**PREVIEW**

**KIMBLEWICK POINT-TO-POINT**

**KINGSTON BLOUNT**

**Saturday 1st April 2016**

The second meeting of the season at Kingston Blount – on Saturday 1st April – has attracted exactly 100 entries for its seven races, all of which have a possible double-figure field, with the first event on an imaginatively framed card taking place at 2.00pm. Local trainer Alan Hill confirmed on Monday morning, “The going is Good, Good to Soft in places, mostly under the wood. We’re spiking and rolling the course today and it’s perfect racing ground – I’d run any horse of mine, whether they prefer top of the ground or soft.”

Before the point-to-point races, proceedings open with a charity flat race at 1.00pm, for which meeting secretary Helen Jackson gave me some information earlier. “It’s sponsored by Tim Underwood’s company Print Concern in aid of the Air Ambulance,” said Helen. “It’s open to anyone – riders and horses – with no experience under rules and is a flat race over about six furlongs. There’s an entry fee of £25 and a commitment to raise a minimum of £250 for charity.” Seven local riders are taking part, including the sponsor’s daughter Sarah Braclick, who laughed, “I’ve been riding work for Dad since I was 12 and I’ve got all the gear but no idea!”

Feature race is the Philip Scouller Memorial Southern Grand National, over about four miles. It is run in memory of the late trainer-rider and pointing legend, who enjoyed so much success on this course, and has attracted thirteen entries. Aston Rowant-based Alan Hill is likely to have two runners – Lord Ashton of Hyde’s Cup winner Supreme Danehill with son Joe on board and Hunters Lodge for owner-rider Gareth Henderson. Alan told me of the former, “I’ve freshened him up since two quick runs in Hunter Chases and we’ll try and repeat last year’s glorious victory here! He stays well.” The local favourite won’t have it all his own way, however. The useful Warden Hill ran in the Cheltenham Foxhunters last time and will appreciate the return to pointing, Hi Vic made a winning return between the flags at Garthorpe and proven stayer Green Winter will be a big danger if he returns to the form he showed last year.

One of the more intriguing events on the card is the Ashley Wilde Group Conditions Race for eight-year-olds and over, who haven’t won since November 2013 and run over two miles five furlongs. It offers chances to eleven horses who’ve struggled to get their head in front, although this year’s renewal has attracted several formerly types, including Catch Tammy – who looks the pick on Stratford Hunter Chase form – for South Midlands Area Secretary Ilona Barnett. His rider Claire Hardwick is optimistic of a good run, saying, “He’s been aimed at this race and, while it’s first time out, he’s been galloping and will be fit. I rode him last season and he’s an absolute dude.”

Atlantic Roller is an intended runner for owner-rider and Sandhurst Area Secretary Caroline Dennis. “I may bring him out quickly after his seasonal reappearance at Penshurst last weekend, where he was seventh in the Ladies Open,” she advised – the ten-year-old is also entered in the Confined, but more likely to run over the shorter trip. No No Bingo would have a chance on his best form if none the worse for a two year absence from the track and, while it may only have been a Restricted in which I Believe was second here at the previous meeting, at least he is in form.

The card opens with the Oakman Inns Confined Race, which has 15 entries, prominent among which is multiple course winner Merrydown Vintage. Owner-trainer Ray Fielder admitted earlier, “I’d like to run but it depends on the ground and I haven’t spoken to (jockey) Phil York. He’s three from three on the course and ran out of his skin when third at High Easter behind two highly-rated horses – he was flying at the finish.” Exclusive Rights is the form pick based on her second in the Subaru Restricted final last season, Woodfleet is improving and ran well on his reappearance at Parham, and Bayley’s Dream has already won this campaign, taking a Novice Riders event at Thorpe Lodge in January.

Two stand out among the 13 entries in the Field Seymour Parkes Novice Riders Race. One is Tempelpirate, 2014’s champion horse and a winner of 16 out of his last 18 points for his irrepressible owner-trainer, Tim Underwood, and the mount of Izzy Marshall, who won on him last time at Parham. “He’s in great nick and definitely goes,” laughed Tim. “What more is there to say about him?” The other is Full Trottle, who has won three Opens this year in the hands of Johnny Bailey, but may take his place here with trainer Laura Thomas who – like Izzy Marshall – is chasing the National Ladies Novice Championship.

Alan Hill may run Horizontal Speed but admitted, “I don’t think we can beat Tempelpirate, while another potential – but not certain – runner is Claire Hardwick’s Creepy, a winner last time at Revesby Park. “I’d love to find a race for (owner-jockey) Charlie Dee,” smiled Claire. “They’ve been third twice then Creepy sulked in a big field at Barbury.” However, the horse may run at Clifton-on-Dunsmore on Sunday.

