

**RACING POST**

# CHELTENHAM

FESTIVAL GUIDE 2024



**208** pages of top advice

Ace Tipsters

Key Trends

Bookmaker Q&A

Trainer Analysis

Racing Post Ratings

Plus Paul Kealy's In-depth Race-by-Race Festival Guide



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**W**ELCOME to the Racing Post Cheltenham Festival Guide – and once again we can look

forward to four fabulous days of jump racing, headlined by a couple of superstars who could put this year's meeting in the memory banks for many seasons to come.

From Britain comes Constitution Hill, who already holds the best figure recorded in the Champion Hurdle in more than 30 years since Racing Post Ratings started. This time, if pressed more closely by last year's nine-length runner-up State Man, Nicky Henderson's brilliant hurdler could take even higher rank among the all-time greats.

From Ireland there is Willie Mullins' Galopin Des Champs, who also recorded an exceptional RPR in winning last year's Gold Cup. Only the phenomenal Kauto Star and Sprinter Sacre have bettered his figure at any distance in the past 15 years.

Already, then, we are in the presence of

greatness and others – notably El Fabiolo in the Champion Chase – may take the opportunity to move into that realm at this festival.

Everyone will be looking, too, for the emerging stars from the novice ranks, currently headed by the likes of Ballyburn, Sir Gino and Fact To File.

In the annual quest for winners, we hope this 208-page guide will provide valuable insight and advice.

The first half of the book features the views of tipsters and bookmakers, Racing Post Ratings, analysis of the key formlines, the lowdown on the Irish challenge and trainer pointers.

In the second half of the book, Racing Post top tipster Paul Kealy provides his race-by-race guide with forthright opinions and profiles of more than 100 of the top horses, along with key trends from Kevin Morley.

We wish you a successful festival – and let's hope it's one to savour.

**NICK PULFORD, EDITOR**





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# THE SPECIALISTS

A dramatic silhouette of a jockey riding a horse, captured against a bright sunburst background. The sunburst is positioned on the left side of the frame, creating a strong lens flare effect that illuminates the scene. The jockey is wearing a helmet and is leaning forward, holding the reins. The horse is in a full gallop, with its legs extended. The overall mood is energetic and dynamic.

The Racing Post's team of experts reveal their festival fancies and the major bookmakers discuss the big issues in our Q&A

# Let's have a Good Time

Richard Birch

WHILE most people were salivating over the might of Galopin Des Champs, El Fabiolo and State Man at the Dublin Racing Festival, it was a performance in a handicap that excited me most in terms of a future punt.

**Good Time Jonny**, a Cheltenham Festival regular, may have been beaten 27 lengths into fifth behind Heart Wood in the Leopardstown Handicap Chase at 18-1, but he shaped with infinitely more promise than the losing distance suggests.

The nine-year-old has made the mid-March

trip to Cheltenham three times. He finished well beaten in the Champion Bumper (2020) and Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle (2022) but made it third time lucky last year when comfortably landing the 23-runner Pertemps Network Final.

The importance of festival form can sometimes be overstated but it's never a negative and Good Time Jonny has clearly been meticulously laid out for the Fulke

*Good Time Jonny: set for another big run in a festival handicap*





Walwyn Kim Muir Handicap Chase by ace plotter Tony Martin.

The fact that Derek O'Connor partnered him two starts ago over a wholly inadequate two miles at Naas reinforces the likelihood of the Kim Muir being the target over the Ultima Handicap Chase.

Good Time Jonny was having just his fifth start over fences at Leopardstown and remains open to considerable improvement. He's also thoroughly unexposed at trips in excess of three miles and makes considerable appeal.

**Corbetts Cross** also boasts festival form, having been sent off a heavily backed 9-4 favourite for the Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle last year.

He was in second place – and holding every chance of landing the gamble – when he jinked right and ran out at the final flight.

The winner Stay Away Fay has made up into a smart novice chaser this term and was beaten only three and a half lengths in Cheltenham's Grade 2 Cotswold Chase behind Capodanno and The Real Whacker. He boasts an official rating of 159 over fences.

Corbetts Cross has also taken extremely well to chasing, winning on soft ground at Fairyhouse in December prior to running a career-best when second to Grangeclare West over Leopardstown's 3m½f in a Grade 1 later that month.

He has always been considered a horse with plenty of class who will stay extreme distances and the 3m6f of the National Hunt Novices' Chase promises to suit him well.

His Fairyhouse fall just five weeks before Cheltenham was far from the ideal preparation, but Emmet Mullins can be relied upon to have him spot on for the big day.

The Kim Bailey-trained **Chianti Classico** also contested the Albert Bartlett last March. Odds of 66-1 reflected his chance and he was pulled up after the second-last.

