

## **CHELTENHAM PERSPECTIVE 2022**

### **TUESDAY**

#### **Supreme Novices' Hurdle**

The winner Constitution Hill produced one of the best performances seen in this type of race for many a year and on paper his performance would have been good enough to have won the Champion Hurdle itself although I'm sure that's where we will see him heading next year. The clash with reigning champion Honeysuckle will be something to see but we may not have to wait that long as there is talk of the clash happening at Punchestown this year. Of those that trailed in his wake none would look to have a hope of ever reversing the form and I'm sure that the likes of Jonbon and Kilcruit will be sent chasing next year. Dysart Dynamo a faller at the third last is another who ought to be heading down the chase route next year although he'll need to settle better to fulfil his true potential.

#### **Arkle**

No superstars in this event but the winner Edwardstone ran a thoroughly likeable race although there must be some question marks as to whether he can make the step up to the next level and win a Champion Chase next year. His sound jumping will stand him in good stead but he's not getting any younger as he won this as an 8yo and that's older than the usual winners of this event. Given that statement it's not that easy to rate those that finished behind highly in the context of the race although Gabynako and Riviere D'Etel who may go to Punchestown next look a couple that could well although the latter of that pair would be far better suited by going right-handed due to her tendency to jump that way.

#### **Ultima Handicap Chase**

A good renewal of the first handicap of the Festival and one that featured a maximum field of 24 and seven last-time out winners although not one of that type finished in the top five. Despite the size of the field it wasn't run at an end-to-end gallop and that makes the performance of the winner Corach Rambler all the more meritorious. Taking time to warm to his task he displayed some of his quirky side (or is it still inexperience) as he didn't look to be travelling at all in the early part of the race (a trait he has exhibited before) but as he warmed to his task he sliced through the field (still had plenty to do three out). In time he looks as though he could emulate the stable's Grand National winner One For Arthur and go down that same route. The second Gericault Roque lost no caste in defeat and having shown his quality in other staying handicaps really deserves to win one and looks a candidate for something over the big Aintree fences in time plus a Welsh/Midlands Grand National. Tea Clipper (4<sup>th</sup>) is another to take out of the race having travelled well for much of the

race coming in off the back of a break and a wind operation. Our Power was another to shape well and looks a well-handicapped type who would be interesting for the 3m handicap chase at Aintree on Grand National Day. That race would also look suitable for Tea Clipper in the future.

### **Champion Hurdle**

Six if the ten runners came into this on the back of a win with the reigning champion and unbeaten mare maintaining her dominance in the is division and we now await her clash with Constitution Hill the Supreme winner. This was her third Festival success in all and despite the fact that the race unfolded perfectly for her she never traded above Evens in-running and quickened clear to win by 3½L in fairly easy fashion beating another former winner and another mare in Epatante. It's hard to see any of this group ever being good enough to beat her if she's in this type of form so it was good to see a new threat emerge. Of those that finished behind it may well be an idea to give the third Zanahiyr a try over further especially with some headgear on to sharpen him up as he kept on well here but was no match for the two mares' who were both of course receiving the mares' allowance.

### **Mares' Hurdle**

The expected Irish domination of this race didn't quite develop as expected with Marie's Rock becoming just the third GB-trained winner of this race although the five that followed her home were all trained across the Irish Sea. Marie's Rock is just really starting to fulfil her promise and demonstrated here what a good turn of foot that she has although she did avoid some of the mishaps that happened to others throughout the race. The fact that she could win in the manner that she did off such a slow gallop suggests that she has more to come although she did display a slightly awkward head carriage at the business end. Mrs Milner (3<sup>rd</sup>) bidding for a second Festival win having taken the Pertemps the year before may well have found this test a little sharp off the back of a four-month break. One of the real sufferers in the melee at the second last which saw Telmesomethinggirl brought down she rallied really well in the straight and finishing off the race with running left in her; kept fresh for the spring it won't be a surprise to see her back over further next time and returning to the winners enclosure.

