

CHELTENHAM

COTSWOLD CHASE – 24th JANUARY 2009

HALCON GENELARDAIS

When Halcon Genelardais finished third at **Cheltenham** in the Cotswold Chase of 2006, he was running thirty one days after his Welsh National win on very soft ground at **Chepstow**. Alan King stated that he thought this contest had come too quickly for him. He may prefer a longer break, or his performance that day could just be as a consequence of returning too soon after racing in testing conditions.

Of the 12 horses that completed in the Welsh National of 2006, only Simon and Juveigneur returned to win a race that season. Simon won two chases and fell in the Grand National, whilst Juveigneur managed to win a minor novice hurdle race at **Plumpton**. Apart from those three wins, the 12 horses who completed the course that day failed to register one success from 34 attempts. This scenario is by no means untypical of the consequences of running in stamina sapping races like the Welsh National. It is certainly worth making a list of the finishers in such a race and noting how they perform on their return. After the 2007 renewal at **Chepstow** six out of the eight horses who finished failed to win a race that season.

Halcon Genelardais needs testing ground and long distances to be seen at his best. The trip of four miles and one furlong was not far enough for him on the good going which prevailed when he finished fifth in the Scottish National in 2006, whilst the combination of heavy ground and three miles and one furlong at **Cheltenham** 31 days later did not look a strong enough test of stamina. It is possible he ran below par in the latter race. His trainer feels he is a much stronger horse now and his improved performance in last season's Scottish National on unsuitable going supports this view. However, although he will be in his element in the event of heavy ground, he has not won one of his last eight chases, yet is favourite for this race despite needing to accomplish something here that he was unable to achieve two years ago.

NOZIC

Has won three out of six completed chases in Britain and finished second in the other three. One could argue that he is the stable's fifth or sixth choice for the Gold Cup, yet is competing against the first string from two of the top yards in the country. Before running at **Newbury** in March 2007 Paul Nicholls voiced his opinion that, to him, Nozic did not appear to be a 150+ horse. He has the luxury of many top class horses at home to feel confident about making this comment - an important piece of the jigsaw to remember. Although his performance that day altered the trainer's view somewhat, the fact remains that he has only completed one chase since then. At the beginning of this season his trainer reaffirmed his view that Nozic would find life hard off a rating of 153.

Last time out at **Wetherby**, over three miles and a furlong on testing ground, he appeared to travel particularly well for the step up in trip before skipping away from Tidal Bay and Cloudy Lane in the home straight. He is a fresh horse, looks to be improving, will probably stay up the hill and could be better for it; he appreciates testing ground, has good recent form and is likely to be the stable's second choice here which could provide an inflated price. **In light of his Wetherby performance he has every chance of going close in this and has to be on the shortlist.**

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ROLL ALONG

He has been outpaced in all of his last five chases before running on strongly to varying degrees in each one. He clearly stays this distance and looks likely to be suited by further. His first time out record reads: **1 1 1 1** – If one discounts his seasonal debut runs he has failed to win in his four other chases. His career record before Xmas reads: **1 1 1 1 1 1 3** – whereas post Xmas his figures are: **1 3 2 2 5** – His performances on the track have certainly been more consistent earlier in the season and when racing as a fresh horse. The fact that he has not raced for 50 days should be to his advantage.

It is possible he will act on very testing ground, but unlike Nozic and Halcon Genelardais he has yet to prove it in good company. He races as if he will appreciate a stiffer test of stamina than those he has experienced so far, but there is a suspicion he will be outpaced over any trip before running on into a place. Certainly his win to run ratio is far less convincing than that of Nozic. His two victories over fences have come in a minor novice chase at **Plumpton** and on his seasonal debut at **Ascot** in November when he wore down two horses who were said to need the run. He obviously has a chance of finishing in the first three in this race and his early ante post double figure price looked a little tempting. Unfortunately, he is now hovering around the 7/1 mark and, although he may be crying out for this type of test, he does appear to have a couple more question marks against his name than one or two of his rivals.

