strength of a staying on third in a reasonable Grade One hurdle at **Fairyhouse** where he was an unconsidered 33/1 outsider. All nine of his previous runs over hurdles suggest that he is, at best a 135 rated horse and on the balance of his career performances to date, this figure does appear to be a more reliable reflection of his true ability level.

Rite Of Passage has won two contests run on very testing ground in relatively slowly run races and as pleasing to the eye as he has been, it is very difficult to quantify how relevant this form is in relation to the skills required to win a Neptune Investment Hurdle run at a faster pace and on a better surface than he has experienced thus far. We have very few form lines through which to make adequate comparisons between the main contenders in the Neptune Investment and although he may turn out to be much better than his rivals, on the balance of evidence before us at the moment his current price of between **5/2** and **7/2** appears to be rather short.

QUANTITATIVEASING

Quantitativeasing met his first defeat on the racecourse on his latest outing when going down by a hard fought quarter of a length to **Phidippides** in the Betdaq Poker Novices Hurdle at **Kempton**. The fact that **The Betchworth Kid** was closing in fast and only beaten a further length suggests that, although this form maybe of a high standard, the chances of all three of these being top class are not good. **Quantitativeasing** is rated 137 over hurdles which would see him finish thereabouts in an average renewal of the Neptune Investment Novice Hurdle; moreover, the fact that he has won three from four career starts, stays two and a half miles well and hails from the powerful Nicky Henderson yard suggests that he has a reasonably good chance of at least finishing in the prize money in what appears to be a wide open contest.

FINIANS RAINBOW

Finians Rainbow has won two out of his three hurdle races and met his only defeat when being outstayed by both **Reve De Sivola** and **Restless Harry** on desperate ground over two miles and five furlongs in the Grade One Challow Hurdle at **Newbury** in December. He travelled like the best horse for most of that race and was only run out of first prize in the final 50 yards; if either of the first two home that day oppose **Finians Rainbow** again in the Neptune Investment Hurdle one would have every confidence in his chances of gaining revenge, providing the ground is good to soft or better. He now heads for the festival with very strong claims after his super impressive win at **Ascot** over two miles and three and a half furlongs; he should have no problem with the extra distance at **Cheltenham** providing the ground is not too testing.

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PEDDLERS CROSS

Peddlers Cross is unbeaten in three career starts since being trained in Britain by Donald McCain. He has been super impressive in winning his two hurdle races to date by wide margins and in his most recent outing run over a trip of two miles and half a furlong he finished 16 lengths and 10 lengths clear of horses rated 132 and 131 respectively. As a consequence of this latest performance at **Haydock**, the handicapper has raised him to a mark of 148 which, purely from a ratings point of view, puts him right in the mix for the Neptune Investment Hurdle. Conversely, the form is easy to question, as the third horse **Radium** was eased a long way from the finish, whilst the second horse home **Scriptwriter** usually races over three miles and followed up by being beaten a similar distance by a 125 rated horse in his next start.

When a horse has won both his hurdle races on testing ground by a wide margin it is very difficult to quantify how much more he has to give and whether or not he could reproduce that form when racing on a different surface. **Peddlers Cross** could easily be good enough to win the Neptune Investment and, from what he has shown on the racecourse, his chances will be more obvious should the race be run on soft going; however, on the limited evidence available to us at this point in time, his position as third favourite for the race is probably an overgenerous estimation of his actual form thus far.

REVE DE SIVOLA

As a second season novice, **Reve de Sivola** has a lot of experience to his name over hurdles in comparison with most of his rivals in the Neptune Investments Hurdle. The fact that he did not break his duck until his sixth attempt suggests that he is unlikely to be top class; on the other hand, one could argue that he only managed to win when he was stepped up in trip. One of the major concerns with the form of his most recent outing is that it took him right up until the final 20 yards to wear down his rivals on bottomless ground at **Newbury** over two miles and five furlongs in the Challow Hurdle; whether or not he will have the necessary speed to stay with the pace in a fast run race on a sounder surface than he encountered at **Newbury** is questionable. His chances should be marked up in the event of the race being run on soft going; in which case, there is a good chance he will finish thereabouts in a fairly open looking contest.

QUEL ESPRIT

Quel Esprit lost his unbeaten record over hurdles when losing out in a close finish behind the Jessica Harrington trained **Cooler River** on heavy going in a Grade Two Hurdle race at **Leopardstown** in January. The winner has franked the form by following up in a similar race under a penalty at **Navan** where he gave the Triumph Hurdle hope and Grade One winner **Pittoni** 12 pounds in weight and more than a five length beating. **Quel Esprit** has taken to hurdles well and jumps in a particularly fluent manner which will hopefully stand him in good stead at **Cheltenham**. Perhaps the pace in his last run was not strong enough to bring his undoubted stamina into play as the proximity of **American Job** in third place implies that **Quel Esprit** was more suited to the stamina test of his three mile win at **Cork** in his previous race where he beat the same horse by a similar margin without coming off the bridle. His most appropriate target race at **Cheltenham** is difficult to judge as **Quel Esprit** will no doubt be suited to the likely faster pace of the Neptune, but may appreciate the extra half mile of the Albert Bartlett on good or good to soft ground. Whichever event he is aimed at he will be one of the strongest contenders and is likely to give a good account of himself; however, all of his

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hurdle races thus far have been contested on heavy ground which is a point worth bearing in mind when assessing his appropriate place in the betting market.

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 an especially difficult race to call as it includes five or six viable contenders. Although **Rite Of Passage** has a perfectly plausible chance of winning, his current odds of **3/1** are far too short in such an open race; moreover, the fact that he is taking up such a chunk of the market suggests we should probably have a pop at a couple of horses at a price. At this moment in time, **Peddlers Cross** and **Quel Esprit** look the soundest each way propositions at odds of **10/1** and **12/1** respectively.