### **Boodles Handicap Hurdle**

The Irish team have now won the last five renewals and mounted a very strong defence this time around and ended up with a 1-2-4. The second Gaelic Warrior was probably one of the most talked about or hyped horses that ran at the Festival with most amateur handicappers thinking that the official assessor had made a "rick" in only giving the Mullins contender a mark of 129 based on his very limited French form. In the end it wasn't lack of ability that saw him defeated by a short-head but the

lack of experience having travelled very well (traded as low as 1.22). There's no doubt on this evidence that he's a talented horse and he may well be capable of winning outside handicap company although if there was a minor quibble it was the fact that he did jump out to his right and that he may be seen to better effect going the other way around. That's not to decry the performance of the winner Brazil at all who started his career on the Flat (brother to St Leger winner Capri) and it was his greater experience and trackcraft that enabled him to win and despite others holding more long-term interest his performance contains some merit.

There were a whole host of promising performances in behind the 1-2 with the 4<sup>th</sup> being the first one that I would highlight to hold plenty of interest for the future. The race didn't really go ideally and he got a little wound up before the start and consequently ended up racing wider than ideal but still staying on well at the end. He also started life on the Flat and there are more wins in him. Too Friendly from the Skelton barn looked to have been laid out for this and that particular yard are very good at training to target a race. The plan of keeping him fresh for this didn't quite come off here and he was held up well of the pace (typical Harry Skelton ride) and it could be argued that he was given a little too much to do. Another one who was useful on the Flat has plenty of scope over hurdles and could well be seen in a better light on a flatter track. Further down the field Saint Segal caught the eye having travelled very strongly and probably over-raced with his finishing position (10<sup>th</sup>) far from a true reflection of how well he shaped in the contest. Swinging away coming to two out his earlier exertions told as they turned for home but this was just his fourth run ever and there is more to come from this one who certainly has an engine that can be used once he learns to settle.

### **NH Chase**

The almost 4-miler as it's now known was rather unusual as it contained not one English-trained horse with the sextet made up of four from Ireland and two from Wales with the Irish recording a 1-2-3. The race despite the small field may well have produced another good winner as it did the previous year in the shape of Galvin and it's not hard to see this year's winner Stattler going on to better things in the future despite beating what ultimately turned out to be a weak field here. Given the turn of foot he showed to put the race to bed by 8L there could well be a case to be made for bringing Stattler back to shorter trips and like Galvin give him a crack at the Gold Cup although the Grand National in future year's would be a more likely target. Before that he ought to be given a crack at the better novices at Punchestown and that will give us a better idea of the merits of his win here.

### **WEDNESDAY**

#### **Ballymore Novices' Hurdle**

Not a deep contest by race standards and a couple failed to handle the conditions, with the result being a clean sweep for Ireland. The early pace was a slow, only increasing after the fourth. The winner Sir Gerhard won in impressive fashion but has since been beaten at Punchestown over 2m where it looked as though this race may have left it's mark to some extent although he didn't get the clearest run through that race despite the small field. Judged on this display he still has plenty of potential for the future and I'd expect him to be seen to good effect over fences next year with the hurdling division starting to look strong again. This form has been given some credence by the win of the second Three Stripe Life at Aintree (2m4f) and he's another who looks a smart chasing prospect for next year. At this stage, the ground wasn't too bad but was starting to get worse and more and more testing throughout the day.

### **Brown Advisory Novices' Chase**

This race - formerly the RSA - has thrown up Gold Cup winners Denman, Bobs Worth and Lord Windermere this century. This latest running lost a chunk of its depth as leading Irish novices Galopin Des Champs and Bob Olinger opted for the Turners, and Bravemansgame was a late ground-related withdrawal, but the performance of the winner was well up to scratch for the race. The form of the race has been well franked subsequently and although L'Homme Presse the winner has been beaten by the second here Ahoy Senor since on this day his performance was worthy of one who could well win again at a high level and I'd have thought that he would be worthy of a place in the King George at Kempton. The second Ahoy Senor is a raw but very talented type who will continue on the up as he proved when winning at Aintree especially if his jumping improves as he gains experience. Perhaps the Betfair Chase would be the race for him to start in next season, though that would be in at the deep end, plenty of other options for a really exciting young chaser. Both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> – Capodanno and Dusart have won since underlining what a strong running of this event this was. The former who looks a real stayer could be one for the Grand National over the next few years and the 5<sup>th</sup> having won subsequently at Ayr in a good-quality novice handicap chase would look ideal for something like the Ladbrokes Trophy next season.