Prior to Cheltenham, he had won a Market Rasen bumper and three races over hurdles at Chepstow, Market Rasen and Wincanton to stamp himself a young horse going places.

Following wind surgery over the summer,

Chianti Classico has thrived as a novice chaser this season, winning novice handicaps at Chepstow and Ascot before finishing second to Flegmatik at Kempton.

His stable was chronically out of form at the time, so that Kempton performance under the steadier of 11st 10lb should be marked up.

Chianti Classico's sole run in a point-to-point saw him beat Stumptown by two and a half lengths at Tipperary. Stumptown is now officially rated 147 over fences after landing a valuable 3m1½f handicap chase at Cheltenham on New Year's Day, and Chianto Classico looks tailor-made for the demands of the Ultima Handicap Chase.

There promises to be more mileage in his mark of 143 and connections have made no secret of the regard in which this exciting seven-year-old is held.

Jonjo O'Neill was also trumpeting the claims of **Springwell Bay** after the lightly raced son of Kayf Tara had won a 2m5f handicap hurdle at Cheltenham's Paddy Power meeting in November by a length and a quarter from Gyeneyame.

"My dream plan is to get him to the Stayers' Hurdle," the trainer said.

That dream may have to wait until 2025 as Springwell Bay's current mark of 143 makes him a highly attractive proposition for the Pertemps Network Final.

The vast majority of recent winners have been rated between 138 and 148 and O'Neill boasts a wonderful record in the race, having landed it four times with Danny Connors (1991), Inching Closer (2003), Creon (2004) and Holywell (2013).

Springwell Bay is a most likeable horse with plenty of pace who also stays three miles well. His high cruising speed suggests big-field handicaps will bring further improvement.

Indeed, he produced a career-best under 12st in a 14-runner qualifier for the Pertemps Final when second to Curley Finger at Musselburgh.

Winner of five of his ten starts to date, he can enjoy his finest hour by landing the three-mile Premier handicap.



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# Cor! Let's bet on Cross

David Jennings

CORBETTS CROSS is the best bet of the Cheltenham Festival and I'm happy to take the 4-1 currently available for the National Hunt Novices' Chase.

That's his only entry now after being scratched from the Turners and Brown Advisory, so we know where he's going and I have a strong suspicion he'll outclass his rivals – even hot favourite Embassy Gardens, who ran a shocker in last year's Albert Bartlett.

Corbetts Cross was still on the tail of Stay Away Fay when crashing through the wing of the final hurdle in that Albert Bartlett, and his chasing career hasn't exactly been smooth sailing either. He's been sent off at 1-4, 11-10, 13-8 and 2-1 for his four outings over fences and the funny thing is that his only win came at the biggest price.

But there's no shame in twice being beaten by Grangeclare West, who was favourite for the Brown Advisory before meeting with a setback. Corbetts Cross was given plenty to do

*Corbetts Cross (right): top bet for the National Hunt Novices' Chase*



when they met in a Grade 1 at Leopardstown at Christmas and still breezed ten lengths clear of Flooring Porter, who is generally a 7-1 shot for the National Hunt Chase.

A little four-runner event around Fairyhouse was supposed to be a confidence-booster for Corbetts Cross last time and it was all going fine until Run Wild Fred cannoned into him at the third-last and he fell.

His jumping isn't electric but he can pop away over 3m6f at Cheltenham in what's likely to be a small field and I'll be disappointed if he's beaten barring accidents like the one at Fairyhouse.

Also on the opening day, I like the look of **Amirite** in the Ultima Handicap Chase at 25-1. Ireland has a shocking record in the race but this Henry de Bromhead-trained eight-year-old could end the drought.

He was given a sighter of the Old course at Cheltenham in October and travelled powerfully through a 3m1f handicap chase won by stablemate Whacker Clan. His saddle slipped there and he finished only fourth, but the way he moved through the race suggests he's capable of landing a good prize off his mark.

Amirite again caught the eye in the Paddy Power Chase at Leopardstown over Christmas. The ground went against him there, but he was beaten only 11 and a half lengths in fifth and I have a feeling he'll be a good deal better than the bare form of that on better ground.

Gordon Elliott is the most successful trainer in the 19-year history of the Boodles Juvenile Handicap Hurdle thanks to Flaxen Flare (2013), Veneer Of Charm (2018), Aramax (2020) and Jazzy Matty (2023) and **Ndawwi** could add his name to the roll of honour this year.

Ndawwi was a classy 93-rated performer on the Flat for Andrew Balding, good enough

to take his place in the Lingfield Derby Trial and the Queen's Vase at Royal Ascot, and he has shown steady improvement in three starts over hurdles.

