

Weekend racing at Musselburgh



At just a touch under £90,000 Musselburgh is putting up record prize money for its feature jumps meeting of the season on Sunday with the John Smith's Scottish Cheltenham Trials.

Three £20,000 races and a supporting £12,000 race has caught the attention of leading stables from as far apart as Newmarket, Lambourn, Cheshire and North Yorkshire, with the indigenous Scottish stables poised to ensure the raiders don't disappear with the bulk of the booty.

Musselburgh has made a concerted effort to establish this fixture as genuine trials or prep meeting for the major Spring festivals, starting with Cheltenham and on to Aintree and the Grand National in April.

The John Smith's Scottish County Hurdle is billed as a run out for the top handicap hurdlers fancying a shot at Cheltenham's County Hurdle and Nicky Henderson will be looking to repeat his 2009 victory in this race when Eradicate won. The leading Lambourn trainer holds a powerful hand this year with Crystal Rock and Dubai Crest but Henderson will not have matters easy this time round.

Richard Fahey is sending his talented Ingleby Spirit in search of his third consecutive Musselburgh success, while Cumbrian trainer Nicky Richards is optimistic that Simply Ned will follow up last month's popular win in the valuable TurfTV Handicap Hurdle. Scottish trainers Jim Goldie and James Ewart are equally confident of a bold showing from New Year's Day winner Kaolak and Allow Me.

A decent run in the £20,000 John Smith's Scottish Triumph Hurdle could lead to a pop at the Triumph Hurdle proper at Cheltenham and this race has piqued the interest of

Newmarket's John Ferguson who is enjoying a fine season with his ex-Godolphin flat racers. His final choice between dual winners Asaid and Creekside will have to be seriously respected but the value could lie with the Malton-trained Blue Destination and John Quinn's four year old – a runner up in both his recent outings over hurdles – looks a progressive type poised to improve with experience.

Always keen to innovate, Musselburgh introduces a new race, the John Smith's Scottish Champion Steeple Chase Handicap and the best two miler collects the Bowes-Lyon Cup, named in honour of David Bowes-Lyon who recently retired as a director of Musselburgh Racecourse.

A tartan version of Cheltenham's Queen Mother Champion Chase, albeit a handicap, the race will feature razor sharp competition amongst the top northern stables. With front runners like Carrietau, Laterly, Storm Surge and Quito Du Tresor among the entries a strong gallop will be assured and the early pace could play to the advantage of Time Out. Langholm trainer James Ewart has already saddled the nine year old to score three times this season and Time Out's ability to act round sharp tracks and his proven stamina will both be in his favour.

Musselburgh Racecourse general manger, Bill Farnsworth, is predicting another cracking day of National Hunt action at the East Lothian course. He said: "This is the richest jumps fixture yet staged at Musselburgh and that is reflected in the quality of entries and the geographic spread of the stables heading our way.

"It sets the stage for a superb day on Sunday and I expect an old fashioned north/south tussle will make for very interesting racing. I won't be surprised if the furthest travelled trainers don't get it all their own way which can only be good for the paying race goer.

“We are grateful to John Smith’s for their ongoing support in building up this flagship fixture and we are in talks with the brewer to strengthen our relationship, with possibly other fixtures benefiting from their sponsorship.”

Gates open on Sunday at 11.30am and first race on the seven card meeting is at 1.30pm.