### **Coral Cup Handicap Hurdle**

A far from conventional running of this race and so mud-splattered were most of the field I did have trouble identifying who was who! Commander Of Fleet was the surprise 50-1 winner although in amongst his failures he does have some strong handicap form and in what was a fine weight-carrying performance in tough conditions. Fastorslow was the one to take out of the race for me; in a first-time tongue strap but minus the hood this time, produced a career best, always well placed and getting to the front late only to succumb to the winner's rally. He's still

unexposed and is bound to have a say in other good handicaps, with a return to chasing (won his only start over fences in France in 2019/20) presumably also on the agenda at some point. Of the others 4<sup>th</sup> home Camprond who had been absent since finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in the Greatwood Hurdle here in November ran really well although better ground will suit him ideally he's one to watch in handicaps in the future.

### **Queen Mother Champion Chase**

A race that had looked to be a vintage renewal before the start fell apart rather quickly and became something of an anti-climax in the end. Shishkin was beaten early in the race and Chacun Pir Soi unseated at the 5<sup>th</sup> last. That left Energumene to win easily by over 8L and look a very good horse although he was left with an easier task than it looked on paper. Of course he since won again at Punchestown once again beating Chacun Pour Soi and looking ever inch an elite 2m chaser. He's yet to run a bad race, looks tactical versatile and will be hard to beat at this trip over the next few years.

### **Glenfarclas Cross Country Chase**

The story of this race was would Tiger Roll gain his 6<sup>th</sup> Festival victory and the answer was no but he was carried out on his shield and into retirement having lost out in an epic battle by his classy stablemate Delta Work a winner of the Pertemps Final here in 2018, hadn't raced outside of Grade 1 company since November of the same year, including finishing fifth in the 2020 Gold Cup, and this was his cross country debut. Without the cheekpieces he was tried in last time, he enjoyed this different test and just denied his stablemate in a driving finish. Delta Work has since finished a very creditable 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Grand National completing an Irish 1-2-3 and he probably would have gone even closer if he has travelled through the early stages of that race a little better a big mid-race move costing him the energy he would need at the end of the stamina sapping event. He'll be likely to be back for a crack at both these events next year.

Nothing else in the race really caught the eye in a race where the Big 2 pulled 21L clear of the third home Plan Of Attack.

### **Johnny Henderson Grand Annual Handicap Chase**

As is traditionally the case, a fiercely competitive handicap run at a strong gallop, although few got involved in what were by now very, very testing conditions. Global Citizen looked a high-class novice two years ago, winning the Grade 2 Wayward Lad, but failed to go on after finishing fourth in the 2020 Arkle and had not run over fences since pulling up in the Desert Orchid in December of that year. He relished this return to chasing and it will be interesting to see him in that sphere next season.

Of those that finished behind Andy Dufresne looks the sort who can win a handicap of this sort (has since fallen in a Grade 1 at Punchestown) and it wouldn't surprise to see him back next year. Il Ridoto shaped much better than the distance beaten suggests and will be something to bet on when getting much more of an emphasis on speed, patently not lasting out on testing ground the last 2 starts; he'll be better with another year on his back also (only a 5yo here).

### **Weatherbys Champion Bumper**

Run in very testing conditions the Irish once more dominated the bumper with the first four home and a Mullins 1-3-4. Facile Vega winning by just over 3L confirming his position as the No1 from the stable (had a tea, of seven), looks a really good prospect for hurdling next year and has since followed up and confirmed the form at Punchestown.

