

Looking ahead to Cheltenham Trials Weekend at Musselburgh



This weekend is one of the biggest moments in Musselburgh Racecourse's calendar.

There is more than £260,000 of prize money available over the two days with champion trainers champing at the bit to get racing.

Trainers Paul Nicholls, Alan King, Charlie Longsdon and Donald McCain are all represented while Scottish trainer Lucinda Russell leads the homegrown challenge.

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to Musselburgh's Racecourse Manager about the newest race the £40,000 Bet365 Edinburgh National Handicap Chase which is being run over four miles. This is regarded as a preparation for the Grand National later this spring.

There's an exciting weekend of racing coming up [@MusselburghRace](#) Although he doesn't give racing tips Bill Farnsworth had lots to tell us! pic.twitter.com/tVHRbMid2f

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 1, 2017](#)

Bill Farnsworth said: "We like to try new things and the Edinburgh National will be the longest race ever staged at Musselburgh Racecourse. We usually have good ground, even in the winter, so this gives trainers a chance to run horses over four miles without the extra burden of facing soft or even heavy ground, which can be very demanding. With 20 entries it

has been well supported by owners and trainers.”

Top weight is the Paul Nicholls trained Just A Par which concedes up to 11lbs to his rivals and this class horse is partnered with young conditional jockey Harry Cobden, who makes his first visit to the East Lothian course.

Cheltenham-based Fergal O’Brien plans to send Alvarado, a horse with a real Grand National pedigree and which was runner up in last year’s Scottish Grand National at Ayr and was placed fourth in the 2014 and 2015 Aintree Grand Nationals.



In the day’s most valuable race, the £50,000 Bet365 Scottish County Hurdle (3.15) top weight is claimed by the Dan Skelton trained Optimus Prime, Somerset trainer Jeremy Scott could make a rare appearance at Musselburgh with form horse Unison, while shrewd punters could fancy Traditional Dancer and the partnership of trainer Iain Jardine and jockey Shane Shortall – the same combination which won this race last year with Shrewd.

In the Bet365 Scottish Triumph Juvenile Hurdle, Paul Nicholls has entered Cliffs of Dover which has won six out of his last seven starts over hurdles and which already holds an entry for the Triumph Hurdle at Cheltenham, while Royal trainer Charlie Longsdon sends The Queen’s horse, Forth Bridge, back to Musselburgh following its win over course and distance in December.

Nicky Henderson’s highly rated Charli Parcs, a strong winner at Kempton over Christmas, will be looking to make it three wins on the trot with the Lambourn trainer preferring

Musselburgh because “they always get decent ground there”.

Bill Farnsworth added: “With the new four mile Edinburgh National, the Scottish County Hurdle and Scottish Triumph Hurdle, no one can question our ambition for putting on high quality racing at Musselburgh. We are competing against Sandown on Saturday but we like to give the bigger tracks a run for their money and the new weekend format is something we can build on in the years ahead.”

On Sunday (5 Feb) Cheltenham trainer Neil Mulholland will fancy Peter The Mayo Man, the highest rated horse in the Sky Bet Supreme Scottish Trial Novices’ Hurdle, and which has won its last three races, while Nicky Henderson’s River Wylde won both its last outings at Ludlow.

In the Pertemps Qualifier (4.10) Nicky Henderson has Barry Geraghty booked for the ride on Cup Final, which won the same race last year under the same jockey before going on to win at the Punchestown Festival.

Gates open on Saturday at 11am and 11.30am on Sunday, and first race is 12.25pm and 1.40pm respectively.

For more information and to book tickets visit www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk