

The Cheltenham Festival

11th - 14th March 2025



2025 CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL PREVIEW

A comprehensive preview with expert contributions from:

- **Steve Lewis Hamilton** - Professional backer
- **Donn McClean** - Racing writer and presenter

Steve (SLH) assesses the home challenge whilst Donn (DMC) analyses the Irish contingent. Prices correct at the time of writing.

- **Mike Cattermole**
- **Richard Hoiles**

Leading racing commentators provide their on-course insight and betting plans

- **Ten year trends**

The telling stats from Paul O'Hara

- **Exclusive horses to follow**

Direct from a variety of Lambourn trainers

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The current going report for both the Old (Tuesday & Wednesday) and New (Thursday & Friday) courses is Good to Soft whilst the Cross Country is Good to Soft (Soft in places). Selective watering to maintain commenced on Thursday 6th.

Dry and cooler outlook from Tuesday onwards with afternoon highs around 8c and overnight temperatures hovering around zero.

Tuesday 11th

1.20 Supreme Novices' Hurdle (Grade 1) 4yo+ 2m¹/₂f

SLH: As the betting market indicates the level of form achieved by the Irish horses is at a higher level to that of the home trained runners. Fergal O'Brien trained Tripoli Flyer's success at Kempton at the end of February makes him my choice of the British horses.

That was a step up on the form he had shown for his two previous hurdle successes, and if connections decide to run him here (Aintree is an alternative) - then he should go well.

However, there are also a couple of notes of caution to consider. His hurdling technique will need to improve - he still wasn't fluent at a number of hurdles at Kempton, and I think more worryingly the vet reported after the race that the horse had bled from the nose. Not exactly cast iron credentials to have going to Cheltenham!

DMC: Kopek Des Bordes did remarkably well to win his maiden hurdle at Leopardstown over Christmas, given how poorly he jumped. There was always a chance that, if Willie Mullins' horse managed to introduce more fluency into his jumping, he could take a significant step forward, and he did exactly that when he won the Grade 1 Tattersalls Ireland Novice Hurdle at the Dublin Racing Festival. He has a huge engine, and he is a deserving favourite for the opening race of the week.

William Munny is on an upward trajectory too. Barry Connell's horse was a high-class bumper contender last season, and he looked very good in winning a Listed novices' hurdle at Punchestown last time. He goes into the race on a high.

Workahead is a player. Barry Maloney's horse beat William Munny by seven lengths when he won his maiden hurdle at Leopardstown over Christmas. He is another progressive individual, and he represents the combination of Henry de Bromhead and Rachael Blackmore, who teamed up to win the festival curtain-raiser last year with Slade Steel.

As is Romeo Coolio; Gordon Elliott's horse was hugely impressive in winning the Grade 1 Future Champions Novice Hurdle at Leopardstown's Christmas Festival. He is a really good jumper of hurdles for a novice, and he proved that he could operate at Cheltenham when he put up a huge performance in finishing second in the Champion Bumper last year. He could be the value of the race.

2.00 Arkle Novices' Chase (Grade 1) 5yo+ 1m7f

SLH: I was a slightly underwhelmed with the performance of L'Eau Du Sud when beating Rubaud on his latest start at Warwick. After looking as if he would win unchallenged turning for home, he had to be ridden out after jumping the last. Granted, Rubaud has subsequently gone on to win the Grade 2 Pendil Chase at Kempton, but I do think that was a weak race for the level.

I think Springwell Bay displayed a similar level of form to L'Eau Du Sud when improving to win a handicap at Cheltenham on New Year's Day, although he now looks most likely to run later in the week.

Jango Baie also comes into the mix having beaten Springwell Bay at Cheltenham in December. However, that was over a longer trip and I can't see that Jango Baie will improve for dropping back to two miles here. So although L'Eau Du Sud remains the pick of the British horses, I do feel he is vulnerable.

DMC: Majborough is one of the most exciting young National Hunt horses in training. JP McManus' horse had the class to win the Triumph Hurdle last season, despite the fact that trainer Willie Mullins always thought that it was as a chaser that he would make his mark.

He has started to make that mark already. He was very good in winning his beginners' chase at Fairyhouse in December, and he was even better when he won the Irish Arkle at Leopardstown's Dublin Racing Festival in February, at the end of which rider Mark Walsh said that he thought he had plenty of energy left. There is no knowing how good he could be. He has pace and he has class and he is only five. He could get further in time, he could be a Gold Cup horse in the long term but, in the short term, he is the most likely winner of the Arkle by some way.

3.20 Mares' Hurdle (Grade 1) 4yo+ 2m3f

SLH: Golden Ace and Take No Chances are the best of the home trained runners. Golden Ace ran at least to her very best when winning the Kingwell Hurdle over two miles at Wincanton on her latest start. She got outpaced turning for home in that race, coming under pressure from her jockey, before staying on well to beat Burdett Road.

I think that the step up in trip here, especially if the ground isn't testing, will suit her well and she could progress further. Take No Chances form has also been progressive and she is a very likable mare. Of the pair, I prefer Golden Ace and I do expect big performances from both of these mares.

4.00 Champion Hurdle (Grade 1) 4yo+ 2m

SLH: A back to his best Constitution Hill would be extremely hard to beat. That best, in my opinion was in the 2022/23 season, when his four victories included a very impressive win in this race. It is quite possible that a repeat of the bare level of form he has shown in both of his wins this season will be good enough for him to regain the hurdling crown. However, with Brighterdaysahead now looking likely to run here, Constitution Hill's task has become a lot harder. At very short odds, he makes little appeal.

I do think that Burdett Road will run well. His latest effort behind Golden Ace was sound, and I think that Cheltenham will be much more suitable to him than the sharp Wincanton track was on that latest start. He needs to improve again, although not by a huge amount. If at least eight go to post, then I think Burdett Road each way at big odds is a viable option.