Of the others the first GB horse home Authorised Speed will be one to note over hurdles next year whilst third James's Gate and Redemption Day who got a lot closer to Facile Vega at Punchestown also look to have bright futures over timber.

### **THURSDAY**

#### **Turners Novices' Chase**

An anti-climax to an anti-climax, as the smallest Festival field in decades - and one completely free of British representation - failed to produce the thrilling division-deciding match that might well have been able to save it, a lacklustre Bob Olinger having no answer to his big rival when Galopin des Champs stood so far off the last he knuckled over on landing, handing it to a most fortunate winner.

Bob Olinger pulled up at Punchestown since looks one who we might see back over hurdles next year whereas Galopin Des Champs made amends at that meeting winning a small-field Grade 1 by 18L and his future remains very bright with his trainer having a variety of options.

#### **Pertemps Network Final Handicap Hurdle**

The sole handicap hurdle won by the GB team, taking this race for the first time since 2015 via Third Wind who went three places better than he had in 2020; a campaign geared around a return for this in 2023 must surely be tempting. Alaphilippe ne of the least exposed, ran a cracker in first-time tongue strap, confirming all the promise of his eye-catching run (when 2 places behind the winner) in the Warwick qualifier 9 weeks earlier as he went down fighting in a tight finish; he's not in the first flush of youth but on the plus side has very few miles on the clock and chasing does strike as

an appealing option, certainly built/bred for the job and likely to be able to test his stamina all the more over fences.

Winter Fog (4<sup>th</sup>) is still totally unexposed for this sort of event and he'll be placed to win a good handicap of two of this ilk in the future.

### **Ryanair Chase**

The most one-sided race of the Festival in terms of betting and it panned out that way in the event, too, with Allaho repeating his 2021 win with another imperious front-running display, his performance a near-identical one both in style and substance to twelve months earlier; won this by 14L. Since this he's followed up with a stellar display in the Punchestown Gold Cup beating a very strong field and confirming that he stays 3m – winning this by the same distance that he won at Cheltenham. He'll presumably be kept apart from A Plus Tard (same owner) and Galopin des Champs (same trainer) in the short term and may well be aimed at the Ryanair Chase again next spring although the King George at Kempton over Christmas must also prove a tempting target.

### **Paddy Power Stayers' Hurdle**

The staying hurdle category has seen a number of outstanding performers this century in Baracouda, Inglis Drever, Big Buck's and Thistlecrack but, while nothing has dominated the division this season, all the recognised trial winners participated and the form is broadly on a par with recent years. With the winner getting the run of it in front, the time was 0.84sec slower than the Pertemps.

Flooring Porter became the first horse to complete consecutive wins in the race since Big Buck's and just as in his previous win he was allowed to dictate under a clever ride from Danny Mullins to defeat his old rival Klassical Dream (5<sup>th</sup>). He's since finished second to Pertemps disappointment Sire Du Berlais in the 3m Liverpool Hurdle with Stayers' Hurdle second further behind this time around. He's clearly a smart performer when he's allowed to go from the front and behaves himself at the start; he'll surely return for another crack at this race next year.

Klassical Dream didn't need to be at his best to take the Punchestown version of this race next time out and he'll stay over hurdles next year so we can expect more clashes with Flooring Porter.

Paisley Park the winner of this in 2019, came into the race on the back of his third win in the Cleeve Hurdle. He started much better than last time and ran a typical race, getting tapped for toe before sticking on stoutly. A stronger overall gallop would have suited.

Thyme Hill would probably have been better served by more of an end-to-end gallop but he ran just about as well as he ever has done to reverse December's Long Walk form with Champ. After his Aintree effort he may well be sent over fences next year (has a chasing pedigree) and will be of interest if he goes down that route.

### **Craft Irish Whiskey Co Plate Handicap Chase**

Plenty of non-runners (seven in total), so a slightly smaller field than usual, but still highly competitive and the form looks solid, with two regulars from the big C&D handicaps throughout the season split by a progressive novice with Graded race aspirations. Typically for this race it proved hard to make ground from off the pace and the winner Coole Cody made nearly all.

