

Tues 16 Mar
Champion Hurdle Day

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Champion Chase Day

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World Hurdle Day

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Gold Cup Day

Supreme Novices' Hurdle

Arkle Trophy

Champion Hurdle

Cross County Handicap Chase

David Nicholson Mares' Hurdle

Tuesday 16 March

Supreme Novices' Hurdle

A sporting bet on Flat Out each-way may be the way to go, rather than take the short odds on Dungguib. I like the fact that Willie Mullins is keen to run him, as he is very strong in the novice hurdle department this season, so he has a good idea of his ability. I also like the fact that he has only had one hurdling start, as horses with two runs or less over hurdles have a superb strike rate in this race, given how few face the starter. He looks like being around half the odds advised at, and we now have the services of Paul Townend rather than Emmet Mullins, which is a positive. His stablemate, Blackstairmountain, has exactly the same profile so I respect his chance as well, especially as Ruby Walsh takes the ride. Of the Brits I can only consider Get Me Out Of Here, as Menorah and Oscar Whisky just don't do it for me.



Flat Out each way may be a better bet than Dungguib



Captain Cee Bee has been under-priced

Arkle Trophy

I am sneakily confident we can land this with Sports Line if Ruby Walsh can just rein back his enthusiasm - I know he will love a fast-run race. I think Captain Cee Bee has been under-priced for a long time, and should be priced similarly to Sizing Europe who I think is more of a danger and becoming the forgotten horse of the race (friendless on the preview evening circuit). However, I believe Somersby is the one to beat as I feel Riverside Theatre is a flat-track horse that may also just lack the class (for me, he'll finish around fourth). As for the rest? I would be very surprised if any were good enough.

William Hill Trophy

I like the two at the front of the market here to give novices a fourth win in the last seven years. How times have changed! Novices previously hadn't won it for over a quarter of a century. He may be favourite, but I do know Alan King feels Bensalem is extremely well handicapped off 143, and has schooled him in a noseband and is expecting to see the 'real Bensalem' turn up now. The one worry I do have about The Package is that Pipe yard have gone incredibly quiet, which does concern me a little. But still, he meets the key trends and is a big player. In fact, all four novices are big players, as Ogee and Theatrical Moment are also ones to watch.



Bensalem is extremely well handicapped

Champion Hurdle



Zaynar needs a longer trip on the likely ground

I can see Punjabi running a blinder given his consistency, the way he travels, and his appreciation of the course. I thought he looked incredibly well in himself in his final prep, and I think back to how well he travelled in last year's race in December. I'm sure he will travel as well this time if the pace is generous, though even that is not certain now... At a preview night Nicholls said he may settle Celestial Halo in with first-time blinkers. If Punjabi doesn't make it, I don't know who will. We could find ourselves having a slower race than anticipated.

Mind you, if Nicholls' words were a bluff about not front running (Henderson was sitting four feet away from him, and he does front run) I could see him getting the run of the race. After all, he only has 11 rivals. If he does front run I could see a Hardy Eustace-type scenario where he leads, then slows up and stacks them up (which would be against Go Native, Starluck, Binocular and Khyber Kim that want to quicken off a fast pace) and then kick on again.

At that same preview I have to say that Henderson's enthusiasm for Binocular was infectious. The impression I formed is that he is back to his very best and, deep down, I do feel the trainer thinks Binocular is his best chance in the race. Zaynar would be the horse most affected by lack of a strong gallop, as he needs a longer trip on the likely ground. I can't have him at all even with the cheek pieces slapped back on for the first time this season.

Go Native has an obvious chance, but is short enough for me given he doesn't have that much in hand over Starluck, who I can't see fully getting up the hill at this level, and Medermit. For most of the season I have felt that Solwhit was the most likely winner, but not any more given his mucus problems over the last week or so. To win a Champion Hurdle off a less than perfect preparation is just too hard.

Khyber Kim has shown so much improvement. However, I just feel he wants it genuinely soft which he is unlikely to get, even though Henderson feels they may over-water for day one. If that was the case, then that would certainly bring him into the mix, and I will be very interested in the race time for the Supreme Novices' Hurdle to better evaluate his chance.

Cross Country Handicap Chase



It looks like L'Ami is the one for the McManus team

Each-way about Sizing Australia looks the best bet after two good runs at the course before the new year. The vibes I'm getting are that L'Ami is the one for the McManus team this year and not Garde Champetre, but the latter is the horse with a turn of foot and that is what wins these races so I still feel he is the most likely victor. I really can't fancy anything else.

David Nicholson Mares' Hurdle

The market over the last 2-3 days has been more in favour of Voler La Vedette than Quevega following rumours that the latter worked like a drain recently, and she has lost her position as antepost favourite. If Quevega is at her best I think she will outstay her main rival. If not, and if Voler La Vedette finds this trip and hill a little too much, I don't think No One Tells Me is out of this.

Another I would give a mention to is last year's third Aura About You. She has not run for a long time, but I gather has been pleasing Paul Nolan at home so she could be the best of the 25/1+ shots. I have also been hearing good things about Sway, but she is only a four-year-old.



The market has been favouring Voler La Vedette over Quevega