

RYANAIR CHASE



POSTFILES

PADDY POWER

- 14th NOV 2009

This proved to be quite a gruelling race run in testing ground where eight of the 16 starters failed to finish the contest. **Poquelin** was said to be unsuited by the prevailing conditions and was rather nursed round by Ruby Walsh. The fact that he made a couple of significant errors did not help his cause and as a consequence he was still a long way behind the leader when being slightly hampered by the fall of his stable companion **Tatnen** at the third last; after making another mistake at the second last fence he then did remarkably well to make up the ground to finish in second spot just four and a half lengths behind the comfortable winner **Tranquil Sea**. Andrew McNamara's mount enjoyed a perfect trip as he travelled and jumped well all the way; making headway down the far side he took up the running going very easily at the third last fence before drawing clear on the run in. Of the rest **Chapoturgeon**, not for the first time, blotted his copy book when falling at the eighth fence.

AMLIN 1965

- 21st NOV 2009

The key factor in determining the outcome of this race was that **Albertas Run** was the only one of the main contenders to put in a blemish free round of jumping. **Planet of Sound** jumped well on the whole but an almighty blunder at the eighth last fence cost him several lengths plus lost momentum and all things considered, he did very well to stay on into second up the home straight. He is yet to convince as a horse capable of staying two and a half miles plus in the highest class and may will have another opportunity to prove his stamina in the Betfair **Ascot** Chase in February.

Supporters of pounds per length theories will point to the fact that **Albertas Run** was receiving weight from his main rivals; nevertheless, the ability to put in a clear round of jumping holds far more significance and if this field meet again off level weights and they all jumped as they did today, then **Albertas Run** would be the most likely to come out on top.

Schindlers Hunt, who completed in fourth place, and **Voy Por Ustedes** both threw away their chances by making at least four fairly significant errors and they will certainly have to up their game to be competitive in the Ryanair Chase. Of the two, **Voy Por Ustedes** was making his seasonal debut and usually improves for a run, whilst **Schindlers Hunt** came here fit and in form with conditions in his favour so was particularly disappointing. It is interesting to note that these two horses have now jumped the last fence next to each other in each of their last three runs and yet, partly due to the Alan King horse receiving more media attention, there is currently a huge discrepancy between them in the betting markets for the Ryanair Chase. This is despite the evidence of all three of their latest runs strongly suggesting there will not be a lot between them come March.

HENNESSY

- 28th NOV 2009

This race could have some significance for more than one race at the 2010 Cheltenham Festival. After running below par in at least two of his three chases last season **Denman** showed he was back to his best with a fantastic display of jumping in the Hennessy Gold Cup at **Newbury**. From a handicapping point of view this was a much better performance than his win

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in the same race in 2007 as he was racing off a mark of 174 here in comparison to the 161 he raced off two years ago.

In this competitive handicap chase he raced prominently all the way before being taken on by his stable companion **What A Friend** from two out. Despite conceding 22 pounds to his stable mate he rallied to go on again from the last and pull away on the run in. It is very difficult to compare this performance with that of **Kauto Star** in the King George as they were two very different types of contests; nevertheless, the Gold Cup should be a race to savour, particularly because now that he has proved his well being there is every reason to suppose that **Denman** will be ridden in the same positive manner at **Cheltenham** in March as he was when winning the Gold Cup in 2008; this spells big trouble for any of his rivals with doubts regarding their stamina.

Barbers Shop travelled well just behind the leaders and looked a real danger until appearing to run out of stamina before the last fence. This is not the first time this has happened as he was also going extremely well in the 2009 Gold Cup before looking like a blatant non stayer from before the second last fence. He has excellent form over two and a half miles including behind **Imperial Commander** in the 2008 Paddy Power Chase at **Cheltenham** and the obvious festival race for this Nicky Henderson horse has to be the Ryanair Chase.

BOYLESPTS.COM GOLD CUP

- 12th DEC 2009

Poquelin was given a more positive ride here in comparison to the one he received in the Paddy Power Chase at the previous meeting at the course. Apparently, connections were pleasantly surprised by the strong finish of their horse in the Paddy Power so presumably felt they could afford to have him ridden more prominently here. Taking closer order from the off he was ridden in the middle of the pack until easing into second place at the fourth last fence; challenging the leader at the second last fence he soon led and was driven out to draw seven lengths clear on the run in. It is difficult to compare the merits of this performance with his run in the Paddy Power Chase on softer going; suffice to say that when the two horses meet again in March the Paul Nicholls horse will not be giving as much ground away to **Tranquil Sea** as he did at **Cheltenham** in November. Connections of **Poquelin** reiterated their view that he would improve when racing on better ground. This comment also applies to the fourth horse **Chapoturgeon** who would have finished a few lengths closer but for blundering at the last fence.