Five next time out winners have come out of the race so far with Slate House looking to have regained his form over shorter distances and The Glancing Queen looking as though she'll be interesting in mares' events especially over the next few seasons.

### **Ryanair Mares' Novices' Hurdle**

The first British-trained winner of this race (first six runnings went to Irish stables), with the two market leaders disappointing to varying degrees.

The winner Love Envoi has quickly developed into a smart mare and extended her unbeaten record to six with her best effort yet under her penalty, racing wide for much of the way but responding well to pressure in the straight. She won't mind the return to further and looks an obvious candidate to return in 12 months' time for the Mares' Hurdle. Her subsequent effort at Punchestown was no disgrace and despite losing her unbeaten record she's still a mare to follow next season.

Ahorsewithnoname a bumper and dual Flat winner, ran well in the face of a stiff task. There'll be easier opportunities for her over hurdles (still a maiden), she'll be suited by further and she'll also be of interest in handicaps back on the Flat and has already won twice in that sphere since this outing – given her trainers record in the Ascot Stakes at Royal Ascot that looks the obvious target for her next. She will though be higher in the weights there (mark probably in the 90's) and it's a handicap that the Irish have dominated of late.

Grangee a triple bumper winner who ran well in a Grade 1 over hurdles in December, showed herself none-the-worse for a fall last time with a solid effort back in trip. She fared the best of the yard's six runners and will be worth a try over 2m4f although she will have to bounce back from two poor runs at Fairyhouse and Punchestown since.

Party Central a Listed winner on the Flat and over hurdles, looked to have decent claims but didn't find as much as seemed likely in the closing stages back up in



grade. Since a winner at Punchestown in a Listed affair she once again idled when clear and her finishing efforts are something to keep in mind if you are investing at short prices.

### **Fulke Walwyn Kim Muir Challenge Cup Amateur Jockeys' Handicap Chase**

A Festival handicap that probably won't live all that long in the memories of most, the SP's of 4 of the first 5 home helping to tell the story of a race in which the majority of the unexposed runners failed to show their true colours, that the same big-priced quartet were essentially in a line at the front as they set out on their second circuit also indicative of how the race developed tactically with what was effectively a stop-start gallop leaving none of those ridden further back able to land a blow.

Chambard the winner has been in excellent form all year but he was far from a typical winner of this race (the first double-figure age winner since 2015). You couldn't rule him out in races of this type but he could be vulnerable off higher marks.

Mister Coffey the second was spoken of as a National type but that "project" may now be on hold due to the fact he disappointed over those fences in the Topham and his trainer (Nicky Henderson) has an abysmal record in the Aintree showpiece.

Venetia Williams the trainer of the winner also saddled the third capping what was a very good Festival for the yard and Didero Vallis took advantage of what looked to be a very good mark and was pulled up at Aintree when the stable just wasn't in the same form.

Nothing else in the race really impressed with their efforts and the form since has hardly proved to be of a strong variety.

## **FRIDAY**

### **JCB Triumph Hurdle**

A renewal that looked up to scratch with Vauban sent off as favourite to confirm the promise of his win in the Spring Juvenile and confirm the form with Fil Dor and Icare Allen from that Leopardstown Grade 1 heat. The first five home were all Irish-trained underlining their dominance in this division. Vauban has since won again at Punchestown gain defeating Fil Dor by 4L this time although he will face a tougher task against his elders next year where the likes of Constitution Hill and Honeysuckle lie in wait.

Fil Dor must be sick of seeing the backside of Vauban and he reportedly goes chasing next year (likely to be a leading Arkle candidate) – he certainly has plenty of size and scope about him for a chasing campaign.

Pied Piper acquitted himself well, plenty to like about the way he's taken to hurdling, like the winner having just his third start at this discipline, physically the type who should hold his own in open company next season. He's since shown that he can hold his own in good company when some would say that he was unjustly demoted at Aintree when "beating" Knight Salute who was back in 9<sup>th</sup> here.