Burdett Road

DMC: It is brilliant that Gordon Elliott and Gigginstown House decided to allow Brighterdaysahead run in the Champion Hurdle, not in the Mares' Hurdle. Her presence makes the Champion Hurdle one of the most intriguing races of the season.

Constitution Hill is top class, obviously. It's a question of (a) how far below his brilliant best is he going to be and (b) how far is he going to be able to get away with. The answer to (b) may not, not very far at all, especially with Brighterdaysahead in the line-up.

She could be very good indeed. She has won her two bumpers and seven of her eight races over hurdles. Winner of the Morgiana Hurdle at Punchestown in November, when she got the better of State Man, she was brilliant at Leopardstown at Christmas, she went fast early on in the slipstream of her stable companion King Of Kingsfield and, when she moved to the front at the second last flight, she kept going. She clocked serious fractions and she won by 30 lengths. She is a massive player in the Champion Hurdle picture.

BEST VALUE OF DAY 1:

SLH: Burdett Road 33/1 E/W

DMC: Romeo Coolio (Supreme Novices' Hurdle)

Wednesday 15th March

1.20 Turner's Novices' Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo+) 2m5f

SLH: The New Lion is near or at the head of the market and is one of the big home trained hopes of the week. His Grade 1 victory in the Challow at Newbury was certainly impressive and he falls into the "could be anything" category.

However, according to my calculations, a strict reading of the form doesn't put him ahead of either Six Mile Bridge or Potters Charm. This pair ran against each other here on trials day at the end of January. Potters Charm was strongly fancied at very short odds to win that race, but in my view didn't give his running and finished a disappointing second behind Six Mile Bridge. If connections are able to get Potters Charm back to his best, then he would have every chance of reversing that form with Six Mile Bridge on today's better terms.

Also taking into account a strong Irish challenge, backing The New Lion at the current short odds makes little appeal.

DMC: Final Demand is a worthy favourite for the Turners Novices' Hurdle. Winner of his only point-to-point, Willie Mullins' horse was impressive in winning his maiden hurdle on his hurdling bow at Limerick's Christmas Festival. He built on that last time at Leopardstown in the Grade 1 Nathaniel Lacy Hurdle, when he came clear of his rivals fairly readily and won by 12 lengths. He will be dropping down in trip slightly for the Turners', but he does not lack pace.

The Yellow Clay is also a big player. Bred by his owners Bective Stud, Gordon Elliott's horse did well to win the Grade 2 Navan Novice Hurdle in early December, quickening up well off a sedate pace, and he improved on that last time when he ran out an impressive winner of the Grade 1 Lawlor's of Naas Hurdle, a race that has been won in the past by Turners winners Envoi Allen and Bob Olinger.

2.00 Brown Advisory Novices' Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 3m½f

SLH: The British trained horses once again look up against it here. A number of them also have other entries, and at the time of writing it isn't certain who will run where.

At big odds Joe Tizzard's The Changing Man is worth considering. His progress had been in handicaps until his latest start, when he won the Grade 2 Reynoldstown at Ascot. He stays well and is effective on all types of ground. I doubt he will be good enough to win, but will be plugging on at the finish. He could turn out to be the best of the Brits.

DMC: You can see why the two Willie Mullins horses Ballyburn and Dancing City dominate the market for the Brown Advisory Chase. Ballyburn took all before him last season as a novice hurdler, including the Turners' Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival. He was beaten by Sir Gino in the Wayward Lad Chase at Kempton at Christmas, but he bounced back last time when he won the Ladbrokes Novice Chase at Leopardstown. If he has a weakness, it is that he can race keenly, so he will need to settle if he is going to see out this extended three-mile trip. He is a point-to-point winner, but he has never been beyond two miles and five and a half furlongs under Rules.

Dancing City is rock solid. A dual Grade 1 winner over three miles over hurdles last season, he is two for two this season over fences, and there is no question about his stamina.



Better Days Ahead

There is no question about Better Days Ahead's stamina either, and he could be the value of the race. Gordon Elliott's horse stayed on strongly at last year's Cheltenham Festival to win the Martin Pipe Hurdle, a race that has been a springboard for many horses who go on to be top-class staying chasers. He has improved with each run over fences this season, and he probably won

the Grade 2 Ten Up Chase at Navan last time with more in hand than the bare winning margin. He should have a faster pace and a greater test of stamina here, and he will be back at Cheltenham, and they are all positives.

4.00 Queen Mother Champion Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 1m7f

SLH: At last, a race where a home trained horse actually sets the form standard in the shape of the high class Jonbon. It is impossible to pick holes in this horse, with his latest Ascot success proving that he is at least as good, if not better than ever. He will be at short odds to deliver but deserves to be so. Let's hope all goes smoothly for him and he can put a winner on the board for the Brits.

DMC: Jonbon is a worthy favourite for the Champion Chase, but it is probable that he is not as good at Cheltenham as he is at Sandown or Ascot, and he may be vulnerable.



Jonbon

Solness has been a revelation this season. When Joseph O'Brien's horse won at Leopardstown at Christmas, it looked like one of those things, one of those results that you couldn't fathom, and you put it down to the superb ride that JJ Slevin gave him, around the outside, probably on the best of the ground, fractions spot on, and maybe even the fog. Then he repeated the trick at the Dublin Racing Festival, and you have to regard him now as a real contender.

The value of the race though may be Marine Nationale. Barry Connell's horse closed on Solness at the Dublin Racing Festival, and looked set to get the better of him as they raced to the home turn. In the end, he went down by two lengths, but it was still a fine run.

The French Navy gelding has raced just five times over fences, he is improving with each run this season, and you know that Barry Connell will have him at concert pitch for Cheltenham. Back on better ground and back at the scene of the most impressive performance of his life, when he and Michael O'Sullivan blitzed their rivals in the 2023 Supreme Novices' Hurdle, he could be set to put up another career-best. And, given his connection with the late and greatly lamented Michael O'Sullivan, he would be the most poignant winner of the week.