There was a real swagger about the way he won a maiden hurdle at Naas in January and the official margin of two and a half lengths doesn't even begin to do his superiority justice. He got an RPR of 128 for that and was handed a British mark of 134 when given an entry at Kelso recently.

A mark of 134 will mean Ndawwi has plenty of weight in the Boodles (last year's topweight McTigue had a rating of 142) but he could have the class to cope with it and it wouldn't surprise me if he turned out to be a Graded performer over hurdles. I liked the way he jumped up the straight at Naas and put the race to bed quickly.

It looks like Ballyburn is Supreme-bound and that could leave the door open for stablemate **Ile Atlantique** to take the Baring Bingham.

He did much of the donkey work in the Lawlor's of Naas Novice Hurdle and that allowed stablemate Readin Tommy Wrong to pounce late, but he'll surely take a lead at the festival and that could make the difference.

Some say **Teahupoo** (above) had his opportunity in last year's Stayers' Hurdle and didn't take it, but he's only seven and is worth another chance.

This time he comes straight from the Hatton's Grace Hurdle at Fairyhouse in early December. The edge hasn't been taken off him like it was in the Galmoy at Gowran Park last season and that could prove the big difference as we know by now he's best fresh.

The final selection is **Ferns Lock** in the Hunters' Chase. He was a sight for sore eye at Thurles in his prep and I fancy him strongly to do the business for David Christie and Barry O'Neill.





# Crambo a star stayer

Graeme Rodway

GORDON ELLIOTT trains the first two in the ante-post market for the Stayers' Hurdle and both are owned by Robcour. As a result, it's probably unlikely that both Irish Point and Teahupoo will run and it's Irish Point who is expected to move aside and go to Aintree, where he won last season.

Teahupoo is a top-class hurdler but his best form has definitely come over shorter than three miles and he traded at 1.7 in running to win this race last year only to falter on the run-in and get outstayed by Sire Du Berlais.

That makes me think he isn't a strong stayer at the distance.

With question marks over his stamina, this is a good race for a bet and the one to be on is **Crambo**. There's no doubt about him staying the trip and nothing will be finishing faster.

Crambo has improved significantly this season and should probably be coming here with three wins in a row to his name because he ran the final furlong 1.32 seconds quicker than Slate Lane when third at Haydock in November. He would have won in another half-furlong.

To put that into perspective, 1.32 seconds

*Crambo (near side): Long Walk win confirmed he's on a rapid upward curve*





equates to around six lengths on good to soft going, which it was at Haydock, and that is an extraordinary amount of ground to make up over such a short distance. Crambo's last furlong was the fastest in his race and the quickest on the card.

Crambo confirmed he's on a rapid upward curve when beating Paisley Park in the Grade 1 Long Walk Hurdle at Ascot in December and not many have been able to outbattle that rival after jumping the last alongside him in recent years. Stamina is evidently Crambo's strength.

That was an 18lb improvement on his previous best Racing Post Rating and there should be plenty more progress to come on what will be only his third outing over further than 2m4f.

The stiff uphill finish at Cheltenham also promises to bring out the best in Crambo and Fergal O'Brien is superb at getting his horses right after a long break, so an 82-day absence is a plus.

The Supreme Novices' Hurdle opens the meeting and Ballyburn, who showed his class when running out the most impressive winner on either day at the Dublin Racing Festival, is now a short price. However, the Baring Bingham is also being considered, so he isn't certain to run.

One who looks sure to run here is **Jeriko Du Reponet**, who has this as his only entry in the novice hurdles all week, and trainer Nicky Henderson hasn't mentioned a different target.

Jeriko Du Reponet started the season with a tall reputation and was flawless on his first two runs over hurdles at Newbury, twice winning without needing to be fully asked for his effort.

He was underwhelming when having his prep run for the festival in Grade 2 company at Doncaster in January, scoring by only a length

and a quarter, but he was going away at the finish and probably wasn't suited by the slow early gallop, which led to a frantic late sprint.

Granted a stronger pace in the festival opener, Jeriko Du Reponet looks certain to post an improved performance and Henderson has won two of the last four runnings of this Grade 1.

Marine Nationale and Gaelic Warrior both put in dismal efforts at the Dublin Racing Festival and the market for the Arkle now has an open feel. The Irish contenders don't look that strong and this could go to the best British performer, **JPR One**, who has improved for fences.

He should have won three of his four starts since going chasing as he was clear when falling at the last in a trial for this race over course and distance in November. He clearly acts at the track.

JPR One was below form when third in a Grade 1 at Sandown next time, but maybe the heavy going was against him that day and a bad mistake at the second-last didn't help.

He put that firmly behind him when landing a Grade 2 on Winter Million weekend at Lingfield in January, when improving his RPR by 8lb, and further progress is likely.

