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PEDIGREE
ANALYSIS
BATTLE OF MARENGO

Battle's lines full of talent but is he the best at Ballydoyle?

IN THE spring, everything happens very quickly for the colts in the Classic crop with pretensions to excel over middle distances. We habitually look for the first clues to the Derby puzzle in the Group 3 Ballysax Stakes at Leopardstown, while aware that only seven weeks hence the Blue Riband event of the year will be history.

Meanwhile, even as we wonder which of the entries have trained on and which might stand a chance of lasting 1m4f and coping with that curious Epsom switchback, we learn that an epidemic of optimism has broken out, with the announcement of 17 additional nominations at £8,000 a time, one of them the currently unbeaten hot favourite for the 2,000 Guineas.

Of course, the next few weeks are going to be more about subtractions than additions as limitations are exposed in numerous cases, but there is still a faint chance of further supplementary entries, at a cost of £75,000, just five days before the Classic is run. This is not the time to be settling on a banker bet for the Derby.

So what did we learn from the 2013 renewal of the Ballysax, the race which marked the first appearance at three of Sinnadar, Galileo and High Chaparral, who all went on to triumph at Epsom?

It has to be said that this version did not appear to be particularly competitive, especially after the withdrawal of Foundry, the expected second favourite.

And there was scant evidence of spring having sprung at Foxrock, with the ground – soft, heavy in places – seeming more appropriate for winter jumping. The winner's time was well over 13 seconds slower than standard. Accordingly, it is natural to have reservations about the form.

Battle Of Marengo, having won the last three of his four races as a juvenile, was a firm odds-on favourite, and he duly won.

He was not wildly impressive, took a while to assert his authority, but was comfortably on top at the finish, nearly two lengths clear of Sugar Boy, who had himself won the last three of his two-year-old races, including a 1m1f Listed event over the course.

Visually, the winner's performance was hardly more than workmanlike, but what should not be overlooked is the fact that he carried a penalty for his Group 2 success in the Beresford Stakes and was giving away 5lb to all his rivals. That was one distinctly positive aspect to Battle Of Marengo's performance; it was worth more than his margin of victory.

Another was that he was doing his best work at the end, suggesting that the step up to 1m4f will suit him,

BATTLE OF MARENGO bc 4-2-2010

Sadler's Wells	Nearctic	Nearco
	Northern Dancer	Lady Angela
	Natalma	Native Dancer
		Almahmoud
Fairy Bridge	Bold Reason	Hail To Reason
		Lalun
Galileo (b 1998)	Special	Forli
		Thong
Miswaki	Mr Prospector	Raise A Native
		Gold Digger
Urban Sea	Hopespringseternal	Buckpasser
		Rose Bower
Allegretta	Lombard	Agio
		Promised Lady
Danzig	Anatevka	Espresso
		Almyra
Green Desert	Northern Dancer	Nearctic
		Natalma
Foreign Courier	Pas de Nom	Admiral's Voyage
		Petitioner
Anna Karenina (b 2003)	Sir Ivor	Sir Gaylord
		Attica
Simaat	Courtly Dee	Never Bend
		Tulle
Satiety	Mr Prospector	Native Dancer
		Raise You
Beanery	Gold Digger	Nashua
		Sequence
	Our Native	Exclusive Native
		Our Jackie
		Cavan
		Full O'Beans

Bred by Anna Karenina Syndicate in Ireland

VERDICT

- ▶▶ A workmanlike win at Group 3 level does not, on its own, make him a compelling bet at single-figure odds for the Derby
- ▶▶ Plus points from the race: he shrugged off his Group 2 penalty, he is certain to progress and 1m4f seems likely to suit him
- ▶▶ His pedigree is impressive, albeit least convincing in the tail-female line, which lacks a real top-notch in recent generations

something that his being out of a daughter of sprint star Green Desert might have called in question.

As for the ground, did he perhaps just handle it better than his rivals, or would he – as his trainer opines – have

preferred faster underfoot conditions?

