

# Countdown to Cheltenham 2017



## Tuesday

### Supreme Novices' Hurdle

<b>1 Altior</b> .....	<b>4-1</b>
2 Min.....	15-8F
3 BuvEUR D'Air.....	10-1
14 ran. Dist's 7l, 1½l	

**Winners/runners** since race 23-54 (42.5%)  
**Profit/Loss** +£10.85 to £1 stake  
**Subsequent winners** Altior (four chases, best winning RPR 175), Min (2C 153), BuvEUR D'Air (two hurdles, 2C, 156 152), Tombstone (4th, 1H 153), Charbel (5th, 1C, 150), Mister Miyagi (6th, 1H, 147), Supasundae (7th, 1H, 150), Petit Mouchoir (8th, 2H, 166), North Hill Harvey (9th, 1H, 151), William H Bonney (10th, 1H, 129), Holly Bush Henry (11th, 1C, 134), Penglai Pavilion (12th, one Flat, 104), Bellshill (13th, 1H, 150, 2C, 155).

Sensational is just about the only way to describe this, with the first three home going 10/10 since and all bar one of the 14 runners (last-placed Silver Concorde) winning at least once. Altior looks a shoo-in for the Racing Post Arkle, BuvEUR D'Air and Petit Mouchoir are serious contenders for the Champion Hurdle, while Tombstone is favourite for the Coral Cup and joint-favourite for the County Hurdle alongside North Hill Harvey. This year's novices have an awful lot to live up to.

### Racing Post Arkle

<b>1 Douvan</b> .....	<b>1-4F</b>
2 Sizing John.....	9-1
3 Fox Norton.....	33-1
11 ran. 7l, 3½l	

**Winners/runners** 13-39 (33%)  
**P/L** -£9.27  
**Subsequent winners** Douvan (5C, 178), Sizing John (2C, 168), Fox Norton (3C, 170), Aso (5th, 2C, 154), Vaniteux (7th, 1C, 160)

Nothing could get near Douvan last year and nothing has got near him since, yet despite that quite a few of those behind have done really well, which all points to the winner being the superstar he looks. Sizing John has spent most of his life staring at Douvan's backside but has found hidden reserves of stamina this season and, if he truly gets the Gold Cup trip, will be a threat given he has twice been placed at the festival over 2m already. Fox Norton is just about favourite to chase Douvan home in the Champion Chase, but will have his supporters in the Ryanair should connections decide it's not worth running for second on the Wednesday.

### Ultima Handicap Chase

<b>1 Un Temps Pour Tout</b> .....	<b>11-1</b>
2 Holywell.....	8-1
3 The Young Master.....	14-1
4 Morning Assembly.....	10-1
23 ran. 7l, 9l, 1l	

**Winners/runners** 10-93 (10.75%)  
**P/L** -£13.47  
**Subsequent winners** Un Temps Pour Tout (1H, 150), The Young Master (1C, 152), Kruzhlinin (5th, 1H, 153), Double Ross (9th, 1C, 154), Ballykan (10th, 2C, 145), Fox Appeal (11th, 1C, 152), O Maonlai (12th, 1C, 150), Theatre Guide (F, 1C, 156), Regal Encore (P, 1C 153)

The 2015 running was unusually good, but last year's returned to type with only a handful of runners turning in performances of note and it will be something of a surprise if any of the runners play more than a bit part this season. Holywell is a ten-year-old now but has been supported in some quarters on his third crack at the race. He won it in 2014 off a mark of 145 (3lb lower than this year) and was second last year off 153 having run fourth in Coneygree's Gold Cup in between, so he obviously comes to hand at this time of year. It will be disappointing if something with less mileage and younger legs doesn't prove better handicapped, though.

# Coo's chance is stark if you trust Winter form



*With previous festival form an invaluable tool in the search for winners, Paul Kealy examines last year's results for clues*

THE purpose of this column has always been to try to find repeat performers based on the previous year's festival without resorting to the bleedin' obvious – we all know Altior and Douvan are going to win, but what about others who are coming back?

In fairness this hasn't been the most successful of endeavours as I keep getting places and no wins, but I'll be going in head down with a Lucky 15 this year and will be disappointed not to pick up something.

Three have been well found in the market, but the one I'm getting most excited about is **Coo Star Sivola** in the Martin Pipe Conditional Jockeys' Handicap Hurdle.

He was an excellent third in the Fred Winter last season and, while that might have been fifth had Campeador and Voix Du Reve not both fallen independently at the last, that doesn't matter as the form has worked out remarkably well.