KING GEORGE

- 26th DEC 2009

Kauto Star was promoted to 6/4 favourite for the **Cheltenham** Gold Cup after his 36 length demolition of **Madison Du Berlais** and the rest of the King George field. Given the incredibly impressive nature of his success at **Kempton** it was a little surprising to see him remain at odds against. When any horse wins a top class race with such ridiculous ease it is important to take a step back and have a closer look, especially when the horse in question will undoubtedly trade at short odds in the future as a result of the impressive nature of one victory. **Kauto Star** is the best three mile chaser we have seen for a long time and, due to the inevitable layers of hype that follow on from each success with such a high profile horse, is always likely to be trading at a shorter price in the market than his overall form merits. Hence, the surprise at his 'odds against' price for the Gold Cup.

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It has to be noted that his chief market rival **Imperial Commander** made a terrible blunder at the second fence which effectively put him out of the race. Also the third favourite **Madison Du Berlais** was unable to live with the tremendous gallop set by **Ollie Magern** and **Nacarat** and was a little fortunate to snatch second spot on the run in. David Pipe's horse will probably be better in a smaller field where he can dictate his own pace. Of the rest, **Deep Purple** broke a blood vessel and **Albertas Run** could never get into the race whilst **Barbers Shop**, **Nacarat** and **Tartak** all failed to get home on the day. Nevertheless, the fact that the race rather fell apart for **Kauto Star** merely added to the scintillating nature of his victory and it has to be said that he never put a foot wrong and looked majestic in what was probably the most impressive looking performance of his career

LEXUS

- 29th DEC 2009

The Paul Nicholls bandwagon rolls on with yet another Grade One win to his name. This time it was the turn of the Alex Ferguson part owned **What A Friend** to do the honours as he held off the late challenge of **Money Trix** to record a hard fought success. Having previously finished an honourable second to Denman when receiving plenty of weight in the Hennessy Gold Cup at **Newbury**, he will be competing for third place at best should he take his chance in the **Cheltenham** Gold Cup. **Money Trix** will require heavy ground to offer him any chance of being competitive at **Cheltenham**.

This contest may ultimately have more impact on the betting markets and outcome of the Ryanair Chase rather than the Gold Cup. **Joncol** has always appeared to be a mud loving three mile plus chaser in the making so this Grade One Chase looked to offer him an excellent chance to show his credentials. He travelled and jumped extremely well in the testing conditions and took up the running before the turn for home, at which point he looked the most obvious winner. Unfortunately, he jumped the last like a tiring horse and was caught on the run in by both **What A Friend** and **Money Trix**. Paul Nolan suggested after the race that he may have got the tactics wrong with **Joncol** who perhaps could have been held onto for longer. His chances at **Cheltenham** in March would be greatly enhanced in the unlikely event of testing ground.

Those old rivals **Voy Por Ustedes** and **Schindlers Hunt** both appeared to find the three miles in testing ground beyond them, though they did jump a lot better here than either of them had previously at **Ascot**. Their respective profiles suggest that the challenges awaiting them in the Ryanair Chase should show them both in a better light and the fact that **Voy Por Ustedes** is trading at **11.0** on the exchanges whilst **Schindlers Hunt** is currently available at three times that price, despite the fact that they again finished within half a length of each other, is as much to do with hype and media coverage as it is to do with ability.

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;

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however, he clearly needs further than two miles and it is more than possible that he finished tired due to taking the favourite on

BETFAIR ASCOT

- 20th FEB 2010

Monet's Garden put in an exemplary round of jumping to take the Grade One Betfair Ascot Chase for the second time, having won it previously in 2007. His performance will have no bearing on the **Cheltenham** Festival as his connections have wisely decided to sidestep the Ryanair Chase and wait for **Aintree** or **Perth**. It was a bitter blow to the festival chances of **Planet Of Sound** when he crashed out at the fifth fence and the fact that he remains a **12/1** shot for the Ryanair is a little surprising. On the other hand, **Albertas Run** did his Ryanair claims no harm at all with another excellent run at **Ascot**. He jumped and travelled well and although he never quite looked like pegging back the winner he did, nevertheless, run on powerfully to the line. He has a good chance of running above his current odds of **33/1** in the Ryanair Chase.