In fact, he has thus far had only one run on going that was not rain-affected, when successful on a surface designated good for his first

effort over a mile at Leopardstown last autumn.

My best guess is that he will not be inconvenienced when required to compete on quick ground and may well impress the more for it. It's not just a guess that he will come on for the run, because that is normal for Ballydoyle horses on their second start of the campaign.

But I cannot begin to hazard a guess as to where Battle Of Marengo stands in the pecking order with such as Kingsbarns and Mars, and maybe one or two others, as yet dark, in the O'Brien stable. I doubt that the trainer knows for sure which is his best Derby prospect.

Battle Of Marengo is inbred to the two most potent influences on the pedigrees of our era. Through his sire he has Northern Dancer in the third generation and Mr Prospector in the fourth, and through his dam he has Mr Prospector in the third and Northern Dancer in the fourth.

And as both of those great sires were grandsons of Native Dancer, there are multiple crosses of that exceptional runner – beaten only once in 22 starts – dotted about his fifth and sixth generations.

There is another Native Dancer link in the seventh, as Exclusive Native, the sire of Our Native, is himself a son of Raise A Native.

Of course, we cannot assume that all these fancy connections guarantee Battle Of Marengo stardom as an athlete; there are plenty of equally well-bred colts in the current crop of three-year-olds.

While we may note what an impressive array of famous names feature in his background, we cannot know the extent of any individual ancestor's contribution.

What we should be able to count on is that the closest ancestors have the strongest impact, so we might take it as a positive that Battle Of Marengo is by Galileo, an outstanding runner himself, and now universally acknowledged as the greatest sire on the planet.

But there are more than 150 in Galileo's three-year-old crop, including Kingsbarns and Mars, and they cannot

all be champions. All we may realistically take from the sire's influence on Battle Of Marengo is that to date he has shown more potential than most and seems likely to conform to type by staying 1m4f.

The distaff side of Battle Of Marengo's pedigree unquestionably tends more towards speed than stamina.

His dam Anna Karenina comes from the fastest source of Northern Dancer, via Danzig and Green Desert, and although we learnt that Danehill, another sprinting son of Danzig, was often not an inhibiting factor in the pedigrees of would-be middle-distance types, Green Desert has tended to transmit his qualities truer to type.

Even so, Was, successful in last year's Oaks, may be cited as evidence that Galileo on a Green Desert mare can represent an effective formula for the production of an Epsom Classic winner over 1m4f.

Anna Karenina must have been an impressive yearling to have fetched €650,000, and while she clearly had her limitations, she showed progressive form at three and took a Listed event over an extended 1m1f at Gowran Park on her return at four before proving she was not quite up to Group 3 calibre.

She might have stayed further than she was asked to stay, and was certainly never a sprinter. Her half-brother Windsor Palace (by Danehill Dancer) once embarrassed his more illustrious stablemate St Nicholas Abbey in the 1m2f Mooresbridge Stakes on the Curragh.

ANNA KARENINA'S dam Simaat was a successful miler and herself a daughter of Satiety, who was tough enough to stand training for five seasons and earned over \$100,000.

She won a minor stakes event over an extended mile at River Downs at four and was placed second in a better contest at Churchill Downs at five.

Her brother, the gelded Rockhill Native, was a rather more distinguished runner – America's champion two-year-old of 1979, when he won twice in Grade 1 company, and a notable performer again at three, when he added a third Grade 1 victory in the Blue Grass Stakes.

He even led the field entering the last two furlongs of the Belmont Stakes before failing to see out the trip and finishing third to Temperance Hill and Genuine Risk.

Beanery, the stakes-placed dam of Satiety and Rockhill Native, was a daughter of Cavan, the English-bred son of Mossborough whose success in the 1958 Belmont Stakes earned his sire similar distinction in the States to that gained by such as Ballymoss and Noblesse in this part of the world.



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