**PREVIEW**

**KINGSTON BLOUNT RACING CLUB POINT-TO-POINT**

**KINGSTON BLOUNT**

**Saturday 4th March 2017**

90 entries have been received for the seven-race card at the first meeting of the season on Saturday 4th March at Kingston Blount, with proceedings commencing at 1.00pm. The Oxfordshire course, which will hold five race days in total this year – including hosting the Anglo-Irish Challenge on Friday 26th May – is always popular with owners, trainers and jockeys. Clerk of the Course Stewart Nash and his team do their best to provide optimum racing conditions and this year is no exception. “It’s a strong entry with lots of quality horses and we look forward to some competitive racing,” Stewart told me earlier.

New national Ladies Open sponsors Skinners hold the latest qualifier for the final of their series, which is held at Stratford on Friday 9th June. It’s definitely a case of quality over quantity here, for the nine entries include prolific veteran and course winner (and former Champion Hurdle second) Khyber Kim and four horses who have looked highly impressive between the flags this winter in Karinga Dancer, Top Smart, Vedettariat and Vesperal Dream.

Top Smart looked even better than last year when scoring impressively from Vedettariat on his seasonal reappearance, although the latter’s trainer Tom Ellis is confident of reversing the Horseheath form given easier conditions. “He jumped horrifically at Horseheath,” said Tom. “And he wants soft ground – we’ve won twice and been second on ground that doesn’t suit. He’s very decent and had excellent form in Ireland.” Owner-trainer Laura Thomas has scored twice on Karinga Dancer this season, and could easily have been three from three had the pair not missed a marker at Black Forest Lodge, but running plans are ground-dependent.

Connolly’s Red Mills is the other national sponsor represented at the meeting. Their Intermediate Race, which qualifies the top four horses for the final at Cheltenham on Friday 5th May, has attracted 13 potential runners. The form horse is Pauline Harkin’s Exclusive Rights, second in the Restricted final at Stratford last year and a good second last time at Brocklesby Park on ground that didn’t suit. “I’m hoping to bring her,” confirmed Pauline, “But I hope the ground isn’t as soft as forecast. I was delighted with her last run and she likes the track.” Joan Johnston’s Subtitle is an interesting runner – the ex-Irish 11-year-old’s form figures may not inspire, but he ran a cracker in a hot Open at Horseheath last time out. Francesca Nimmo’s Clondaw Island has won impressively here in the past, Peeping Thom has some useful form last year and – from entries outside the area – Sava Bridge is consistent and Dream Doc had good form in Ireland.

Only four have been entered for the Volvo XC90 Mens Open, but they include another prolific veteran in the shape of Consigliere, as well as the in-form Full Trottle for Laura Thomas. The Barbury handler is “Pretty positive we’ll run. I wouldn’t want to give away seven pounds to Consigliere, but at level weights we’ll give him a run for his money!” David Kemp’s useful Master Workman and Tim Underwood’s Golden Crisp, a definite runner, according to his exuberant owner-trainer, complete the line-up. “He was going to be my first ride of the season,” said the 69-years young Tim, whose stated aim is to ride a winner at 70. “But I had a fall last week – I ducked under a branch, came off and hurt my back.”

Racing opens at 1pm with the two mile five furlong Maiden for four, five and six year olds, sponsored again by Michael Avery – part owner of 25-time winner and local favourite Start Royal – on behalf of the Brentham Cricket Club, which has attracted 13 entries. Gerald Bailey’s Seamusjay is top-rated following his Chaddesley Corbett second, while Tom Ellis is quietly confident in the chances of seasonal debutant Ginuwinefizz, placed twice last year and unlucky when carried out at Mollington on his final start. “He’s in good form at home and has been ready to go for a while,” advised the in-form Tom. “He was a bit of a lunatic when we got him and is still a bit quirky, but has a lot of scope and is a good jumper who’s been galloping well. He’s got to go left-handed.

The three-mile Maiden – sponsored by The French Horn at Sonning – sees an entry of 17. The Ellis yard has another live contender here in Bilzic, whose form under rules for Dan Skelton looks decent in this company. “He ran well behind (useful) Neumond at Chaddesley Corbett,” Tom told me, “Then didn’t respect the fences at Cottenham. I hope he’ll go close.” A dark horse here could be Top Man Tim, representing Shenley trainer Thomas Gallagher who is enjoying a great start to the year and who has come from Martin Cullinane – like the yard’s promising mare Lostin A Fog. “He lost his confidence in Ireland,” admitted Thomas. “But he’s capable of winning a Maiden and, if he runs well, I’d be delighted.”

This race looks a decent contest based on ratings, with plenty showing consistent form and holding a chance. South Midlands-based contenders include Francesca Nimmo’s Alittlebitless, who has been knocking on the door and was second at Larkhill last time, Claire Hardwick’s Thorpe Lodge second Middleton’s Minx, bidding to be a debut success for Sam Canning, Steve Barry’s Spessartine and Karen Lawther’s Lucky To Be Alive. Raiders from other areas with chances include Phil York’s Cottenham runner-up Miss North Light, the consistent Sunglasses Ron and the improving Skiptothegoodbit.

