

Musselburgh to host best for Scottish Cheltenham Trials



Great opportunity to watch the best in the sport this Sunday.

Top quality fields for Musselburgh's £140,000 John Smith's Scottish Cheltenham Trials Day on Sunday 2 February 2014 will ensure a bumper crowd as the East Lothian course stages its first Listed jumps race.

Firmly established as a bona fide trials day for the Cheltenham Festival proper, the eight race fixture features five £20,000 races, including the Listed John Smith's Triumph Hurdle Trial.

The Musselburgh Racecourse general manager said Scottish racing fans had a great opportunity to see potential Cheltenham champions in action and that despite a forecast cold spell later this week, no weather issues are anticipated for Sunday's meeting.

He said: "The John Smith's Scottish Cheltenham Trials Raceday just gets better and better and gaining Listed status for the Scottish Triumph Hurdle Trial is confirmation that our hard work is paying off.

"Scottish racegoers really appreciate getting a close look at genuine contenders for the Festival and tend to follow their progress over the subsequent weeks and right through the Festival, so Musselburgh on Sunday is an exciting opportunity for jumps supporters to see quality performers in the flesh."

The class horse in the Pertemps Network Handicap Hurdle (Series Qualifier) is the Nicky Henderson-trained Whisper who has been raised 7lb for winning at Newbury towards

the end of December. He also holds an entry in the Welsh Champion Hurdle at Chepstow on Saturday but his champion trainer has plenty of back in the shape of Heronry, Malt Master and Mister Dillon. Monetary Fund, trained by in-form Venetia Williams is worth watching as the Herefordshire raider landed a nice prize over course and distance at the 2013 New Year's Day meeting.

John Quinn has his highly-rated Racing Pulse lined up for the Albert Bartlett Scottish Trial Novices' Hurdle (1.30pm) after he tasted defeat for the first time at Cheltenham on New Year's Day, while Paul Nicholls is represented by improving mare Tagrita and Donald McCain is triple-handed with Clondaw Hero, I Need Gold and Sir Mangan.

The two joint top-rated horses in the John Smith's Scottish Champion Chase (2.00pm) are Paul Nicholls-trained Domtaline and His Excellency, trained by David Pipe. Domtaline has rarely been unplaced in nine starts over fences while His Excellency, who carries the colours of Largs owner Jo Tracey, ran twice at last year's Cheltenham Festival where he notched a fine third behind Simonsig in the Arkle Challenge Trophy.

Calipto, co-owned by Chris Giles from Ayr, heads a quality entry for the John Smith's Scottish Triumph Hurdle Trial (2.30pm). Trained by Paul Nicholls, he is currently third favourite for the Triumph Hurdle following his impressive hurdling debut at Newbury in November. No less impressive, and also prominent in ante-post lists for Cheltenham, was John Quinn's Pearl Castle, who romped to victory at Doncaster last Friday. The Malton trainer has also entered Forced Family Fun, the winner of two of his four races over hurdles.

Paul Nicholls also has a strong hand in the Scottish Future Champions Novices' Chase (3.00pm) with Funny Star and Valco De Touzaine. Nicky Henderson is represented by Top Of The Range, the winner of his sole chasing start to date, while Brick Red landed the Scottish County Hurdle for Venetia Williams on this

card last February.

The John Smith's Scottish County Hurdle (3.30pm) features Sametegal, the winner of the Triumph Hurdle Trial at this meeting last year before finishing a terrific third in the real thing at Cheltenham. Strongpoint, trained in Larne by Stuart Crawford, will have his supporters as he has gained back-to-back impressive victories already at Musselburgh this season.

And Brian Ellison, who sends plenty of Flat and jumps horses to Musselburgh, may bid for glory with Yorkist who is bidding to extend his winning sequence to four for the Yorkshire trainer.

The CGA Scottish Foxhunter Chase (4.00pm) looks a hot affair and Special Portrait could be the one they all have to beat. Trained in Cumbria by Mark Hughes, he has won six point to points and eight hunter chases. Moscow Menace has won three points for his Galashiels connections as well as last year's Buccleuch Cup at Kelso under top amateur rider Jamie Hamilton.

Los Nadis and Divers were second and third respectively in this Conditional Jockeys' Trial Handicap Hurdle (4.30) 12 months ago. The pair, trained by Jim Goldie and Donald McCain, are old rivals and regulars at Musselburgh having occupied the same placings behind Call Box at the East Lothian track's New Year's Day meeting.

Gates open at 11.30am and first race is off at 1pm. Discounts are available when booking online at www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk

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