My final selection is **Grey Dawning** (above) in the Brown Advisory. He should be coming here unbeaten in his last three runs because he would probably have beaten Ginny's Destiny at Cheltenham two starts ago but for a bad mistake two out, and that rival has won subsequently.

The step up to 3m at Warwick last time brought further improvement from Grey Dawning when he slammed Apple Away by 14 lengths in a good time and there looks to be more to come.



# Elementary for Watson

Nick Watts

THE Champion Hurdle appears to be a closed shop, and to a slightly lesser extent so do the Champion Chase and Gold Cup, so for the most part we must look beyond the big championship races for attractive options.

One is the Willie Mullins-trained **Lecky Watson**, who could have the Albert Bartlett on his radar and is a generally available 12-1.

His run in the Champion Bumper at last year's festival was excellent, finishing fourth and close to such horses as Fact To File, Captain Teague and It's For Me. Since going hurdling, he won on his return at Thurles over 2m7f in November before being placed in two Graded races over the shorter trip of 2m4f.

Both of those runs were excellent, particularly two starts ago at Navan, where he finished half a length behind the classy Slade Steel. That showed he's probably not quite up to a crack at the Baring Bingham, but he's still unexposed over staying distances and

*Lecky Watson: looks well suited to the Albert Bartlett test*



his winning run at Thurles suggested that's where he needs to go.

He pulled far too hard there and did plenty wrong, but still pulled the race out of the fire, and he can go well in the Albert Bartlett if he switches off in the likely big field.

The Stayers' Hurdle has been unpredictable in recent years. We had a 33-1 winner last season, a 50-1 winner in 2020, and even Flooring Porter was a relatively unfancied 12-1 for his first victory two years ago.

However, in the hope that some order is restored this year, I'm going for ante-post favourite **Teahupoo** to step up two places on last year's close third behind Sire Du Berlais and Dashed Drasher.

Compared to some in this field, he's a spring chicken at the age of seven and he seems to be getting better year on year. He's starting to make the Hatton's Grace Hurdle his own, having won the Fairyhouse Grade 1 for the last two years, and while the decision to keep him off the track after his latest win in early December hasn't pleased the purists, in his case it was the right thing to do.

He goes well fresh. His two Grade 1 wins have come after absences of 219 and 220 days, so going to Cheltenham off a gap of 102 days should work to his advantage.

He almost did it last year – a couple of sloppy jumps and a messy finish where he had to be switched turned what might have been a win into a narrow defeat. Hopefully this year he can put that right.

Mullins will probably win a hatful again and his streak is likely to start in the first race on Tuesday, the Supreme, where he can pick between Ballyburn and **Mystical Power**.

Both are obvious contenders, but will they run against each other? That doesn't appear likely and I would hazard a guess that Ballyburn will go in the Baring Bingham and Mystical Power in the Supreme.

I'm hoping that's the case as I was most impressed by the way Mystical Power won the Moscow Flyer at Punchestown last time out. It might not have been the strongest running of the Grade 2, but Mystical Power was having

his first run for 167 days and was very light on experience going into it.

That rawness showed through the race and he remains a work in progress, but the talent is most definitely there. Being by Galileo out of Annie Power doesn't automatically mean he's going to be a superstar, but the signs are promising after three starts and apparently he does nothing at home – which I take as a positive that he saves it for the racetrack.

Don't be surprised if he comes off the bridle at Cheltenham, but don't be surprised either if he finishes off his race strongly once he gets organised.

The Arkle, which follows immediately after the Supreme, has been thrown wide open after Marine Nationale's defeat at the Dublin Racing Festival.

Il Etait Temps has thrust himself to the forefront after taking to fences much better than most expected. However, his Cheltenham record is undistinguished – two fifth places from two starts – and his Mullins stablemate **Facile Vega** is way ahead in that respect.

Facile Vega won the Champion Bumper in 2022 and was a good second to Marine Nationale in the Supreme last year. In my view, he has been unfairly maligned, probably on account of his illustrious lineage as a son of Quevega, but he has won eight of his 12 starts, four in Grade 1 company.

Last time out he bounced back from a dreadful run at Christmas to finish on the heels of Il Etait Temps in the Irish Arkle at the Dublin Racing Festival. Judging from that race, a more forceful ride might benefit him over two miles.

He jumps well and stays further, so he has the attributes to stretch his opponents. At Leopardstown Paul Townend was content to sit in second behind Found A Fifty and Facile Vega got done for a bit of toe after the last.

He wasn't beaten far, however, and more positive tactics could see him in a different light. He has drifted out to a decent price for the Arkle at around 8-1 and I think he'll finish in the frame at least. With a bit of luck, he might well win it.