DMC: BEST VALUE OF DAY 2: Better Days Ahead (Brown Advisory Novices' Chase)

Thursday 16th March

1.20 Mares' Novices' Hurdle (Grade 2) (4yo+) 2m1f

SLH: There is very little to choose between all of the British trained runners. The level of ability they have shown to date is behind what the Irish horses have

displayed. Jubilee Alpha, Diva Luna and Just A Rose are among the shortest priced of the British horses.

Yet, according to my figures both Hollygrove Cha Cha and That'll Do Moss, who are available at significantly bigger odds, have attained a similar level of form. This pair had just a short head between them in a Grade 2 at Sandown on their latest start. As I say, with little to choose between the best of the home trained horses, I would expect the Irish to dominate this race.

3.20 Ryanair Chase (Grade 1) (5yo+) 2m4f

SLH: What a wonderful horse Protektorat has proven to be and he has a live chance of repeating last year's win in this race. After being below par on his first two starts of the season, I thought that we had already seen the best of him and that he was possibly on the downgrade. However, on his latest start, with conditions to suit he returned to his very best with a comprehensive success at Windsor. I do think the ground is a critical factor for Protektorat. Soft or even heavy ground suits ideally as it brings his stamina into play over a distance that he stays extremely well. Quicker ground conditions will make him vulnerable to the speedier types. If conditions are suitable on the day, then Protektorat will be of definite interest.

If the ground is good, good/soft, then Il Est Francais has to be strongly considered. He put in an excellent round of jumping when finishing second in the King George on Boxing Day, the manner of that performance suggesting that today's race, on not too testing ground would suit ideally. It has been reported that Il Est Francais has burst blood vessels in the past, which is always of concern. However, on suitable ground barring accidents, I would expect him to go very close.

DMC: It looks like Fact To File is going to take his chance in the Ryanair Chase, not in the Gold Cup and, if he does, he is the one they all have to beat.

JP McManus' horse was very good at last year's Festival, landing the odds in the Brown Advisory Chase and, when he won the John Durkan Chase on his debut this season, he looked set to take his place at the top table of staying steeplechasers.

He couldn't confirm places with Galopin Des Champs in the Savills Chase at Leopardstown, and he again had to give best to the reigning champ in the Irish Gold Cup, but there is obviously no shame in that. He remains a highly talented horse, and the drop back down in trip for the Ryanair Chase could see him step forward again.

4.00 Stayers' Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo+) 3m

SLH: At the start of the season Crambo looked to have the potential to develop into a very decent staying hurdler; which I thought would have a good chance in this year's Stayers Championship. His reappearance success in the Long Walk Hurdle at

Ascot seemed to confirm that view. He then went onto the Cleeve Hurdle over today's course at the end of January and unfortunately was most disappointing. In mitigation, he did make a bad mistake five hurdles out. However, it was still in my view a very much below par effort.

The horse that I feel has the potential to progress further in today's race is Lucky Place. He put up a career best performance here at the new year fixture when winning the Relkeel Hurdle over 2m 4f. That form has a very solid look to it, with four of the horses that finished behind Lucky Place subsequently going on to run well. It was the manner of Lucky Place's success that also impressed me. He was in a battle with a strong stayer in Gowel Road, but kept on well up the finishing hill to beat that rival. He could just be the horse to take a big step forward for today's test. At the time of writing odds of 8/1 appear fair.



Lucky Place (near side)

DMC: Teahupoo was the correct favourite for the Stayers' Hurdle last year, and he is the correct favourite for the Stayers' Hurdle again this year. The title-holder, Gordon Elliott's horse went straight from the Hatton's Grace Hurdle at Fairyhouse in early December to the Stayers' Hurdle at Cheltenham in March last year, and he won impressively.

He was beaten in the Hatton's Grace Hurdle this season, but he was beaten by Lossiemouth, and he wasn't suited by the sedate pace. He is at his best when he is fresh, and he is the one they all have to beat again.

He is short though. The Wallpark is a player and Home By The Lee is a player and, at a much bigger price, Rocky's Diamond is interesting. Declan Queally's horse ran a massive race in the Christmas Hurdle at Leopardstown at a massive price to take

third place behind Home By The Lee, despite the fact that a few things went against him. Pitched into the Galmoy Hurdle at Gowran Park next time, he was game in victory, probably winning with more in hand than the bare winning margin.

He is only five and he has raced just six times over hurdles in his life, so there is every chance that he will progress again from his Gowran run. No five-year-old has ever won the Stayers' Hurdle in its current guise, but not many try, there hasn't been a five-year-old runner since 2015. And no five-year-old had ever won the Galmoy Hurdle either until Rocky's Diamond won it this year.

5.20 Kim Muir Challenge Cup Handicap Chase (5yo+) 3m2f

DMC: Midnight Our Fred could be a big player in the Kim Muir.

John Flavin's horse was impressive in winning a two-and-a-half-mile contest at Gowran Park on his debut this season, over a trip that was shorter than ideal and going the wrong way around.

He stepped forward from that last time in the Paddy Power Chase, back up at three miles and going left-handed again, when he finished second behind Perceval Legallois. That race has been working out spectacularly well since. Perceval Legallois won a listed handicap hurdle at the Dublin Racing Festival next time, while sixth-placed Three Card Brag won his beginners' chase at Navan. Also, Nick Rockett, fourth in the Paddy Power Chase, won the Thyestes Chase at Gowran Park next time, and went on to win the Grade 3 Bobbyjo Chase at Fairyhouse. He is now rated 11lb higher than he was in the Paddy Power Chase.

Midnight Our Fred can race off a British mark of 132, which is just 4lb higher than the Irish mark off which he raced in the Paddy Power. He has run three times at Cheltenham, he has run well to finish second on all three occasions, and the drying ground is in his favour.

