

January 07

Before too many racing days are ripped from the 2007 calendar I'll wish all Club members a very happy and healthy New Year, both from myself as Jump For Fun "head lad" and all the team at Grange Hill Farm stables. Having said that, it's not been the most auspicious start to the year in a racing sense, has it? Recent runs for both our horses have failed to raise the pulse rate and we'll certainly be looking for something slightly more exciting and fun-filled over the months ahead.

I'll try and reprise the season to date for both Ballyshan and Ace Of Clubs individually later in this newsletter, but suffice to say that their somewhat lack-lustre appearances to date have been somewhat symptomatic of the stable form generally. You don't need me to tell you that the yard has been very quiet across the last few weeks during which time the winner: runner ratio has collapsed from a healthy 25% to a less impressive 15%. Although nothing shows up on trach washes and blood tests there is almost certainly some form of low grade respiratory virus present as although some horses have been running all the way to the line the majority just haven't been seeing their race out. There's no magic remedy, but the very mild winters don't help and one almost yearns for a reasonable cold snap to kill off many of the equine bugs that loiter in this sort of atmosphere. As it is the number of runners from the stable tends to tell its own story. There have been comparatively few of late and the autumn flow of winners has dried to a trickle.

The reduction in the number of runners is understandable with so many under-performing at the race track as it would be a retrograde step to overface them when they're "wrong". This, however, is the big imponderable for the trainer as many of the horses, including ours, look fine and work well enough at home but simply don't deliver when going racing. It's been very frustrating, but as with all problems of this nature it will come right and hopefully the autumn glut will return in the spring.

Meanwhile, what of the Jump For Fun beasts?

Ballyshan

Having waited patiently for Sean's return to the race course, the more so since a novice chasing career was eagerly anticipated by us all, it was particularly deflating to witness his debut over the larger obstacles at Taunton where he was eventually pulled up before the second last. As is often the case, there were explanations for this disappointing performance, one immediate and one subsequent.

Although he'd schooled well over fences at home a mistake at the second totally knocked his confidence and thereafter he never had a cut at any of his fences and looked anything but a natural jumper of the larger obstacles. Not really having had a race at Taunton, Nigel opted to revert to hurdles at Chepstow just after Christmas but his jumping was equally wanting over timber, particularly in the second half of the race, and he finished tailed off looking as though he hadn't much enjoyed the experience. It transpired that he was very sore on returning home and he's subsequently had an injection in his sacro-iliac and his hocks and this will hopefully bring about an improvement. Even when he was running so consistently last season he could never lay claim to being a convincing jumper of obstacles so the thought is that if the vets can find the key to whatever it is that's discomforting him then this should bring about a distinct improvement. As it is, he's still working away in the mornings and even gave a buck and a squeal after his 3 canters today(Tuesday) so will be

ready to run again fairly soon. He'll stay over hurdles for the immediate future and may well go back over fences if he's seen to be enjoying himself and his confidence returns alongside. Expect to see him again, all being well, towards the end of the month.

Ace Of Clubs

Ace's apparent deterioration in form from his 2 bumper runs to his first 2 novice hurdles very much mirrors the stable performance across the period. One mark of improvement from his second hurdles start at Exeter compared to his first at Wincanton lay in his jumping, but he was another who didn't see out the final half mile at the Devon track. The main thing to remember is that he's only 4 (5 now) and as such he's still got a lot of strengthening to do before he's the finished article. He continues to please at home and will have another run soon (entered at Kempton on Saturday and Newbury Wednesday) after which he'll have a handicap mark which should be an attractive one once the yard starts to come right again. Nobody should give up on him. He, like Ballyshan, will win races when right and fully developed.

Stable Visit

As is customary we'll organise a pre-Cheltenham gathering on the Naunton gallops to listen in rapt silence to Nigel's words of wisdom and hopefully hear what (not) to back at the Festival. The date I've earmarked is Friday March 2nd and you might like to diary this and also make a note that there's racing at Newbury in the afternoon. Assuming sufficient numbers we could make a day of it but I'll be back in touch on this front.

Membership

Lastly, an update on the Club's continuing development. It was gratifying to see from first year renewals that most members would appear to be broadly happy with what they're getting as only 3 of the original "cast" decided not to renew. This slight decrease in numbers has been more than negated by recent additions in the shape of Dave Kelly from Mansfield, Gerda Hayes from Malmesbury, Paul Tooley from Gorleston, Ken Smy from the wilds of Kent and Bob Howes from outer Cumbria. Thus current paid up numbers are 33, still a little way short of being able to take on a third horse, but moving in the right direction.

Mention must be made of Ken Smy and wife who shortly after joining up made the long journeys to Taunton and Chepstow to see Ballyshan cover himself in anything but glory. It can only get better Ken! And the rest of us too, come to that. Here's to an upturn and a winner or two over the weeks and months ahead.

Best wishes to you all meanwhile, especially Joan Butler in Worcester who's recovering from a fractured pelvis after doing an impression of Ballyshan with a passing car. If you were a horse, Joan, the trainer would have you doing 3 canters up the all weather by now!

Best regards,

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