Cub Cadet sponsor the Kingston Blount Club Members Conditions Race, for which the first horse past the post owned by a graduate of Oxford University takes the historic Bullingdon Cup. 18 have been entered, of whom three are rated over 100 and three are on 99! Philip Rowley’s Hazel Hill is unbeaten in points in Britain and may bid for his seventh consecutive success, while Nick Wright’s It Was Me is a classy Open horse at best and is dropping in grade here and Ray Fielder’s Merrydown Vintage looked better than ever when scoring at Higham last time out.

Tim Underwood’s multiple winner (and 2014 leading horse) Tempelpirate may make a quick reappearance after Sunday’s Badbury Rings second, his ebullient trainer saying, “He went out in the field earlier and was jumping and kicking, rolling and bucking. He definitely runs again this weekend – at Kingston Blount or Charing. He won’t mind the ground – he goes on anything – and Yorky (Phil York) will ride.”

Lawney Hill Racing sponsors the Restricted race over the distance of two miles five furlongs. 16 entries have been received and the race looks competitive, with half the field rated in the eighties. Three come here on the back of a Maiden success last time out, including Brocklesby Park winner Demood, whose trainer Richard Pringuer was cautiously optimistic. “She’ll go if she works well this week,” he told me. “She’s come out of her last race well and I’d be quite hopeful if she runs like she did then, but it’s a step up in class.” Also hopeful is Pauline Harkin, who said of her Glory Hunter, “He’s had the virus but he’s well now, so fingers crossed… He’ll come on for his last run.”

Top-rated after a win and a place at Barbury is Tim Underwood’s Cheltenham Mati, who is also entered at Godstone. “I’m leaning towards Kingston Blount,” admitted Tim, “Because while softer ground will help as she stays forever, she doesn’t like it tacky and it doesn’t get holding here – you can gallop through it.” Zak Baker has ridden the mare so far this season but Phil York is likely to be on board on Saturday, Tim saying “Write than Yorky can do the weight – he’s not too fat to do eleven stone three!”

Local trainer Alan Hill, who is based just a mile and a half away (less as the crow flies) in the neighbouring village of Aston Rowant confirmed “I walked the course at 9am on Monday morning – the going is Good, Good to Soft in places and we’ve had a couple of hours of light rain since. With the forecast rain, I wouldn’t be surprised if it goes to Good to Soft – or even Soft, but we’re hoping for better weather on Saturday.”

As ever, Alan is hoping to be well represented at his “home” meeting and has at least one entry in every race on Saturday’s card. He talked me through his prospects.

**1.00 Young Horse Maiden – Big Time Frank**

His Milborne St Andrew form is working out well and he’s improved since. I’ll keep him in young horse races for experience, as I’m not sure he needs three miles yet. We’ll pop him out, let him roll, and see what happens.

**1.35 Open Maiden – Harris Garden**

I think he’s good but we’re still walking on thin ice with him and I won’t be confident until he’s jumped off. This is his third year in the yard and we’ve never had a major problem, just minor niggles. He ran well under rules, has done a tremendous amount of work and jumps well. His owner Hugh Jarvis – my assistant trainer – is besotted with him and rides him 49 days out of 50!

**2.10 Conditions Race – Billie Magern or Horizontal Speed**

One will run for owner Gareth Henderson and the other will go to Godstone. We’ll probably run Billie Magern, whose form is better this year than last.

**2.45 Ladies Open – Vesperal Dream**

Owner Victoria Pendleton is surfing in Costa Rica at the moment but back on Friday. The plan is for her to ride but it’s ground-dependent – I’d rather run him on good or firmer.

**3.20 Mens Open – Consigliere**

It’s 100% that he runs. I rode him myself this morning and he’s in rude health. Even at his age, his enthusiasm is great and he likes the course.

**3.55 Restricted – Allie Beag**

I’m very much looking forward to running her. The Ampton form has worked out well and she won more easily than the form says. She’s light-framed, so I didn’t want to run her too soon and – although they say never back a Maiden winner first time in a Restricted, I’m hoping they’re wrong!

**4.30 Intermediate – Pride Of Parish**

I’d probably put him down as my nap. He’s in tremendous form – (son) Joe schooled him last week and he was awesome. He’s well in himself and has got fire in his belly since his injury last year. I’d like to get him qualified to run him in the final at Cheltenham – that’s his long-term target.

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 to all meetings this season at Kingston Blount is £10 per person – under 18s go free. Entry to the reserved car park is £40 per car, subject to availability. Pedestrian entry is also £10. We remind you that there is no longer any parking in the area over the road adjacent to the horsebox park.

The first race is at 1.00pm.

For more information, visit [www.kimblewickraces.co.uk](http://www.kimblewickraces.co.uk), follow us on Twitter @KimblewickRaces or join us on Facebook at Kimblewick Races.