BEST VALUE OF DAY 3:

SLH: Il Est Francais (if suitable ground) 7/2, Lucky Place 8/1

DMC: Midnight Our Fred (Kim Muir)

Friday 17th March

1.20 Triumph Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo) 2m1f

SLH: Nicky Henderson has two strong chances in Lulamba and Palladium. Both impressed on their sole starts over hurdles, and both have any amount of improvement in them.

However, I prefer the chance of East India Dock. He is unbeaten over hurdles, including two wins at this track with the latest being over today's course and distance. He was a very useful horse on the flat when trained by James Fanshawe

and has transferred that flat ability over to hurdles. East India Dock looks to have the ideal mix of tactical speed and stamina for this race. The issue I have is formulating what is his realistic chance of winning this race-in other words his odds. As well as the Henderson horses, there is the Irish challenge which cannot be dismissed. At odds of 2/1, I will let East India Dock run unbacked.

It's one of those situations where there are just too many unknown factors for me to formulate prices with total confidence.

DMC: You can understand why Lulamba and East India Dock are high in the betting for the Triumph Hurdle, but Hello Neighbour should probably be at least a little closer to them in the market than he is.

Gavin Cromwell's horse has raced four times, and he has won four times. Given a flat rating of 96 after the second of his two wins on the flat, it was significant that his trainer ran him in the Grade 2 juveniles' hurdle at Leopardstown's Christmas Festival on his hurdling bow, not in the maiden. He duly won the Grade 2 contest too, despite the fact that plenty of things went wrong for him through the race.

He won the Grade 1 Spring Juvenile Hurdle too at the Dublin Racing Festival, a race that has been a really good pointer to the Triumph Hurdle in the past. His jumping was better there than it had been at Christmas, and he travelled like the most likely winner from a fair way out. He only got home by three parts of a length in the end, but he left the impression that he had more left to give if more had been required. He should improve again for that run, and the faster pace that he should get should be a positive.

Galileo Dame, runner-up in the Spring Hurdle, is also interesting. Another talented horse on the flat, Joseph O'Brien's filly finished off her race well in the Leopardstown contest to take second place. That was just her second run over hurdles, so there is every chance that she will improve again.



Telepathique

2.40 Mares' Chase (Grade 2) (5yo+) 2m4f

SLH: Telepathique is progressing race on race and sets the home trained standard. She is however up against an extremely strong Irish challenge. Conditions should be fine for Telepathique and I expect her to run a big race and hopefully be in the mix coming down the hill. Whether she is good enough to win is altogether another matter.

3.20 Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle (Grade 1) (4yo+) 3m

SLH: Yellow Car and Moon Rocket, who finished first and second in the River Don at Doncaster are

just about the best of the British runners. This best I fear, is way below the level needed to win this race, as their odds in the market indicate.

DMC: The Big Westerner is unbeaten in three runs. Winner of her only point-to-point for Matthew O'Connor, she won her maiden hurdle at Punchestown on her first run for Henry de Bromhead and she followed up by winning the Grade 2 Dorans Pride Hurdle at Limerick over Christmas.

That is a race that has been a good pointer to the Albert Bartlett Hurdle in the past, and The Big Westerner was impressive in winning it this season. She stays well and she is progressive, and she is a big player in the Albert Bartlett picture.

Jasmin De Vaux is also a big player. Willie Mullins' horse won the Champion Bumper last season, so we know that he can operate at Cheltenham and under Cheltenham Festival conditions. He won his maiden hurdle at Navan in December despite the fact that he didn't jump well. Sent off as a short-priced favourite for the Grade 1 Lawlor's of Naas Hurdle on the back of that run, again his jumping lacked fluency, and he didn't get away with it in a Grade 1 contest.

He was better last time in the Nathaniel Lacy Hurdle when he was fitted with cheekpieces for the first time. He should appreciate the step up in distance and, on the New Course, where there are just two flights of hurdles in the final seven furlongs, he could go well.



Jasmine De Vaux

4.00 Cheltenham Gold Cup (Grade 1) (5yo+) 3m2f

SLH: Only a handful of British runners at most, with all at big odds. Grey Dawning and The Real Whacker look to be the best of these, but neither are good enough to be winning an average Gold Cup.

DMC: Galopin Des Champs is on the cusp of history. Only three horses, Arkle, Best Mate and Cottage Rake, have won the Cheltenham Gold Cup three times since Golden Miller won the fifth of his five in 1936. That is an elite club, and Galopin Des Champs looks set to join them.

Winner of the Gold Cup in 2023 and again in 2024, Willie Mullins' horse looks as good as ever this season. Winner of the Savills Chase again at Leopardstown at Christmas, the reception that he got when he and Paul Townend came back into the winner's enclosure at Leopardstown after winning the Irish Gold Cup was fantastic. You know that, if he can land a third Gold Cup, he will be greeted by the Cheltenham crowd with a reception that will befit the achievement.

Monty's Star should progress from his run in the Irish Gold Cup, and he should appreciate going out in trip, and Banbridge is set to line up, as long as the ground isn't too soft. Winner of the Martin Pipe Hurdle in 2022 and winner of the Arkle Trial at Cheltenham's November meeting as a novice chaser, Joseph O'Brien's horse proved his stamina for three miles when he got the better of Il Est Francais in the King George at Kempton on St Stephen's Day. He will have another two and a half furlongs to go in the Gold Cup, but there is plenty of stamina in his pedigree, and he finished off his race strongly at Kempton. He could be Galopin Des Champs' biggest danger.



Galopin Des Champs

DMC: BEST VALUE OF DAY 4: Hello Neighbour, Triumph Hurdle

For more information about Donn's work, go to: www.donnmcclean.com.

Mike Cattermole

I've just been reading about punters heading to the sunshine to watch the Cheltenham Festival in Benidorm! It's "a thing". Each to their own I guess, but not for me!

