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She has a mark of 145. Now is Marsh Wren: smart mare will that a mares' handicap mark or be tough to crack against her own sex again this season

He has won over three miles but the Aintree test is unknown territory, as it is with virtually every horse.

"Does anybody know whether they'll get the trip until they try it?" muses Edmunds rhetorically. "He switches off in his races and gets into a good rhythm, so I think we may give it a go. He may just sneak into the bottom off his mark.

"The plan would be to go back to Aintree for the Grand Sefton [November] and probably have a prep race at Chepstow in October. After the Sefton we could go for the Becher [December 7]."

A tilt at the National is not set in stone, however. Edmunds and his team have an alternative plan if Aintree is taken off the table-a cross-country route with Cheltenham as the terminus.

"Jumping is his very strong asset and we're thinking that may be a better test for his stamina," says the man who likes to tell people he moved "ten roundabouts" last summer from just north of Milton Keynes to the custom-built Croft Farm stables a few miles south of the Buckinghamshire town famous for its grid system.

The new stable switch coincided with Edmunds achieving his best figures since taking out a licence ten years ago, saddling a record 30 winners and earning just under £380,000 prize-money from only 182 runners, a strike-rate of 16 per cent and 35th place in the British jumps trainers' championship.

Although Arizona Cardinal was by far the stable's biggest money earner, helping boost the total was **Marsh Wren**, arguably Britain's best two-and-a-half-mile chasing mare after her third in the Mares' Chase at the Cheltenham Festival.

"This is potentially her last season because her owners want to breed from her, so if she shows she's not on song she'll go to the paddocks.

"But at the moment she's in full work and we'll aim her down the mares' route, which is