STAR DE MOHAISON

After he won at **Aintree** in April 2006 his trainer stated: "The key to him is he would not want it too soft – he struggled on the winter soft ground." The ground tomorrow will be heavy and soft in places at best so, unless the trainer has changed his mind in the intervening period, Star De Mohaison may well drift tomorrow on the back of 'going concerns' expressed by Paul Nicholls in his Racing Post column.

In his first chase for over two years and racing off a mark of 155 he jumped incredibly well over tomorrow's course and distance before going down in a close finish to Mon Mome. The time of that race strongly suggests the going was softer than the advertised good to soft ground. He has only run three times in over two years and after his comeback race in January 2008 his trainer reiterated his view regarding the ground: "He could come back to **Cheltenham** at the end of the month [for last year's renewal of this race] although I wouldn't want to do that if it was too testing." His two graded chase victories came on good ground and the balance of his form is definitely stronger on such a surface. However, he does have some reasonable soft ground form to his name and he is one of only two horses to escape a penalty in this chase; Halcon Genelardais being the other. This does not look the strongest of Gold Cup trials and it is still a possibility he is a little better than his rivals today. Unfortunately his current odds of 100/30 make little appeal considering the doubts about his ability to act in testing conditions and the fact that he has been absent for most of the last two years.

SNOOPY LOOPY

This admirably consistent horse has only been out of the first three once in his last 14 completed chase starts. He finished unplaced in his last run in the Grade One King George Chase at **Kempton** in this sequence, but lost his chance after being knocked sideways by Voy Por Ustedes down the far side. As is not unusual for this horse, his jumping had been less than fluent, to say the least, up to the point he was hampered. Despite his repetitive jumping errors he has only failed to complete the course once in 26 races in Britain, when being brought down at **Uttoxeter** in June 2008.

According to the handicapper he has improved from a mark of 108 – 168 [60 pounds] in less than one year. Due to the fact that he is from an unfashionable yard with a rider who most people would put in the category of a 'journeyman jockey' he is always likely to trade at an inflated price in the betting market. Despite having no experience of jumping fences at **Cheltenham**, if one ignores the hype and excuses of the vanquished and instead concentrates on the facts, it becomes plausible to make a case for this horse in the Cotswold Chase.

At **Aintree** he beat Voy Por Ustedes [getting weight], took the scalps of Kauto Star and Tamarinbleu at **Haydock** and ran on into third place behind Air Force One [giving weight] at **Newbury**. This last race gives him a similar chance to Roll Along yet he is trading at over three times the price of that rival. In the Hennessy he acted on the very testing ground and ran as if he would appreciate a stiffer test of stamina. The helter skelter pace of that event did not play into his hands and consequently he made many mistakes at **Newbury**. However, the undulations of **Cheltenham** will always create a more stop start tempo compared to the breakneck pace he experienced in the Hennessy and this could help him stay in touch in the likely event of him making one or two mistakes.

He will act on the ground, stay the trip, is on the upgrade and has good recent form to his name. Furthermore, he is currently leading the order of merit table and, as such, will therefore be ridden with points [and prize money] in mind. He will not be given an easy time with a future target in mind. Today is always the day for Snoopy Loopy.

In Running: IF his jumping holds up he is still quite likely to be travelling less well down the hill than some of his rivals. However, half of this field are not going to get up the hill tomorrow so a decision will need to be made whether or not to support him in the win or place market at this point. If Ollie Magern and Tidal Bay are two of the horses travelling well in front of him before they start to climb one may have reason to be more confident!

OLLIE MAGERN

He is clearly a horse that saves his best for his seasonal debuts. His career first time out record over obstacles reads: **1 1 1 U 1 2** – whilst in all other runs he has failed to win in his last 14 attempts and has finished tailed off in most of those. He has won on soft ground but has always looked better on faster going. His trainer remains out of form although the fact that he did have a winner earlier in the week means we should keep a close eye on all runners from the yard this weekend. Ollie Magern finished very tired over a slightly shorter trip and on much better ground than he will face in this at the last **Cheltenham** festival. Nothing in his profile suggests he will play a part in the finish in this race. He is likely to push the pace and even more likely to drop out when the race becomes competitive.