I've no work there (how times change) so will watch it all on Racing TV. Crucially, their output includes a lot of shots of the horses in the paddock which is so helpful.

There's a spell of bright and dry weather up to the weekend and possible showers after that so I don't think we need to worry about extremes of ground. Good to soft, good in places, maybe?



Mike Cattermole: Racecourse commentator, presenter and writer. Chairman: Bob Champion Cancer Trust.

Tuesday

Kopek Des Bordes should start things off in style by landing the opening SkyBet Supreme Novices' Hurdle after a highly impressive win at Leopardstown. Being an ex-Timeform man, my ears popped up when I heard the Yorkshire sages had allotted him a rating of 154P (large P), meaning he will be the highest rated to line up in this since Altior (155p, small p) in 2016.

That Leopardstown race has a rich history with many of the winners going on to win at the Festival - Samcro, Klassical Dream and Ballyburn, to name just three.

He is going to be short of course but is a worthy favourite.

I spoke to Henry De Bromhead when he was over at Windsor in January and he was pragmatic about his team going through a rebuild.

However, I was very taken by his Workahead at Leopardstown on Boxing Day when he thrashed William Munney by seven lengths on that gloomy afternoon. Fascinatingly, his time was virtually identical to Kopek Des Bordes who had won half an hour earlier from the now-sidelined Kawaboomga.

(Interestingly, Kawaboomga went on to beat William Munney by a length and a half a month later at Fairyhouse).

Workahead has had his problems – he was off almost two years after his point-to-point win - but he is clearly very talented and a fascinating contender here.

No Sir Gino in the Arkle means the big match-up with Majborough is postponed. But don't underestimate L'Eau Du Sud who has done everything right in his novice chase career and could make them all go if getting into his usual rhythm. He is such a likeable young chaser and goes well on the course.

I went to see Paul Nicholls recently and his Festival team will number around a dozen. I watched Ginny's Destiny exercise and he looked in great shape, as did all of his horses on that rare, sunny morning. Paul is a master at laying one out and Ginny's Destiny has the Ultima Handicap Chase on Tuesday or the TrustATrader Plate on Thursday as possible. He split Grey Dawning and Djelo in last year's Turners Novices' Chase and although his form this year has been a touch underwhelming, Ginny's has been dropped to a nice mark of 149. He has won three times over fences at Cheltenham.



Ginny's Destiny

So on to the Champion Hurdle. Constitution Hill should regain his title and yet there is a lingering doubt as we still don't really know whether he is as good as he was. Indeed, it is hard to know how good any horse is when they remain unbeaten. Certainly, his last three starts have been below his outstanding best and I reckon Lossiemouth might give him more to think about than she did at Kempton when she appeared to be rather sluggish.

I had a chat with Rich Ricci last week and they hadn't made up their minds about where to go with her and maybe with Brighterdaysahead now heading for the big one, the Mares' Hurdle might be tempting. I think that would be a shame but let's see. It is great for the game that Brighterdaysahead does run here. She is getting better and better and races with such enthusiasm.

The Mares' Hurdle, meanwhile, has become a distraction and I believe that a rating ceiling of 150 for it (even if it's a handicap) is essential to preserve the Champion for the very best around, regardless of sex.

The Irish have dominated the Boodles Fred Winter Juvenile Hurdle for the past seven years, two from Joseph O'Brien and three from Gordon Elliott. No strong thoughts here but I note that the upwardly-mobile James Owen has had this in mind for Liam Swagger for a while. He looked in good shape when winning on the Tapeta at Southwell the other day and could outrun his price.

Wednesday

I was convinced that I was watching the Turners Novice Hurdle winner as I called The New Lion home in the Challow Hurdle. He made some good horses look very ordinary there and goodness knows how much more there was in the tank.

He was snapped up after that by JP McManus in a private sale and I can only think that Darren Yeats, his previous and very proud owner, suddenly needed some ready cash. Anyway, it's none of our business. Mr Yeats will be watching on with mixed feelings should win this for JP and the all-conquering Skeltons.

Any dangers at all? The Yellow Clay looks a very nice type of Gordon Elliott's but he is also in the Albert Bartlett. Willie Mullins's Final Demand is a hulk but does look set to go here rather than Friday. Now, he might be the danger and a serious one at that. A line with Wingmen puts those two close together.

I don't think there is much between the Willie Mullins pair of Ballyburn and Dancing City in the Brown Advisory Novices' Chase. There's certainly more hype about Ballyburn but Dancing City, remember, was a very smart novice hurdler who was way too good for the class The Jukebox Man at Aintree last April.

He doesn't do a tap in front which is why he hasn't caught the imagination as much as he might have done.

Steel Ally is a horse I want to keep on the right side for either the Coral Cup or the Martin Pipe - the excellent Dylan Johnston can ride him in both. He is getting better and is a real trier. The Martin Pipe on Friday would be the better option as it is a weaker race and he will have two more days to freshen up after his excellent second to Nemean Lion at Fontwell.

The Queen Mother Champion Chase ought to be won by Jonbon and there won't be many out there who will not think he deserves it. He was ridden pretty aggressively by Nico (NOT Neeko!) at Ascot and I thought he looked better than ever because of it.

But I would love to see the free-going Il Est Francais go here and take him on. What a talent he is. That would be something. But the Ryanair might be too tempting for connections.

In the Johnny Henderson Grand Annual Handicap Chase, Path D'Oroux returns to have another crack after a fine third last year. However, he only had a head to spare over Jazzy Matty here in October and Jazzy Matty was trying to give him 8lb.

Now, Jazzy Matty gets 10lb and so is a massive 18lb better off! I notice that Cian Collins ran him over hurdles last time, probably to protect his chase mark. He also has other entries but, as a former Festival winner when winning the Fred Winter in 2023 for Gordon Elliott, I want to be with Jazzy Matty wherever he shows up.