There are two Maidens on the card. The first is the Guy Luck Memorial Race over two miles five furlongs for four, five and six year olds, which has attracted 13 entries. Alan Hill is keen on the chances of Big Time Frank. “He’ll hopefully build on his last run,” the trainer told me, “Where he was beaten by a good horse of Gerald Bailey’s. He’s in good order and improving race-by-race.” Ginuwinefizz and Le Fou Royal are the two in the race with the best form, having each been placed four times (the latter starting at a short price each time), so it may be better to concentrate on one of the dark horses.

Thomas Gallagher has already been successful this season with horses that have come from Martin Cullinane and has entered another here in the shape of Going Away. “She’s a nice filly, but we’ve only just got her,” admitted Thomas. “She’s run in a few points in Ireland so she’ll be fit.” Pauline Harkin also has an ex-Irish mare, Burrows Spring, entered. “She didn’t like the soft ground in Ireland but is a very nice French bred who’s been going well at home,” said Pauline. Claire Hart relies on Earcomestom, fourth in the Barbury bumper on his racecourse debut. “We love him,” she enthused. “He’s had a break since Barbury and is just a baby – he’s still growing.”

The second Maiden, sponsored by Norcal Vets of Thame, is for all-comers and run over the full three mile trip. 18 horses have been entered – the highest on the card. Alan Hill is well-known for his “milk bottle” horses (those expected to run well first time out) and this season’s is Changeofluck, formerly trained by wife Lawney under rules. “He ran well first time for us at Ascot and was then second at Fakenham, then ran a few average races as he had a bug,” explained Alan for the horse’s apparent regression. “We’ve freshened him up and he’s in fantastic form – we hope he’s rejuvenated.”

Other local horses who are less exposed include Thomas Gallagher’s Chestey – “The ground was way too quick for him at Barbury and he’ll appreciate the easier going” and Tim Underwood’s Kicker King, although the Beedon-based handler was hardly exuding confidence in saying, “ I bought him from Martin Oliver but I don't know why – he’s got no form that stands up!” The six-year-old will run in “Whichever maiden race looks weaker.” Arcal Fifty, Alittlebitless and Aunty Joan all have placed form this season, Distant Rain would have had he not tipped up close home on both his runs, while Magic Symphony is worthy considering on his 2015/2016 form. And keep an eye on Michael Kehoe’s Bazukhov – the trainer’s horses usually go well first time and the horse will be fit following two fourths in Irish points over the winter.

The card closes with a competitive-looking Restricted, sponsored by RC & WM Newman trading as PC Turner of Farnborough, for which 17 have been entered. Like so many of these contests, it’s going to be hard to call if the majority of the highly-rated entries stand their ground, and several trainers I spoke to emitted positive vibes:

**Alan Hill (Allie Beag)**

“She was going well when she fell here last time. I blame myself for running her over two miles five – she was run off her feet in the first mile, so made jumping errors and didn’t settle. Then she was badly baulked at the ditch and unseated. She’ll prefer the three-mile trip and I hope we can make amends.”

**Tim Underwood (Ballyfore Cross)**

“His win at Parham was in a slowly-run race and the second had form under rules. He’s bone idle – we call him ‘The Hunter’ at home as he’s so laid-back, so we’ll put cheekpieces on to rev him up. He needs a strong rider like Yorky (Phil York).”

**Pauline Harkin (Glory Hunter)**

“He was unlucky not to be placed at Brafield-on-the-Green where he settled nicely. He’s giving us a good feel at home.”

**Claire Hardwick (Ticinese)**

“He’s got stacks of ability and I was delighted with his run at Thorpe Lodge, where he made a mistake four out then did the splits at the next, but I rode him off the pace here last time when he fell and was winded, but would have finished third. He’s no worldbeater but will win a Restricted. Jordan Nailor rides – he’s schooled him loads.”

**Thomas Gallagher (Top Man Tim)**

“He’s improved since he won here last time (where he came with a devastating late rattle to take a maiden) and we’re hoping for a good run.”

And those are just the comments from trainers I spoke to earlier. Throw in the highly-regarded Teeton Power and Lively Article (a Brafield-on-the-Green winner last time) and the improving Demood, Mazurati and Royal Beekeeper, and you have the makings of a cracking contest!

Kingston Blount is an undulating course, with a steep climb after the 5(13)th and a downhill run before the 6(14)th. It is very well cared for with watering available and the ground is rarely firm, even at later meetings. Car parking is good, with a downhill exit if wet. There is good viewing from the slope above the finish.

The course is located at Kingston Grove, Kingston Blount OX39 4SG, approximately eight miles NW of High Wycombe and well signposted off the B4009 towards Chinnor, leaving the M40 at J6. For safety reasons, we do not advise leaving the M40 at J5 as the descent down Kingston Hill is both narrow and steep. For the same reason, please do not try to park on Kingston Hill.

Admission is £10 per person, with under 18s going free. There is a Reserved Car Park, at a cost of £40 per car, subject to availability.

The first race is at 2.00pm and there will be a parade of hounds after the fourth race.

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