

January 08

Firstly, here's wishing you all a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year and if the latter is aided by a winner or two in our colours then so much the better. Let's not be greedy - even one win would be nice!

Doubtless everybody was disappointed with Ballyshan's run at Bangor on December 29th, none moreso than Nigel. Like me he thought that this was a race that was certainly within Sean's capabilities and indeed we were mentally congratulating ourselves in advance for selecting the Bangor option over Chepstow and Haydock. The make up of the race, the weight he was carrying, the ground and the prize money all combined to delude us as to how clever we were! Not for the first time, though, nobody had told the horse and a fairly flat performance on the day left our best laid plans in tatters.

What went wrong? Well, certainly nothing that we can immediately pinpoint. David England felt that he wants ground even softer than he found at Bangor (officially good to soft with soft patches) and although there maybe a realistic preference for soft/heavy, I don't feel that the ground should have been a major factor. The plain fact is that he performed with little zest, running a bit flat and jumping indifferently with the result that he didn't really threaten to get on terms in the last mile and 5th of 9, beaten 20 lengths by the 33/1 winner, wasn't at all what we had in mind. Token prize money of £281 probably doesn't cover the transport costs, but hope springs eternal so reminding ourselves that they're not machines we'll hope for a bit more excitement and possibly a greater return next time up.

But where and should it be another hurdle or a novice chase? Having spoken to Nigel we're likely to enter him for both and see how the entries look, what the ground's like and how he handles fences on the schooling ground. He's already schooled perfectly well over fences giving grounds for optimism that his first, disastrous attempt at fences at Taunton was a "one-off". Hopefully on genuinely deep ground and with most chases run at a slightly slower pace his stamina and need to get his toe in will come more to the fore. Also his hurdles handicap mark (120, but effectively ran off 117 at Bangor with David's 3lb claim), poses a problem in its own right as 0-120 races will see him as top weight but better class, more valuable opportunities inevitably throw up tougher opposition. So possibly the novice chase option, albeit now as a 10 YO, could prove to be the more potentially rewarding route. He's perfectly fine after Bangor and, weather permitting, should be out again before the end of the month.

For those members who are interested in a 3rd horse I still have no firm news but we are pursuing, in Ireland, a 4 YO gelding by Flemensfirth and I'll hopefully be able to tell you more in the next week or so.

Best wishes until the next time.

Regards,

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