Thursday

Jazzy Matty is also in the Jack Richards Novices' Handicap Chase on Thursday as he is effective over two and a half miles, too. But he some way down the list there and even further down in Friday's Martin Pipe.

The weights are topped in the Jack Richards by the smart Springwell Bay, who I am a fan of, but he has so many options.

He's even in the Ryanair Chase where Protektorat is trying to defend his title. Dan Skelton's brilliant Windsor winner has a genuine chance but I don't think he nor Fact To File will cope with Il Est Francais if he shows up here.

Teahupoo has been favourite for the Stayers' Hurdle for a while but I am not sure that the ground drying up too much would help him. I will watch with interest and it wouldn't surprise me to see Langer Dan get placed.

Friday

Nicky Henderson has said that there isn't much between Lulamba and Palladium at home and they are at very contrasting prices in the JCB Triumph Hurdle. But Palladium is a German Derby winner so that may not be surprising. It will be disappointing if he doesn't improve on Huntingdon. Lulamba did look the part at Ascot, though.

Neither may be able to cope with East India Dock who will go hard from the front and acts on any going.

The Yellow Clay would be the one to beat in the Albert Bartlett as Willie Mullins is not keen on the race for Final Demand but Gordon Elliott will only consider this if the ground is drying up. The Turners remains the preference.

All eyes then on Galopin Des Champs in the Boodles Gold Cup and, barring accidents, he should complete the hat-trick and cement himself as one of the best ever. He really is a very special horse who deserves all the plaudits he can get.

With Grey Dawning off to Aintree, the likeable Banbridge and Monty's Star are my picks to get placed for an Irish clean sweep.

SUGGESTIONS

WORKAHEAD: EW SkyBet Supreme

GINNY'S DESTINY: Ultima or Plate

JAZZY MATTY: Johnny Henderson Grand Annual

STEEL ALLY: Coral Cup or Martin Pipe

Richard Hoiles

This year the battle lines will be drawn early. By the time we reach the conclusion of the Champion Hurdle on Tuesday the balance between punter and bookmaker for the entire Festival may already have been decided.

It could have been even worse had Brighterdaysahead gone for the Mares and not the Champion Hurdle but still there are three short priced favourites in Kopek Des Bordes (Supreme) , Majborough (Arkle) and Constitution Hill (Champion Hurdle) that will ensure will be plenty of potential multiple liabilities rolling up.



Richard Hoiles: *Racecourse & ITV lead racing commentator for this year's festival. Richard has commented on many of the world's biggest races.*

It is my contrary nature, and the fact it represents a good betting strategy, to try and go against the flow and so I tried very hard to pick holes in Kopek Des Bordes's win at the DRF but completely failed. Whilst it would not be enough for me to wade in at such a short price he is the one Novice who has made the pulse quicken in the hope that he may turn out to be a star for seasons to come.

In Majborough's case it is my personal biggest disappointment of the week that for a second year running we have been deprived of a clash between himself and Sir Gino. The race has been left at his mercy, I am not convinced by L'Eau Du Sud, and I think it will only be the usual worry of a novice jumping round at the Festival that would concern favourite backers.

Finally of the trio Constitution Hill remains a stand out in the Champion. There is no doubt the presence of Brighterdaysahead adds to the race but she has a fair bit to do to convince me that she should have taken this option rather than the Mares. She was the talking horse of all the Irish preview nights last year before getting beaten by Golden Ace and the merit of her form is largely built around State Man who has just not looked the same horse, even in victory, as he did last year. The presence of King of Kingsfield will ensure a solidly run race but there will not be the element of surprise there was last time and if Constitution Hill holds together physically then he still looks a class apart.

Once the drama of the first day is consigned to the form book there will still be skirmishes around the likes of Jonbon (solid) . Teahupoo (short price by default in a weak division and best with some cut), and Galopin Des Champs (will Fact or File turn up ?) along with a couple to potentially take on in Final Demand (if he runs in the Turners rather than the Albert Bartlett) and Ballyburn who I am still not entirely convinced by off the bridle. The subsequent performances of Rubaud and Bioluminescence have weakened my conviction that Dancing City was far more solid in the Brown Advisory but it remains my gut feeling, along with the fact Dancing City is a long term Grand National horse.

Elsewhere on the week keep a close eye on the French challenge in the Cross Country which is a handicap this season. In recent years it has been won by a classy performer so the French horses were just not good enough but they have much more experience in this division domestically and several have run well from out of the weights when they have come over this season which leads me to believe they are a population of horses the UK handicapper underestimates. Iseo Madrik looks the pick and is my biggest bet of the week but there will be savers on all Gallic counterparts who line up in opposition.

With the handicapper generally being encouraged to drop horses more quickly the angle of horses that have run well in Festival handicaps in the past returning having been campaigned with just one day in mind is well worth revisiting. In my day it was the 'Buena Vista' angle and more recently Langer Dan. The horse that chased home Langer Dan last year in the Coral Cup, Ballyadam lines up again and has an excellent Festival record with the De Bromhead yard going much better than they were.

Happygolucky (Ultima but could do with some rain/watering) and Gericault Roque (NH Chase/Kim Muir) are others who have been dropped, in their cases after absences from the track whilst Crebilly has been artistically campaigned to line up off a 2lb lower mark than last year whichever option he decides to take. (Grand Annual or Plate)

The Triumph clash between East India Dock and Lulamba on Friday represents a strong renewal with preference at this stage of their development for East India Dock who is more the finished hurdling article and Firefox has been campaigned to get enough runs into him to have the handicap option over fences over either 2m or 2m 4f. He has slightly marked time over fences but the compensation is the fact he can line up in handicaps rather than one of the feature conditions races.

Good luck with all your own fancies and buckle up for the ride as it could get pretty ugly early on for one side or the other!