The first four home have won ten times between them, while the seventh was Messire Des Obeaux, whose three wins this term include the Grade 1 Challow Hurdle, and Campeador fell with another big handicap at his mercy on his only subsequent start.

In the Fred Winter Coo Star Sivola was the only one of the first eight home who raced prominently and he found a remarkable amount for pressure having joined the lead four out and been pushed along a good

### Stan James Champion Hdle

<b>1 Annie Power</b> .....	<b>5-2F</b>
2 My Tent Or Yours.....	10-1
3 Nichols Canyon.....	15-2
12 ran. 4½l, hd	

**Winners/runners** 12-45 (26.7-33%)  
**P/L** -£12.41  
**Subsequent winners** Annie Power (1H, 170), Nichols Canyon (1H, 166), The New One (4th, 2H, 165), Top Notch (5th, 4C, 160), Identity Thief (6th, 2C, 146), Hargam (10th, 1H, 151)

It remains to be seen how much this race has a bearing on the 2017 renewal, but there's no doubting Annie Power was a high-class winner. My Tent Or Yours and The New One will be back again, but the former has looked a pale shadow of his former self this season, while The New One will always make more appeal on the New course. He has frame claims, though, in much the weakest Champion Hurdle he'll have run in. Fifth-placed Top Notch has made a surprisingly good fist of chasing given his size and the market says he's Yorkhill's big danger in the JLT.



**Coo Star Sivola (second right): excellent third in last year's Fred Winter, with the form working out well**

three furlongs from home. It's not surprising he has improved this season for the step up to 2m4f, winning a Listed hurdle at Cheltenham on New Year's Day and, last time out, a Warwick novice by a country mile.

The handicapper raised him just 4lb to 138 for that last run, but Racing Post Ratings awarded 148 and he has to be a player if repeating the form on better ground, which he obviously does handle.

Gordon Elliott is the king of the handicaps and it's no great surprise he has a few warm favourites, including The Storyteller in the Martin Pipe, but his more interesting runners for the purposes of this column have to be **Tombstone** and **Diamond King**.

The former is reportedly most likely to run in the Coral Cup after connections decided not to supplement him for the Champion Hurdle following his victory over Jezki at Gowran last month and it's fair to say

### OLBG Mares' Hurdle

<b>1 Vroum Vroum Mag</b> .....	<b>4-6F</b>
2 Rock On The Moor.....	66-1
3 Legacy Gold.....	40-1
19 ran. 2½l, ½l	

**Winners/runners** 13-48 (27%)  
**P/L** -£14.48  
**Subsequent winners** Vroum Vroum Mag (3H, 157), Pass The Time (4th, 2C, 138), Desert Queen (7th, 2C, 149), Stephanie Frances (8th, 3C, 137, 1H 140), Rons Dream (9th, 2H, 144)

Not a bad return given nearly half the field have not run since. A winning RPR of 146 tells you Vroum Vroum Mag did not have to be anywhere near her best to win this last year (it was actually her lowest RPR since March 2015) but she does have a habit of beating what's put in front of her and we know she's capable of a fair bit better. Although she is remarkably versatile, it was still a surprise connections decided to go down the Champion Hurdle route with a mare who won over 3m 20 starts ago but then scrambled home over 2m in a weak race.

the O'Learys didn't throw the toys out of the pram when he was awarded a handicap mark of 149.

He was beaten more than 12 lengths when fourth in last year's Supreme Novices' Hurdle, but that race is arguably one of the best ever run and the horses who finished third and eighth are among the favourites for the Champion Hurdle.

The ever-shrewd Elliott won this race last year with the 149-rated Diamond King and he must be very pleased with that one's handicap mark of 150 over fences for the Brown Advisory & Merriebelle Stable Plate, given how well last year's Coral Cup worked out.

Plenty of winners emerged at a good level on the Flat, over hurdles and over fences and, while Diamond King's chase form in three starts doesn't really merit such a high mark, it's fairly obvious he's been prepared for this once Grade 1 ambitions were shelved.

