

May 07

With the official end of the 06/07 N.H. season it seems an appropriate time to look back at what the last few months have delivered both for the Twiston-Davies stable generally and the JFF membership in particular. With most of the yard's horses now out at grass and the 2 club horses certainly out of training across the summer we can take a quick look back as well as indulging in a bit of star gazing for the 07/08 season in terms of what it might deliver.

06/07

Although it had its moments, my overriding feeling as I look back across the winter months is one of general disappointment. A season that began with high hopes for Ballyshan in a novice chase campaign and Ace Of Clubs building on the promise of his initial bumper run ended with the original hopes and plans for both horses going somewhat awry.

As you know, Ballyshan had only the one run over fences and it probably wouldn't be an overstatement to describe this as a disaster. As ever hindsight is a wonderful thing, but maybe Taunton wasn't the ideal track to introduce him to fences. Be this as it may the basic facts are that his delayed return from summer in Ireland due to intermittent lameness/back problems coincided with a marked decline in our stable's form and most of the Twiston-Davies inmates across that period were performing moderately at best. Add to this the fact that Ballyshan has his own way of getting from one side of an obstacle to the other (in short he's never been a "natural", even over hurdles) and maybe the levels of expectancy were on the high side. However, he'd schooled perfectly adequately at home so his apparent dislike of the larger obstacles at Taunton came as a bit of a shock leaving us to ponder whether he simply wasn't likely to take to fences or that most of the horses, including him, were simply "wrong" at the time.

For what it's worth I believe we should give him another try over fences next year although not until he has his required soft ground, which we now all know is essential for him whatever race he runs in. He simply must have it soft, so much so that it's pointless running him on ground any quicker as he does give the impression of having a back problem that's exacerbated on faster ground.

Returned to hurdles after the Taunton race, Ballyshan's next outing at Chepstow was equally disappointing when he was tailed off with top weight in a 3m h'cap hurdle, but he then ran much better, in my opinion anyway, over a trip too short at the same track when a staying-on 6th of 8. Although the stable was still struggling to regain some form there was sufficient encouragement for the members who journeyed to Kempton in March when he produced a gutsy front-running performance to land a nice prize and give us all a boost. Unfortunately he wasn't able to build on this when, after a prolonged dry spell that took him to the brink of being roughed off, softer ground manifested itself at Perth and we gave him one more outing before his holidays. Only Gerald & Denise Massey from Yorkshire and Joanne Nicholson from the borders made it to Scotland, but must have been left wondering why they bothered as almost without exception the yard's runners at the Perth Festival ran deplorably. Certainly Ballyshan's run, where to my mind he was beaten even after jumping the second, was too bad to be true and smacked of a horse under a bacterial cloud.

So, in a nutshell 5 runs for Ballyshan across the season with one undisputed highlight (and £9K

prizemoney) to almost erase the four disappointments. He's going back to Ireland for his summer holidays and won't be back at Naunton until around September time as there's no point in getting him ready until the ground eases, which is unlikely to be before the end of November.

Ace Of Clubs began his season with another promising bumper run behind his quite highly regarded stablemate Golden Child at Worcester before embarking on a novice hurdle campaign. In his first race at Wincanton he made an early mistake which rather frightened him and then everything happened too quickly, but he learnt from this and his subsequent run at Exeter where, although beaten a long way, he jumped a lot better. Sadly, as you know, he then broke down quite badly at Stratford when in the process of running a promising race over 2m 6f. He'll miss most, if not all, of next season because of the tendon injury and remains of horse with potential when he gets back on a racecourse, but as we are all aware, there are no short cuts in the healing process.

So, one way and another, it wasn't the most auspicious or exciting of seasons, but such are the vagaries of N.H. racing and while these events test everyone's patience there is still much to potentially look forward to with both horses.

The way in which fortune seemed determined to bypass Jump For Fun this year also reflected itself in the stable generally for, after a golden autumn when they seemingly could barely saddle a loser, the flow of winners dried to a trickle. A final tally of 60 winners was certainly below what was hoped for at the start of the campaign, but 2 separate periods when it looked very much as though a low-grade virus had taken up residence, wasn't exactly conducive to success on the track. Hopefully next season will be healthier all round.

07/08

All being well Ballyshan will be back in action once we get some proper jumping ground - hopefully towards the back end of the calendar year.

Ace Of Clubs certainly won't be seen again until February at the earliest as he'll be given a full 12 months off and I'll let you know of his progress as we go along. At the time of writing he's coming towards the end of his enforced box rest and he'll also be going to Ireland for the summer if he gets the veterinary green light.

As far as a possible 3rd club horse is concerned, none of the members gave this concept the thumbs down and we're therefore looking at the sales across the coming months (Doncaster end May, Goffs early June) to see if we can find a suitable addition in the bargain basement. Obviously any additional membership income would be very welcome in this context, but being realistic there hasn't been too much going on of late to encourage our numbers to swell much above the current level. As I write we number 28 - small is beautiful, but a few more wouldn't go amiss!

I hope you all enjoy what is forecast to be another glorious summer, but may it start raining early in the autumn and absolutely bucket down across the winter months.

Best wishes meanwhile.

BOB SIMS

H: 01442 842955

M: 07871 571054