

Tues 16 Mar  
Champion Hurdle Day

Wed 17 Mar  
Champion Chase Day

Thurs 18 Mar  
World Hurdle Day

Fri 19 Mar  
Gold Cup Day

Triumph Hurdle  
Martin Pipe Conditional Jockeys' Handicap Hurdle

Vincent O'Brien County Hurdle  
Handicap Hurdle

Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle  
Gold Cup  
Grand Annual

Foxhunters'

## Friday 19 March

### Triumph Hurdle

Secant Star was my fancy, but he has encountered problems in his preparation in recent weeks. So much so that Walsh has decided to ride Advisor for Nicholls instead, hence his walk in the market so I'm not confident at all now. Alaivan is tiny and may be a mud lover, and I am not as convinced as Gordon Elliot that Carlito Brigante will stay, so I have no strong view on this race. In fact, I could see a big-priced winner.



Walsh has decided to ride Advisor

### Vincent O'Brien County Hurdle



Arcalis may be a surprise

Arcalis should have been placed in this race last season had he not been ridden from so far off the pace (beaten by a length and a half for fourth, after having just one behind him two out). And it would not surprise me at all if sneaky old Howard Johnson had trained him for this race all season as he knows he needs decent ground, which he looks like getting - and he is 5lbs lower this season. His Festival record catches the eye having won the Supreme Novices' Hurdle, finished fifth in the Champion Hurdle, and fifth and seventh in the County Hurdle (the first time beaten by only two lengths). The truth is, there are worse big-priced outsiders around than him even if he is a ten-year-old.

As for the likeliest winner, I really fancied Noble Prince for the 2m5f handicap hurdle so was surprised when they told us he was running here instead. I do think this is a Grade 1 horse at 2m4f, and they may have wanted to run him on the Friday as he is a good ground horse plus, of course, they won't hang around here over 2m1f. The novices Bellvano and Tito Bustillo are also major players, so they would be my four against the field.

## Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle

I feel confident either Enterprise Park or Tell Massini will win. Tell Massini is the form horse, the trends horse, loves the course, and I have been hearing very good reports about his work and how much he has improved since his last win. The more rain, the better his chance, and I believe rain is planned for Friday.

Enterprise Park's form is not as good, but he is unbeaten and his form is working out well. I also like the way Mullins has trained him and the fact his action suggests better ground will suit him, but that is not a given for Tell Massini, which is why I just prefer the Irish horses especially if Tell Massini and Restless Harry cut each other's throats up front. Fionnegas would worry me more than Shinrock Paddy if he came here, and I am just not sure The Betchworth Kid will stay well enough.



*The Betchworth Kid may not stay well enough*

## Gold Cup



*Cooldine and Imperial Commander have been correctly priced*

With Kauto Star and Denman appearing so dominant for most of the season, punters have been looking to the 'without' markets (however I feel Cooldine and Imperial Commander have been correctly priced in those). There has been a big swelling of support for Tricky Trickster on the preview evening circuit to finish second or third, but the value has now also dried up about him as a consequence. I personally feel that Kauto Star will win by a long way, so will have a look at winning margin bets on the day and fancy Cooldine to finish second.

## Foxhunters'

Trust Fund has to run very well as he was given a rating of 140 for the Grand National, and you can generally run to around 135 and win this race. The winner of the Aintree Fox Hunters' last season is older than ideal at the age of 12, but is lightly-raced for his age and is trained by Richard Barber who has expertly prepared four winners of this race so those factors offset his age for me.

Roulez Cool is my main worry. He has been given a rating of 148 to run off in the Grand National and, if he runs to that, he could be the easiest winner of the week but he is short enough considering he had an injury scare last week, and he has struggled home in two point-to-points this season.

Kilty Storm could be the best of the Irish and be under-rated as Dun Doire wouldn't have been good enough at his peak to win this race, as was running off low marks when winning his big handicaps a few years back.

Baby Run was third last year and respected, but he didn't appear to get home and this looks a better renewal.

## Martin Pipe Conditional Jockeys' Handicap Hurdle

Ashkazar was my fancy, so I wasn't best pleased to see Qaspal win the Imperial Cup so well on Saturday as his penalty gives him a decent chance of squeezing into the race. If that happens, he'll start a hot favourite. The Pipes have done an incredible job to get the handicapper to drop Ashkazar 20lbs this season to a mark of just 136. Maybe the horse has gone at the game, but I suspect not – I think this has been a long-term plan. Pevereil and Meath All Star appeal as best of the rest.



*Ashkazar was my fancy but may be challenged*

## Grand Annual



*French Opera is highly-weighted*

First things first, I have to say I think this is the most competitive Grand Annual I have ever seen. Usually you can just look at the front half-dozen in the betting, but I must have had marks for over half a dozen horses this season. Novices have a great record in this race but there are plenty of them likely to run this time, and their winners have been rated no more than 135 and there are few of them.

Beggars Cap was running well in the race last year until crashing out, and has been training for it all season. Plus, we all know how good Ferdy Murphy is with his handicappers at the Festival. He does need decent ground though, so I hope the forecast for heavy rain on Friday is wrong. Others to interest me are You're The Top, a Henderson novice in a race he is all out to win again, being named in honour of his father. Indeed, I prefer him to the highly-weighted French Opera, especially as I understand Barry Geraghty will ride, the Irish novices Fosters Cross and Jered (especially the former if it's decent ground but he needs to jump better) and Shoreacres, yet another novice and one who took the eye last time out and wasn't far behind the best novice hurdlers last season.