### National Hunt Chase

<b>1 Minella Rocco</b> .....	<b>8-1</b>
2 Native River.....	7-1
3 Measureofmydreams.....	9-1
17 ran. 1¾l, 6l	

**Winners/runners** 20-74 (27%)  
**P/L** -£48.48  
**Subsequent winners** Native River (4C, 171), Vicente (5th, 1C, 159), Vieux Lion Rouge (2C, 160), Viva Steve (8th, 1C, 145), Johnny Og (F, 1C, 141), Definitely Red (F, 2C, 156, 1H, 149), Noble Endeavor (F, 1C, 157), Shantou Flyer (F, 1C, 160), Waldorf Salad (P, 1C, 140), Pleasant Company (P, 1C, 145), Vintage Vinnie (P, 1C, 143, 1H, 124)

This race has been getting better year on year, but the 2017 renewal will probably have to house the Champion Hurdle winner to surpass the 2016 renewal. Second-placed Native River certainly deserves his place at the head of the Gold Cup market, while Vieux Lion Rouge and Definitely Red head the betting for the Grand National after enjoying stellar seasons. The strike-rate of runners from this race is remarkably high.

Last year's County Hurdle also produced plenty of winners and the one to take out of it is **Starchitect**, who finished fifth and has shown his versatility by winning on the Flat, over hurdles and over fences since, with his best form over hurdles on good to firm and his best over fences on heavy.

Still only six, he's turning into a really admirable performer and he fairly bolted up on his third chase start at Ayr in January.

He was taken out of the Racing Post Arkle at the latest entry stage, which is hardly surprising given the towering presence of Altior and a handicap mark that must have David Pipe licking his lips.

Starchitect is on 143, which is 7lb lower than his hurdles mark, and while he'll stay the longer trip of the Brown Advisory he won't run into anything as well treated in the Grand Annual.

### Close Bros Nov Heap Chase

<b>1 Ballyalton</b> .....	<b>12-1</b>
2 Bouvreuil.....	14-1
3 Double Shuffle.....	8-1
4 Bridgets Pet.....	12-1
20 ran. ¾l, 4¾l, 2½l	

**Winners/runners** 8-66 (12.1%)  
**P/L** -£9.26  
**Subsequent winners** Double Shuffle (1C, 153), Twelve Roses (5th, 1C, 113), Thomas Brown (7th, 1C, 147), Amore Alato (9th, 1C, 143), Killala Quay (P, 1C, 135), Katgary (P, 1C, 141), McKinley (U, 1C, 142), Javert (U, 1C, 153).

Double Shuffle became only the second horse in the last three years to make the frame in this contest and win another race the following season (the other one was Irish Cavalier) and this contest continues to disappoint. Just eight winners from a 20-runner field supposed to have been 'plotted up' for a festival handicap is poor, doubly so when you consider half of those wins came from the last-placed horse and three of the six non-finishers.

## Wednesday

### Neptune Novices' Hurdle

<b>1 Yorkhill</b> .....	<b>3-1</b>
2 Yanworth.....	11-10F
3 Its'afreebee.....	33-1
10 ran. 1¾l, 7l	

**Winners/runners** 14-41 (34%); **P/L** -£0.42  
**Subsequent winners** Yorkhill (1H, 149, 1C, 150), Yanworth (3H, 165), Its'afreebee (2C, 146), Welsh Shadow (5th, 1H, 138), Vigil (6th, 1F, 80), A Tsi Phil (7th, 3C, 152), O Seven (8th, 2C, 154), Yala Enki (P, 1C, 154)

No arguing with the quality here, with Yanworth a serious Champion Hurdle contender and Yorkhill hot favourite for the JLT, even though he needs to brush up his jumping.

### RSA Chase

<b>1 Blaklion</b> .....	<b>8-1</b>
2 Shaneshill.....	16-1
3 More Of That.....	6-4F
8 ran. ¾l, 8l	

**Winners/runners** 3-35 (8.6%); **P/L** -£22.38  
**Subsequent winners** Shaneshill (1H, 152), Seeyoutamidnight (7th, 1C, 161), Le Mercurey (8th, 1C, 160)

For the second year running this race posted the worst return of the Grade 1s, with only the last two horses winning a chase this season. Blaklion is a Grand National contender but on this form is handicapped up to the hilt.

### Coral Cup (heap hdl)

<b>1 Diamond King</b> .....	<b>12-1</b>
2 Long House Hall.....	16-1
3 Ubak.....	28-1
4 Blazer.....	8-1
26 ran. 1¾l, nk, ½l	

**Winners/runners** 21-98 (21.4%); **P/L** +£17.99  
**Subsequent winners** Diamond King (1C, 140), Long House Hall (1C, 156), Ubak (1H, 153), The Romford Pele (8th, 1H, 144), Avant Tout (9th, 2C, 156), Qewy (11th, 2F, 108), Baron Alco (12th, 2C, 153), Commissioned (13th, 1F, 103), Theivnal (14th, 2C, 146), Politologue (20th, 3C, 158), Rock The Kasbah (22nd, 2C, 148), Days Of Heaven (23rd, 1C, 140), One For Harry (P, 1H, 141)

An excellent strike-rate with plenty of good performances from a wide range of horses, including the first three. It's no wonder Diamond King is a warm order for the Brown Advisory & Merriebelle Stable Plate given he's only 1lb higher than when taking this with a bit to spare 12 months ago. Seventh-placed Brother Tedd has not won since but is now 14lb lower over fences and he'd have to be of interest if he squeezes into the Close Brothers Novices' Handicap Chase.