Cheltenham Trends 2025 from Paul O'Hara...

Before I break into the trends, I just want to reminisce for a moment. It is 30 years since Willie Mullins had his first winner (Tourist Attraction) and he continues to go from strength to strength. At the same festival a certain AP McCoy had his first ride on a 100-1 shot. It's also significant as it was my first festival, so I'm not in bad company! Moving swiftly on to the trends, I have trawled through the potential runners and identified some of the key trends from the previous ten years running of the 'Big Four' races.

Champion Hurdle - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - unbeaten in season

10/10 - two to four runs that season

10/10 - age 5 to 8

10/10 - had their prep run at Sandown, Kempton, Leopardstown, Naas or Punchestown

The trends point to two horses and they are: **CONSTITUTION HILL AND BRIGHTERDAYSAHEAD**

MY SELECTION – Brighterdaysahead is this year's leading Irish runner having defeated last year's champion hurdle winner State Man on two separate occasions. Her only blip to an unblemished record was at Cheltenham last year with defeat in the mares novice hurdle. This potentially leaves a question mark on whether she truly handles Cheltenham. The return of CONSTITUTION HILL, who Nicky Henderson reports in rude health is something to be feared. He remains unbeaten over hurdles without being severely tested and is my selection to regain his crown.

Champion Chase - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 32 days ago

10/10 - Top two finish in last two completed starts

10/10 - No more than three runs that season

10/10 - age 7 to 10

10/10 - SP no bigger than 11-1

Four horses fit the trends and that's last year's Arkle winner **GAELIC WARRIOR, MARINE NATIONALE, JONBON** and French raider **IL EST FRANCAIS**

MY SELECTION – With plenty of runners who like to race up with the pace, this is likely to be a survival of the fittest. Much will depend on horses jumping and getting into a rhythm. Gaelic Warrior managed to do that in last year's Arkle win, but has struggled this season so far. However, given his quirks he's one you'd rule out at your peril. Marine Nationale, a former festival winner over hurdles, doesn't look natural over the bigger obstacles, but his quality could see him finish in the places. The trainer of Il Est Francais has indicated preference for the Ryannair, which leaves the current favourite as the only other horse in the trends. Impressing with some spectacular jumping, if he's able to continue that on the biggest stage and get into a rhythm then JONBON will prove very hard to beat. He's my selection to finally break his festival duck at the third time of asking

Stayers' Hurdle - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 32 days ago

10/10 - top four finish on last completed start

10/10 - ran at least eight times over hurdles

10/10 - had their prep race at Cheltenham, Leopardstown, Punchestown, Navan or Fairyhouse
9/10 - age 6 to 8

Five horses make the cut and they are: last year's winner **TEAHUPOO** (current favourite) and four big priced horses in **MAXXUM, MONMIRAL, STRONG LEADER** and **JULY FLOWER**

MY SELECTION – If you take out the favourite this looks a wide open race. Of the trend horses, Maxxum/Monmiral are decent handicappers that have stepped up into graded class, but would be surprise winners. Strong Leader was one of the leading fancies following an impressive win at Aintree last year, but after bombing out at Ascot, the hope is the second run back after a wind operation will see him in a better light. He could be the each way value at a big price (around 25's). The trainer has indicated that July Flower will run in the mares hurdle, which leaves last year's winner as the only other horse to fit the trends. In a field that perhaps lacking quality over quantity it's hard to see past TEAHUPOO and for that reason he is my selection to retain his title.

Gold Cup - 10 Year Trends

10/10 - last ran at least 33 days ago
10/10 - age 7 to 9
10/10 - won in last two completed starts
10/10 - top four finish last time out
10/10 - had their prep run at Newbury, Leopardstown (last four), Thurles or Tramore

Three horses fit the trends and they are: **BANBRIDGE, THE REAL WHACKER** and looking to three peat **GALOPIN DES CHAMPS**

MY SELECTION – The Irish have won the past six renewals and look likely to dominate again. This appears to be a much weaker renewal and may result in a small field given alternative engagements. Banbridge has yet to run over this far and impressed winning on his first attempt at three miles in the King George. However, this is not Kempton and whether he has the stamina for a Gold Cup remains questionable. The Real Whacker is a previous festival winner and likes things his own way, but could outrun his odds (currently 66-1 on offer) if left alone out front. This leaves the reigning champion GALOPIN DES CHAMPS, who has looked as good as ever this season. His form is far superior to any of the opposition and it's difficult to see where a challenge will come from. He is my selection and become the first horse to three-peat since Best Mate just over 20 years ago

Finally, five horses currently declared in the handicaps that could go well at a price:

Henry's Friend
Altobelli
Dancing On My Own
Lucky Lyreen
Kabral Du Mathan

Lambourn Trainers Horses to Follow

A mixture of National Hunt and flat with a few comments directly from the trainers worth noting.

Owen Burrows

Jarraaf - Won the twice last season, both times at Ascot. Ended the year finishing 2nd in a Group 3 & now rated 106. Has developed very pleasingly over the winter and I think handicaps are not an option for him now so will start in a Listed race at Salisbury in May, all being well. Will then have some fancy entries in some Group races over 6 and 7 furlongs.



Gethin - Only had the one start last year where he won very impressively at Nottingham on soft ground. Another, who I've been very pleased with physically over the winter. He has a Derby entry so we will have to find out quite quickly if he's up to that!

Henry Candy

Tiger Bay - Listed placed last year, will hopefully get a bit more Black Type this year.

May Encount - Sprinting handicapper who has done well over the winter and should be ready towards mid- April.

Moster Marvellous - Unraced Waldgeist filly from a good family. Still weak and backward but should come into her own in the second half of the year.

Regal Charm - Very well related filly. Has grown a lot and will take a bit of time, but goes nicely.

Tom Dascombe

High On Hope - Well handicapped, didn't get the rub of the green last year but should be a big improver.

