

# And they're off at Musselburgh this weekend

✘ Musselburgh's highlight of the winter jumps season, the John Smith's Scottish Cheltenham Trials on Sunday 6 February 2011, has attracted a swathe of the country's top hurdlers and trainers with its £80,000 prize kitty.

Racecourse boss Bill Farnsworth is raising a glass to the news that sponsor John Smith's has signed up for another two years sponsorship with more to come if the event achieves challenging targets in terms of attracting race goers and top quality horses.

Top Lambourn trainer Nicky Henderson, hot on the heels of Paul Nicholls in the race for the jump trainers' title, returns to Musselburgh with four declared runners. The master of Seven Barrows saddled Eradicate to win the Scottish County Hurdle last year but tomorrow he will be aiming to win the John Smith's Scottish Triumph Hurdle with Titan De Sarti in the hands of Andrew Tinkler.

This highly regarded four year old has yet to win this season but his second to the Paul Nicholls newcomer Cedre Bleu at Newbury last month suggests he will be very hard to beat at Musselburgh. Henderson, who is flying up to the meeting with a party of owners, will be represented by Skint, Pipe Banner and Dark Lover in the supporting events and pick of this trio is Skint, whose second behind Ski Sunday at Kempton in mid-January gives him a clear chance of landing the Scottish Racing Novices Hurdle which opens the card at 1.30. The promising conditional jockey David Bass is in the saddle.

David Pipe has yet to send out a winner at Musselburgh, but the West Country trainer could end that barren spell with Hunterview in the £25,000 John Smiths' Scottish County Hurdle.

A close third behind Salden Licht at Exeter on New Year's Day, the front running Hunterview will be much better suited to Musselburgh's sharper contours and jockey Tom Scudamore excels at getting the fractions spot on.

A small but select field contest the John Smiths' Novices Chase, and the choice here will be the course winner Divers. The Ferdy Murphy trained gelding won well over fences at Carlisle in November in the hands of Graham Lee who has few superiors round Musselburgh.

General manager Bill Farnsworth said: "The John Smith's Scottish Cheltenham Trials is now well established on the racing calendar and we are delighted the brewer has extended their sponsorship for at least two years, possibly more.

"We have some very strong fields entered and the conditions are perfect for high quality winter jumps racing. Hopefully the race going community will back us by coming along on Sunday to see some Cheltenham-bound runners."

The going is good to soft and the forecast for Saturday and Sunday is to be dry with the wind dropping. Gates open at 11.30 with the first race off at 1.30pm and Channel 4 presenter Derek Thompson is making one of his regular appearances at Musselburgh in a hosting capacity.