

Shorter distance but higher quality for Edinburgh Cup at Musselburgh

Shortening the distance of the £40,000 Edinburgh Cup at Musselburgh tomorrow (Sat 3 June) seems to have appealed to Middleham trainer Charlie Johnston who is triple-handed in the nine furlong handicap.

Musselburgh Racecourse general manager Bill Farnsworth revealed earlier that trimming the race from 12 furlongs (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles) to just 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ mile was done to attract a larger quality field of three year olds.

Farnsworth said: "At this time of year the pool of three year old horses who can run 12 furlongs is quite small so by reducing The Edinburgh Cup to nine furlongs, that little drop in distance could lead to a bigger quality field.

"By changing the distance the race now provides the ideal steppingstone to the Britannia Handicap for 3 year olds over 8f (1 mile) or the Golden Gates Handicap for 3 year olds over 10f (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ m) at Royal Ascot in mid-June."

Johnston, now operating with his sole name on the license, will be represented by Venetian, Lion Of War and Gareeb, who is partnered by stable jockey Joe Fanning.

Top-weight, under 9st 9lb, is Coco Jack from the Newmarket stable of George Scott, who has only had one previous runner –

without success – at Musselburgh, while Ian Williams-trained Dancing In Paris arrives in great heart having already won at Haydock and finished a close second at Sandown this spring.

Lightly-raced Old Smoke, from the Richard Fahey camp, wasn't beaten far in the London Gold Cup at Newbury recently while Keith Dalgleish's Iato's Angel was only just pipped over course and distance in a fillies' handicap in April.

The second £40,000 race, The Queen of Scots Fillies' Stakes, is Musselburgh's only Class 1 Listed Flat race of the season and the Musselburgh boss reckons this is probably the best race in Scotland for fillies and mares.

Heredia is the likely market-leader and trained in Wiltshire by Richard Hannon, she beat 27 rivals in last year's Buckingham Palace Stakes at Royal Ascot.

White Moonlight, representing Saeed bin Suroor, was a close runner-up in Group 2 company during the winter in Dubai, and Basil Martini, just the third runner at the track for Irish handler Joseph O'Brien, won a Group 3 contest at the Curragh last autumn.

The Edinburgh Cup Raceday, sponsored by Edinburgh Gin, is also Derby Day and Musselburgh's first race has been brought forward to the slightly earlier 1.15pm slot in support of the main Epsom classic, which is off at 1.30pm and will be shown throughout the East Lothian track.

"Derby Day is a huge day for racing and it adds an extra dimension to our own fixture, with an extra buzz around the place and everyone gathered in front of our big screens," added Farnsworth. "For those unable to be at Epsom itself, Musselburgh offers a great experience to soak up the unique atmosphere that turf racing creates and we expect a big crowd tomorrow."

Gates open on 3 June at 11.30am, the first race is at 1.15pm

and the last race at 4.50pm. Tickets will cost £40 on the day for adults, while children aged 17 and under go for free. Those who book before June 2 will save £5. Concession tickets will cost £25 on the day for those who are eligible.

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