### Champion Chase

<b>1 Sprinter Sacre</b> .....	<b>5-1</b>
2 Un De Sceaux.....	4-6F
3 Special Tiara.....	16-1
9 ran. 3½l, nse	

**Winners/runners** 9-35 (25.7%); **P/L** +£8.93  
**Subsequent winners** Sprinter Sacre (1C, 174), Un De Sceaux (1H, 165, 2C, 174), Special Tiara (1C, 163), God's Own (4th, 2C, 170), Just Cameron (6th, 1C, 159), Sire De Grugy (6th, 1C, 170)

Four of last year's runners have won and returned RPRs of 170 or higher, so it was clearly a very decent renewal. That doesn't mean it will have any bearing on this year's race, though, as none of the first three are back and Douvan looks bombproof anyway.

### Cross Country Chase

<b>1D Any Currency</b> .....	<b>11-1</b>
2 Jossies Orders.....	15-8F
3 Bless The Wings.....	33-1
16 ran. 1l, 1¼l	

**Winners/runners** 9-62 (14.5%)  
**P/L** -£9.12  
**Subsequent winners** Any Currency (1C, 146), Quantitativeeasing (4th, 1C 135), Third Intention (5th, 1C, 154), Valadom (7th, 1C, 143), Dolatulo (9th, 1C, 136), Cantlow (11th, 3C, 148).

Double the strike-rate of last year and it's shame the veteran Any Currency was later disqualified due to a banned substance. It wasn't connections' fault and it would be great if he could set the record straight, but he is 14 now.

### Fred Winter Heap Hurdle

<b>1 Diego Du Charmil</b> .....	<b>13-2</b>
2 Romain De Senam.....	20-1
3 Coo Star Sivola.....	16-1
4 Missy Tata.....	10-1
22 ran. hd, ¾l, 3¾l	

**Winners/runners** 20-96 (20.8%) **P/L** -£11.55  
**Subsequent winners** Diego Du Charmil (2H, 151), Romain De Senam (1C, 111), Coo Star Sivola (2H, 148), Missy Tata (5H, 144), Messire Des Obeaux (7th, 3H, 146), Duke Street (9th, 1H, 133, 1F, 91), Jaleo (10th, 1H, 136), Harley Rebel (12th, 3H, 128), Paddys Runner (P, 1H, 126).

This was an excellent renewal. The first four home have won ten times between them since, while seventh-placed Messire Des Obeaux is a Grade 1 winner in his second season as a novice and going for the Neptune this time. Add Campeador, who was making a strong challenge when falling at the last and would have won a Grade A handicap at Leopardstown had he not done the same in December, and it's clear this was way above average.

### Champion Bumper

<b>1 Ballyandy</b> .....	<b>5-1</b>
2 Battleford.....	25-1
3 Bacardys.....	16-1
23 ran. nse, 2l	

**Winners/runners** 24-79 (30.4%)  
**P/L** -£2.60  
**Subsequent winners** Ballyandy (1H, 151), Battleford (1H, 133), Bacardys (1B, 136, 2H, 147), High Bridge (6th, 3H, 136), Augusta Kate (7th, 1B, 130, 1H, 126), Rather Be (9th, 2H, 129), Avenir D'Une Vie (12th, 1H, 133), Turcagua (15th, 1H, 139), Geordie Des Champs (18th, 4H, 139), Ballymalin (20th, 4H, 142), Spirit Of Kayf (22nd, 2H, 138)

Couldn't match the previous year's strike-rate, but that was a bit of an outlier and 30 per cent is well up to scratch. There haven't been many standout performances, though, so those who want to crab the form have an argument, but Ballyandy looked good when winning the Belfair Hurdle and has a fair chance in a very open Supreme Novices' Hurdle.