Best of the GB-trained runners was Porticello (the betting suggested he would) – a wide-margin winner on heavy ground at Haydock, he'd have preferred much softer going and was unable to hold his pitch when things got serious from the second-last. He's still a lovely prospect who looks ready for a step up in trip and may well be one to follow next year in top-class handicaps.

### **McCoy Contractors County Handicap Hurdle**

A cracking edition of the County Hurdle dominated by unexposed improvers and sure to make for strong form, State Man becoming the shortest-priced winning favourite since Blowing Wind in 1998 and his nearest pursuers all handicappers to be interested in near to hand; the pace was sound, making for a fair and pretty clean race.

State Man was the Mullins guessing game of the Festival as he had him entered in just about everything from the FA Cup to the Eurovision Song Contest but this was the chosen race and this totally unexposed type didn't disappoint. He showed no signs of inexperience (it would have been easy to do so) when scoring from a mark of 141 (he won't be seeing that mark again) on his handicap debut. Two handicap winners at last year's festival went on to Grade 1 novice success at Punchestown and he'll be given the chance to do the same in the Champion Novice (Won that by 7L). He's arguably the best prospect bar the outstanding Constitution Hill among the 2021/22 class of novices and a clash between the two would be fascinating.

Runner-up First Street lost nothing in defeat showing that the Betfair Hurdle was another piece of very strong handicap form and he'll be worth noting for those types of races next season.

### **Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle**

A race first run in 2005 and the roll call includes subsequent Gold Cup heroes Bobs Worth and Minella Indo, Stayers' Hurdle winner Penhill, as well as Grade 1 winners Black Jack Ketchum, At Fishers Cross and Unowhatimeanharry. This was competitive on paper featuring 12 last-time out winners.

The Nice Guy upped in trip for this contest kept his unbeaten record intact and has since won again at Punchestown to underline the strength of this form and how well suited he is by a test of stamina. He's reportedly set to go chasing next year although

it wouldn't take much progress to see him as a Stayers' Hurdle candidate next year should connections have a change of mind and keep him over hurdles.

Minella Cocooner already a Grade 1 winner at the Dublin Racing Festival lost nothing in defeat here having forced a strong gallop (he is a little headstrong at times though). Subsequently, second to The Nice Guy at Punchestown where he didn't look too comfortable going right-handed everything points to him being a better chaser next year when he may well be clashing with The Nice Guy again.

Of the others one of the most taking performances came from 4<sup>th</sup> Ballygrifincottage who had won on heavy ground when last seen and although these conditions may have been a little quick for him was the first of the GB contingent home. He can win again over hurdles before he embarks on a chasing career, being a triple point winner who is bred to jump fences.

Ramillies is another who looks every inch a chaser and he shaped better than his finishing position but not for the first time looked a rather weak finisher. He may do better with another summer to strengthen up although he will need to jump fences better than hurdles to really fulfil his obvious potential.

Hillcrest looked to have decent claims on his wide-margin Grade 2 win (admittedly in an uncompetitive event) in deep ground at Haydock last time but he ran no sort of race on this drying surface, jumping with little fluency and one of the first beaten. He's a strapping sort who remains a fine prospect for chasing next season, though.

### **Boodles Cheltenham Gold Cup**

A representative field for the Cheltenham Gold Cup, lacking really only the winner of the Irish Gold Cup Conflated, and it looked an open contest beforehand, with not a lot to choose between the pick of the field on their best form, a close contest continuing to look on the cards for much of the way, the pace ordinary on the first circuit, plenty still with a chance and going okay 3 out, the winner in a bit of a pocket as last season's winner Minella Indo kicked for home, before he picked up in the straight and stormed up the run-in in remarkable fashion, the winning margin the widest in the race since Master Oats scored by the same distance in the mud in 1995, the winner's superiority over the second somewhat exaggerated, his stable companion finishing rather tamely, though clearly A Plus Tard deserves his place at the head of the staying chasing pecking order. Six of the last seven Gold Cups have now gone to Ireland and this was another Gold Cup 1-2 for Henry De Bromhead.