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TIDAL BAY

This horse has a fantastic win to run ratio. In 17 career starts he has won 10 races and finished runner up in the other seven. One needs to find very good reasons to oppose him in any contest. He has won six out of nine races over fences. His trainer has stated that he thinks this horse is best over distances of two and a half miles – two and three quarter miles.

He has a lot of experience at this course and has won three of his five outings here. He is unbeaten in two runs over fences at **Cheltenham**. He has finished second in his last two chases behind Master Minded over two miles at Sandown and Nozic over this trip at Wetherby on soft going. This is another range finder race as his trainer tries to determine which contest to target at the festival. He clearly has a fantastic engine, however, he has looked vulnerable over a speedy two miles where he appears to struggle to get himself organised at his fences and also on testing ground over two and a half miles - plus he has looked like a doubtful stayer.

He certainly seemed to struggle to get home in a novice hurdle race against Wichita Lineman over two miles and five furlongs on heavy going here two seasons ago. After that defeat his owner stated that Tidal Bay was not suited to jumping the hurdles out of the prevailing gluey ground. At the time of writing [Friday 12.30pm] the going is officially heavy with soft patches and a dry run through until after racing tomorrow is predicted. This being the case the going is likely to be gluey, the fences will need jumping and he has to get up the **Cheltenham** hill at the end of a gruelling examination over three miles and one and a half furlongs against proven stayers.

In Running: He may not get up the hill as well as looks likely at the point he begins to climb.

JOE LIVELY

After his win at **Cheltenham** in November he was raised to a mark of 153 which still makes him one of the lowest rated horses in this field. He received 23 pounds from Halcon Genelardais that day and is now carrying 6 pounds more than that rival. Pounds per lengths fans will say he has no chance in this and whilst it is true to say his overall performances leave him a little short here, his excellent course form means he is more likely to run to his optimum than some of his better fancied rivals. His form at **Cheltenham** reads: **1 1 6 2 3 1** – and it is not too difficult to delve into his profile to find good reasons for his defeats in this sequence. His third place finish came on his seasonal debut which he looked like he needed and he finished runner up to Beat The Boys at the end of a very hard season when he appeared to have had enough for the year. Although he has generally jumped well at the course, he made too many mistakes in the Grade One Sun Alliance Chase to trouble the easy winner Albertas Run.

He is another horse who comes from an unfashionable yard with a 'journeyman jockey' on board and again, as such, will probably trade at a bigger price than he should. He does not have the best chance of winning this race; he will, however, act on the course, stay the trip well and has proven he gets up the hill on testing ground. It will be no surprise to see him run a solid race and finish closer than his place in the market suggests he will.

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CONCLUSIONS

Of the shorter priced horses **Halcon Genelardais** is trading under 2/1. If we are going to make money at this game we cannot support short priced favourites who have failed to win in eight attempts. If he gets outpaced again and runs on into a place he will appear to have run disappointingly and therefore, could be more of a proposition at more attractive odds, in a big field, faster paced Gold Cup run in testing conditions. **Star De Mohaison** could also be a contender for the Gold Cup but again, is a short enough price given his enforced absences and the doubts regarding his suitability to the conditions.

Roll Along is another with some sort of chance in a race where many of the contenders fail to tick all the boxes. **Nozic is in form and is more suited to the day than any of his rivals.** However, it is a close call and his current price of 5/1, whilst not tight by any means, does not look outstanding value in such a difficult race to call. Of the more strongly fancied horses **Tidal Bay** has the weakest credentials for this challenge. This is not to say that he cannot win; but his profile strongly suggests he will struggle to get up the hill on heavy ground.

Ollie Magern will probably take the field along but it would be a major surprise if he was competitive at the business end. **This leaves the two horses that look overpriced in Snoopy Loopy and Joe Lively.** The market for this race is a little lop sided. The fancied horses are a bit shorter than they should be and these two outsiders have a better chance than their price suggests. If this turns into the expected slog up the hill one can be certain that if they are still in the game they will be asked to give everything. A gruelling battle may not be what one or two of the market principals require at this point in their careers.