## Thursday

### JLT Novices' Chase

<b>1 Black Hercules</b> .....	<b>4-1C</b>
2 Bristol De Mai.....	4-1C
3 L'Ami Serge.....	8-1
9 ran. 3l, 1l	

**Winners/runners** 9-39 (23.1%)  
**P/L** +£2.54  
**Subsequent winners** Bristol De Mai (1C, 173), Three Musketeers (4th, 1C, 159), As De Mee (5th, 2C, 148), Outlander (F, 1C, 17), Garde La Victoire (F, 2C, 165), Zabana (U, 2C, 158)

A bit of a head-scratcher as the first and third have been desperately disappointing, but second-placed Bristol De Mai ran an RPR of 173 – huge for his age – when winning the Peter Marsh at Haydock in January. He's becoming an enigma but has each-way Gold Cup claims on that form. Other than him, the best horses failed to finish.

### Pertemps Final (heap hdl)

<b>1 Mal Dini</b> .....	<b>14-1</b>
2 Arpege D'Alene.....	14-1
3 If In Doubt.....	10-1
4 Taglietelle.....	14-1
24 ran. ¾l, hd, 1½l	

**Winners/runners** 13-110 (11.8%)  
**P/L** -£41.53  
**Subsequent winners** Arpege D'Alene (1C, 140), Our Kaempfer (1C, 152), Warriors Tale (11th, 1C, 125), Rolling Maul (13th, 1H 134, 1C, 137), All Hell Let Loose (16th, 1C, 122), Oscar Sam (17th, 1H, 147), Cup Final (P, 1H, 146), Kilfinchen Bay (P, 2C, 145), Missed Approach (P, 1C, 149)

There have been a few decent performances, but this is never a race that does well. Having said that, Arpege D'Alene's form in big fields (11293 with 13 or more runners) makes him of interest in the JT McNamara National Hunt Chase.

### Ryanair Chase

<b>1 Vautour</b> .....	<b>EvsF</b>
2 Valseur Lido.....	11-1
3 Road To Riches.....	7-1
15 ran. 6l, ½l	

**Winners/runners** 8-55 (14.5%)  
**P/L** -£21.75  
**Subsequent winners** Perfect Candidate (10th, 2C, 162), Splash Of Ginge (12th, 1H, 140), Mon Parrain (15th, 1C, 144), Capard King (P, 1C, 144)

A poor return and only two of the first six home have won since, but the ill-fated Vautour was in a league of his own. Champagne West jumped terribly and was pulled up, but those problems seem behind since he joined Henry de Bromhead and he's a Gold Cup contender.

### World Hurdle

<b>1 Thistlecrack</b> .....	<b>EvsF</b>
2 Alpha Des Obeaux.....	8-1
3 Bobs Worth.....	33-1
12 ran. 7l, 22l	

**Winners/runners** 12-40 (30%)  
**P/L** -£7.92  
**Subsequent winners** Thistlecrack (1H, 171, 3C, 178), Alpha Des Obeaux (2C, 145), Aux Pits Soins (5th, 1C, 141), Saphir Du Rheu (6th, 1C, 151), Tommy Silver (7th, 1H, 141), Frodon (8th, 6C, 150), Connetable (11th, 1C, 135), Sceaux Royal (12th, 2H, 159), Zubayr (13th, 1H, 115), Who Dares Wins (14th, 1F, 98, 1H, 149).

Another race that featured a winner in a league of his own, but Thistlecrack is unfortunately not going for gold after picking up a minor injury. If Alpha Des Obeaux can match the 170 RPR he achieved when second here he'll win the RSA, but he has a bit to prove after a bad bleed last time. There are others of interest at Cheltenham this year (Aux Pits Soins and Whisper) but not based on what they did here.

### Brown Advisory Plate (heap eh)

<b>1 Empire Of Dirt</b> .....	<b>16-1</b>
2 Tango De Juilley.....	33-1
3 Kings Palace.....	11-1
4 Full Shift.....	7-1
22 ran. 4l, 1¾l, 2½l	

**Winners/runners** 7-67 (10.4%)  
**P/L** -£22.55  
**Subsequent winners** Empire Of Dirt (1C, 160), Ballycasey (5th, 2C, 162), Astrad (6th, 1C, 140), Sew On Target (8th, 1C, 135), Art Mauresque (P, 2C, 157)

Empire Of Dirt won this very easily and has gone on to prove himself a Grade 1 performer with a serious chance in the Ryanair. Other than that the less said the better. There have been a couple of good performance from Ballycasey and the pulled-up Art Mauresque, but the return is surprisingly low and without the winner you'd say it was a bit of a shocker.

### Trull House Mares' Nov Hdle