

Could we see Oisin Murphy in the saddle at the Cheltenham Festival?

Oisin Murphy is a name synonymous with the flat racing circuit, winning over 20 Group/Grade 1s all over the globe and lifting the British flat racing Champion Jockey title on three successive occasions between 2019 and 2021.

However, his reputation has taken something of a hit over the last couple of years. The 27-year-old brought the sport into disrepute when found to have breached covid restrictions after returning from Greece in 2020 before failing two breathalysers in May and October of 2021.

As a result, he handed in his license in December 2021 and was later slapped with a 14-month ban by the British Horseracing Authority (BHA). Murphy was granted back his license in February under very strict terms and will be watched closely for the next year, but he was welcomed back with open arms by fans and won on his first ride atop Jupiter Express in a six-furlong handicap at Chelmsford.

The Irish native fended off Godolphin's William Buick by the skin of his teeth to win the top jockey award in 2021 and it looks set to be another tight battle between the pair for this year's championship, with Buick the favourite in the [racing betting today](#) to retain his title at 1/2 and Murphy 7/4 to win back his crown.

However, before the race for the championship gets underway starting with Guineas weekend on May 6, there is mass speculation that we could see Murphy try his hand on the other sphere for the first time in his professional career – as the 27-year-old has also been granted a jumps racing license.

With the prestigious Cheltenham Festival rapidly approaching, rumours of Murphy picking up a ride at Prestbury Park are gaining momentum – especially with the new controversial whip rules striking fear into trainers that they could be left short of riders for the jumps racing showpiece.

Murphy wouldn't be the first predominantly flat jockey to have a booked ride at the Cheltenham, with the legendary 30-time Classic winner and 11-time Champion Jockey Lester Piggott winning the Birdlip Hurdle on Mull Sack at Prestbury Park in 1954 and Fran Berry winning the Grade 3 Coral Cup with Khayrawani in 1999, while Johnny Murtagh and Pat Smullen also contested at the Festival.

However, while he is an avid showjumper and initially wanted a career doing that before taking flat racing by storm – and even spent a lot of his time during his ban showjumping – it is unlikely Murphy is going to take a competitive mount over hurdles or fences anytime soon – especially not at a meeting like the Cheltenham Festival – as it would take thorough training for even someone of his quality.

Instead, if he is to get phone call from a jumps racing trainer, it will most likely be to book him for a ride in the Champion Bumper – a National Hunt flat race. The Grade 1 contest was last won by a flat jockey in 2002 when Jamie Spencer romped home on Pizarro, but if Murphy is thrown into the mix then his ride might gain some momentum in [Paddy's Cheltenham odds](#).



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