Second last year to Minella Indo the tables were turned this time in no uncertain terms with the winning margin being 15L with A Plus Tard sprinting away up the hill putting his narrow Savills Chase defeat behind him. He looks sure to follow the same

route as he took last year as he will bid to defend his crown become another back-to-back winner.

Last year's winner Minella Indo race his best race of the year and it has to be said that he does come alive at the Cheltenham Festival where his record now reads 1212. That maybe a fact worth remembering next year as he will enter next season on a down note after being pulled up at Punchestown when opposing a lot of the rivals from this race but running a deplorable race. He has struggled with consistency in the past but is a high-class operator on his day.

Along with Minella Indo all of those to run subsequently have been beaten showing what a tough gig the Gold Cup is. Third Protektorat would be the pick of the challengers were he to come back next year for a crack at another Gold Cup after all he will only be eight then and has proved his stamina – his run behind Clan Des Obeaux disappointing though it was showed how much the Gold Cup run had taken out of him and he'll always be best fresh.

As a side note with A Plus Tard winning the Gold Cup in this manner and Allaho the Ryanair winner proving he stays 3m with a devastating Punchestown Gold Cup win in the same ownership (Cheveley Park) it will be interesting to see which path they both take next year. I'd say that they will be kept apart and go for the same targets although Allaho looks made for a crack at the King George at Kempton over Christmas.

### **St James's Palace Festival Challenge Cup Open Hunters' Chase**

A decent renewal of the one of the showpiece events of the Hunter Chase season and Billaway who went close last year and the year before finally got his head in front. Typically he hit the odd flat spot in races and ran in snatches with the odd mistake thrown in but then that's him. He's clearly smart in this sphere and went onto add the Champion Hunter Chase at Punchestown next time out beating the three-years younger Vaucelet (who then won next time out).

The horse he beat at Punchestown is a stablemate of the horse he defeated in this race at Cheltenham Winged Leader and with that pair being younger he's bound to be seeing them again next year when I'm sure he'll be back to defend his crown.

### **Mrs Paddy Power Mares' Chase**

A couple of the better fancied mares ran below market expectations in what was the second running of this Grade 2 event, but there was still an exciting finish although it was lacking the quality of the initial contest.

Elimay, second in this last year battled to a win in this year's contest and although she was a long way below her best she did show a good attitude in winning and

holding off Pink Legend who probably ran a career best. She didn't get anywhere near this form when beaten at Punchestown subsequently and Scarlet And Dove reversed the form from this race but she should continue to be a force to be reckoned with in this grade.

Scarlet And Dove beaten here is clearly useful as shown at Punchestown and she would look interesting in a big-field handicap perhaps something like the Galway plate given how well she goes on decent ground.

Concertista was the disappointment of the race especially as she has a fine record at this meeting as a hurdler. However, her jumping wasn't up to scratch against some more experienced rivals and she made no significant impression. It remains early days for her as a chaser and she should get more fluent with time.

### **Martin Pipe Conditional Jockeys' Handicap Hurdle**

One of the biggest fields of the week (it was a rough race) with the win of Banbridge completing a clean sweep on the day for the Irish runners. The winner might not quite be in the class of previous Irish winners such as last year's winner Galopin Des Champs but he still turned in a solid performance to hold off an improving GB runner in a race that had echoes of the previous year's contest. It should be noted that his trainer Joseph O'Brien was training his second winner of this race. His subsequent run at Aintree was disappointing (ran flat) but I suspect that came a little bit quick after this major effort.

Cobblers Dream (2<sup>nd</sup>), Hollow Games (3<sup>rd</sup>) and Freedom To Dream (4<sup>th</sup>) have all run below this level of form since but it wouldn't be surprising to see that trio doing far better over fences next season.

5<sup>th</sup> home Party Business followed up at Aintree to give this form some credence and as usual it will be a race worth following next season with He's A Hardy Bloke one I particularly like for big handicap hurdles next year – little went right for him here and two subsequent runs have shown him to be capable in this type of race.