THE GUIDE

POQUELIN

According to official ratings **Poquelin** has improved to a mark of 161 from the 139 rating he began the season off and the fact that he has done so whilst contesting three chases run over about two and a half miles at **Cheltenham** bodes well for his chances in the Ryanair Chase. He has now won four out of his eight chases culminating in an impressive win over two and a half miles off a mark of 151 at **Cheltenham** in December. He has won three chases and finished runner up once from five attempts at **Cheltenham** and has run on well up the hill on all five occasions. He stayed on past beaten horses from a long way off the pace in the Paddy Power on unsuitably testing ground and in the circumstances did remarkably well to get so close to the comfortable winner **Tranquil Sea**. We should expect him to be ridden more prominently in the Ryanair and given the likely better ground has an excellent chance of finishing in the first three.

BARBERS SHOP

Barbers Shop drops back in trip for the Ryanair Chase after finishing very tired in his previous two contests which were both run over three miles or more. He has jumped extremely well in all three chases he has contested at **Cheltenham**, has performed well on ground ranging from soft to good and is yet to race on extremes of going. He stays two and a half miles well, is yet to prove he has the stamina to win in a top class chase over three miles and has failed to stay in both races he has contested over a distance of around three and a quarter miles. His best performances to date suggest he may be slightly below the standard set by the top chasers; however, he is a lightly raced chaser who could still be open to more improvement. He has excellent form over two and a half miles including behind **Imperial Commander** in the 2008 Paddy Power Chase at **Cheltenham** and has an obvious chance of finishing in the prize money.

VOY POR USTEDES

Voy Por Ustedes has an excellent record at the **Cheltenham** Festival over the last four seasons and can boast form figures of: **1 1 2 2**. As a consequence of finishing just under 20 lengths behind **Master Minded** in the Game Spirit Chase on his latest outing, he has drifted out to **16/1** for the Ryanair Chase. He was beaten a very similar distance when runner up to **Master Minded** in the 2008 Champion Chase; at that time, pundits and punters alike found it very easy to forgive him as a horse that required an extra half mile; conversely, due to the fact that two horses finished between him and **Master Minded** last time out at **Newbury**, he has now been written off for reproducing that previous Champion Chase form. We should remember how he bounced back from the 2008 defeat to reverse the form with **Master Minded** over two and a half miles at **Aintree** and although he has been somewhat disappointing in his latest two runs, it is also important to note that neither of those contests have been run in his optimum conditions. He now returns to his favourite venue for the Ryanair Chase which will be run over his preferred trip and, although one or two of his rivals may hold stronger claims, it is far too soon to write **Voy Por Ustedes** off; consequently, his current price of **16/1** appears to be rather generous.

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ALBERTAS RUN

Albertas Run is a quirky individual who disappoints as often as he wins; however, within this quiriness there lies one or two interesting patterns. His form on good ground reads: **1 2 1 1 3 2 3 1**. His two third places in this sequence have both occurred when racing at **Aintree**, which is a course where he is yet to look like winning in three attempts. Conversely, he has won two out of three chases at both **Ascot** and **Cheltenham** and has managed to win at each of those courses when the ground has been officially good to soft; interestingly enough, his chase form on good to soft going away from those courses reads: **P 3 3 6**. Aside from **Ascot** and **Cheltenham** he has only managed one other victory from eleven attempts over fences and that was in a minor novice event at **Towcester** on his chasing debut. He is currently trading at odds of **33/1** for the Ryanair Chase and if the ground on the day is good or good to soft then he has an excellent chance of being in the shake up.