Charlie Hills

Socialite

Double Rush

Richard Hughes

Kambo - 4 year old gelding, is very well handicapped and likes the all-weather tracks.

Arcturian - 4 year old gelding who currently has a 100% strike rate being 2 from 2 and is a favourite on the yard.

Daniel Kubler

Siempre Arturo

Royale Goodnight

Stan Moore

Queue Dos

Obsidian Dram

Fleetwater

Whinbarrow

Jonathan Portman

Bulletin - 3yo maiden gelding. More to come.

Takeitorleaveit - 2yo colt by first season sire Ubetterbelieveit.

Mark Usher

Older Horses - **Shades of May** and **This Time Maybe**

3 y.o. - **Saidha** and **Vilaine Verlaine**

2 y.o. - **Telling Time** and **Ardad ex Rosehip**

Ed Walker

Almaqam - Narrowly beaten in a Group 2 at Longchamp on his last start in 2024 he is an enormously exciting prospect for this year. He will start in the Gordon Richards at Sandown

Harpers Ferry - A frustrating horse last year, he came good for being gelded and has a bright future. He will start in the Lincoln or the Doncaster Mile. He could be a group horse in a handicap should we go down that route.

Miss Tonnerre - A winner at 2 on debut she made a huge leap to be a close 4th in the May Hill. Her last run was a bit disappointing at Deauville but the ground was atrocious. I hope she will make into a top class 10 furlong filly.

Noble Champion - An expensive purchase was a shade disappointing on debut but won well on his second start. Good ground is essential and he will start in the Greenham. Hopefully he can be a 2000 Guineas horse

Never Let Go - A maiden winner with a handicap mark of 77. Hopefully we can have a lot of fun in handicaps and the Sandringham at Royal Ascot is her mid-summer target.

Tom Ward

Crystal Flyer - Has strengthened up over the winter, and aiming for another great campaign this summer

Our Golden One - Will be aiming for more black type this summer

Transparent - Purchased from Breeze Ups last year, looks to be very exciting for the turf. From 3 starts this winter he has won twice and come second.

Magna Grecia ex Morning Line - A two year old and is taking his work well; promising

And finally...

Nicky Henderson

A general summary for the battle ahead and a few horses to follow:

Jonbon, Constitution Hill and Lulamba – are currently all very well but at very short odds so we are thinking the following may be more of a betting opportunity...

Lucky Place (Stayers Hurdle) – he has done nothing wrong all season, we think he will stay 3 miles and if he does could at least be the best of the Brits.

Mister Coffey – has been second in the two cross country races this season and should have an each way chance.

Jango Baie – comes back to 2 miles in the Arkle but this might not be the strongest renewal.

Aston Martini – was a good second at Ascot and could be each-way in the Coral or Martin Pipe, as yet undecided.

East India Express – won his last two starts with his conditional on board and he will run in the Martin Pipe.



Constitution Hill

Lambourn Open Day - Good Friday 18th April 2025

The annual Lambourn Valley Open Day is a superb opportunity to really go behind the scenes and meet the trainers, riders, stable staff and the real stars of racing – the horses.

Sadly last year's Open Day had to be cancelled which was a major setback for the ongoing work of the Lambourn Valley Housing Trust and has made this year's event even more important.

A flavour of the 2023 Open Day...

In glorious Good Friday weather, Lambourn opened their doors to the public for The Peter O'Sullivan Lambourn Open Day. Large crowds gathered in the morning to see great horses, past and present. They included legendary dual Champion Chasers Altior and Sprinter Sacre along with the dual Champion Hurdle winner Constitution Hill.

Twenty-seven racing yards and horse exhibitions opened from nine in the morning, giving the public the opportunity to get first-hand experience into the running of top yards such as: multiple Champion Trainer Nicky Henderson, Charlie Hills, Clive Cox and Grand National winning trainer, Oliver Sherwood.

In the afternoon, the central area opened with a full demonstration of equine shows and country skills. Events included the highly competitive jockey's show jumping competition won by Harry Derham, National Hunt jockey's schooling over fences, the Shetland Grand National and the Derby Hoppers competition. Visitors with their canine companions could also enter their dogs in various classes of show and there was an entertaining sheepdog display.

A regular feature in the Parade of Equine Heroes which this year featured Sprinter Sacre, Queens Gamble, Coneygree and the resplendent 26 y.o. Solo Flight.

The Lambourn Open Day also gives the opportunity to check out the brilliant facilities at both the Lambourn Valley Equine Hospital and the Injured Jockey's Fund rehabilitation centre, Oaksey House. There was also a vast array of trade stands, food and refreshment amenities adding to a great fun Easter day out for all the family.

'Today was a superb advert for our wonderful sport with all ages enjoying a range of activities. Yards were busy all morning and the afternoon events were varied and enjoyable. A great family day out.'

All money raised goes to Lambourn's registered charity, The Lambourn Valley Housing Trust, which works tirelessly for the welfare of its stable staff, The Air Ambulance and worthy local organisations.

Tickets cost £15 on the day for the whole day, £10 for afternoon entertainment only. Children under 12 can enter for free.

Car Parks are free and open at 7.30 a.m. Yards will open from 9.00 a.m. until 1 p.m.

Full coloured programmes, featuring all information on the day including a map, information on all trainers and timings of events will be available in all car parks and yards.

Visit www.lambournopenday.com to buy tickets and for more information.

Lambourn Open Day Chairman Mark Smyly commented: *“It’s such a crucial day for Lambourn. Not only do we raise a lot of money for some worthwhile charities, but the day provides an opportunity for thousands of people to get behind the scenes at racing yards to see how well racehorses are looked after on a day-to-day basis by their trainers and stable staff.”*

My thanks to all the contributors to this preview and to you for supporting the stable staff through your donation to the Lambourn Valley Housing Trust.

Best of luck,

Steve Lewis Hamilton