TRANQUIL SEA

Tranquil Sea has run in two chases at **Cheltenham** with very contrasting results. He raced off a mark of **139** in the Jewson Handicap at the 2009 **Cheltenham** Festival and didn't travel or jump well enough to stay in contention on the good to soft ground. He eventually finished well beaten in sixth place though improved considerably on that performance when he returned to the course to contest the Paddy Power Gold Cup in November 2009. Here he ran out an impressive winner off a rating of **148** in what proved to be quite a gruelling race run on testing ground, where eight of the 16 starters failed to finish the contest. His best performances have generally been when he has raced on testing going and if the Ryanair Chase is run on soft or heavy ground he has to be on the shortlist and will be one of the main contenders; conversely, should the race be run on a quicker surface his jumping will be put under increased pressure and there will be at least two or three contenders with more substantial claims. He was promoted to **9/2** favourite for the Ryanair with some bookmakers after his recent win, and another good run on heavy ground, in the Grade Two Newlands Chase run over two miles and one furlong at **Leopardstown**.

PLANET OF SOUND

Planet Of Sound is a consistent chaser who has performed well in all six chases he has completed since he made his chasing debut at **Sandown**. He looks best suited to racing on flat tracks and has run well on ground ranging from soft to good; he has proven his ability to stay two miles and two and a half furlongs in novice company, though he is yet to confirm his ability to stay two and a half miles. In his latest completed start he ran on well into second place behind **Albertas Run** over a trip of two miles and three furlongs on good going at **Ascot**. Unfortunately, he then blotted his copybook when falling at the fifth fence on his return to the same course in the Betfair Ascot Chase. This fall was a major setback to his chances at **Cheltenham** and was far from the ideal preparation that his connections would have been hoping for. He now heads for the Ryanair Chase having made serious blunders in each of his latest two runs and with his ability to stay two miles and five furlongs still unproven. If everything falls into place for **Planet Of Sound** he could run well and be in the mix at the final fence; nonetheless, several of his main rivals have more proven stamina and stronger course form than him; therefore, at his current odds of between **9/1** and **12/1**, others are preferred.

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SCHINDLERS HUNT

Schindlers Hunt is a very experienced chaser who has managed to finish in the first three in half of his 26 races over fences. Although this is a decent record by most standards, it does not add up to the profile of a potential Grade One Chase winner at the **Cheltenham Festival**. With his poor win to run ratio he is the type of horse to oppose when he is trading short, and one to consider supporting in a small way when he is an unconsidered outsider. Until recently, **Schindlers Hunt** looked a reasonably attractive proposition for the Ryanair Chase as he was trading at three times the price of his old adversary **Voy Por Ustedes**, despite the fact that they are closely matched and have jumped the last fence together on each of the last four occasions they have met. This imbalance has been reversed as **Schindlers Hunt** is now as short as **8/1** whilst the Alan King horse is currently available at **16/1**. If his jumping holds up, there is no reason to think that **Schindlers Hunt** cannot run as well as last year and finish in the first three; however, for a horse that has won just two of his last 21 races his chances of winning this Grade One contest are not fairly reflected in a single figure price.

J'Y VOLE

In her latest win **J'y Vole** beat the 12 year old **Watson Lake** by 15 lengths on soft going in the Grade Two Red Mills Chase at **Gowran Park**. In her previous success she had beaten **The Sawyer** at **Punchestown** in April 2009 when racing off a mark of **134**. All of her eight career wins have been earned when racing on soft or heavy going and she appears most suited to racing over a distance of about two and a half miles. After her latest win she came in for some quite heavy support for the Ryanair Chase and is now trading between the odds of **12/1** and **16/1**; however, **J'y Vole's** profile suggests that she is very ground dependant, is yet to jump fences at the festival and several of her rivals have more relevant form to their names. Clearly she will have some sort of a chance but it is very difficult to see anything in her form to justify her current 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 another wide open race with several likely candidates, including the favourite **Poquelin**, who may not need to improve much on what he has already achieved to go close here. **Tranquil Sea** is trading at a similar price and would be the likeliest winner in the event of the race being run on very soft ground. In such a wide open race, the best course of action is to look beyond the favourites and have a couple of each way bets on horses trading at double figure prices. The two obvious ones to focus our attentions on are **Schindlers Hunt** and **Voy Por Ustedes** who are closely matched, having jumped the last fence next to each other in each of the last four races in which they have met. Both horses would be most suited to racing on ground no worse than good to soft. Last season **Voy Por Ustedes** started as the **4/5** favourite for this event which was clearly an overreaction to his chances. His current price for this race is **16/1** which, although he may not have the best chance of winning the race, is an underestimation of his percentage chance. **Schindlers Hunt** also appears slightly overpriced at **12/1**.

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