

CHELTENHAM RACECOURSE MEDIA RELEASE

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DARTNALL HOPING FOR HAPPY NEW YEAR AT CHELTENHAM WITH EXMOOR RANGER

KNOCKARA BEAU AIMING TO STRIKE IN DIPPER NOVICES' CHASE

Meeting: *New Year's Day*

Date: *Friday, January 1, 2010*

Gates Open: *10.30am*

First Race: *12.30pm*

Admission prices from £10 (in advance). Accompanied children aged under 18 are admitted FREE of charge, while FREE parking is available.

Go to www.cheltenham.co.uk for further information

Cheltenham welcomes in the New Year with a quality seven-race card on Friday, January 1, the highlight of which is the £50,000 Grade Three victorchandler.com Handicap Chase (2.10pm).

The two mile, five furlong contest has attracted a classy entry of 31 which includes last season's Listed Jewson Novices' Handicap Chase victor **Chapoturgeon**, who was fourth in the £150,000 Boylesports.com Gold Cup at the Boylesports International on December 12.

North Devon trainer Victor Dartnall is hopeful that he can get 2010 off to a winning start with **Exmoor Ranger**, who ran on strongly to land a handicap chase at Newbury at the end of November.

The seven-year-old has a choice of the victorchandler.com Handicap Chase and the £20,000 Annual Pony Club Raceday Handicap Chase (1.05pm) over an extended three and a quarter miles on January 1 at Cheltenham.

Having beaten subsequent Grade Two scorers Kornati Kid and Gone To Lunch on his chasing debut at Exeter in October, 2008, Exmoor Ranger was running a big race in the Jewson Novices' Handicap Chase at The Festival last season prior to falling three fences from home.

Dartnall commented today: "I am hoping to run Exmoor Ranger at Cheltenham and I will have a good look at both races before deciding which one to go for.

"I was delighted with his win at Newbury and he seems to be going the right way at the moment.

"We set him targets last term but the weather intervened and then he came down in the Jewson Novices' Handicap Chase, which had been his aim for quite some time. We ran him at Uttoxeter at the end of season just to get his confidence back.

"He won at Newbury over an extended two miles and six furlongs and he was running so well prior to falling at The Festival, which is over the same course and distance as the victorchandler.com Handicap Chase.

"Having said that, I think that he needs three miles and Jack Doyle said he was flat out in the Badger Ales Chase at Wincanton (November 7), so the Cheltenham Annual Pony Club Raceday Handicap Chase would also come into the equation.

"We have claimed on him in the past and I would be keen to let Josh Guerriero take the ride so that we can utilise his allowance. He has won on Exmoor Ranger twice in the past so he obviously knows the horse well."

Apart from Chapoturgeon, champion trainer Paul Nicholls may also be represented in the victorchandler.com Handicap Chase by **Tatenen**, who landed the Grade Two Independent Newspaper Novices' Chase at last year's Open meeting, while another Somerset handler, David Pipe, has entered **I'm So Lucky** and Sandown Listed scorer **Seven Is My Number**.

Other notable contenders include Boylesports.com Gold Cup runner-up **Razor Royale**, Grade Three Paddy Power Gold Cup third **Hold Em**, Aintree Grade Two scorer **Killyglen** as well as Cheltenham Festival winners **Something Wells** and **Mister McGoldrick**.

An entry of 31 for the Cheltenham Annual Pony Club Raceday Handicap Chase includes the 2008 Grand National runner-up **King Johns Castle**, **Nenuphar Collognes**, successful in the Grade One Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle at The Festival in 2008, the progressive **Jaunty Flight** and **Hennessy**, who landed the Grade Three Sandown Gold Cup on his latest start.

The £32,000 Grade Two Dipper Novices' Chase (1.40pm) will be a top quality affair with an entry of 17 headed by last season's Ladbrokes World Hurdle runner-up **Punchestowns**. The Nicky Henderson-trained seven-year-old made an impressive debut over fences when taking a Grade Two novices' chase at Newbury at the end of November and is the current ante-post favourite for the RSA Chase at The Festival in March.

Henderson has also entered **The Polomoche**, a debut winner over fences at Fakenham, while Nicholls may be represented by Tuesday's Newbury winner **Take The Breeze** and **Tchico Polos**.

Northumberland-based handler George Charlton is looking forward to seeing **Knockara Beau** return to Cheltenham for the two mile, five furlong contest, having seen his stable star go down by a neck to **Weird Al** in the Steel Plate And Sections Novices' Chase at The Open on November 13.

The progressive six-year-old had previously beaten Killyglen by seven lengths in an intermediate chase at Carlisle and goes into Friday's race on the back of a facile victory in a novice contest at Kelso on December 6.

Charlton reported: "The plan at the moment is for Knockara Beau to run in the Dipper Novices' Chase. He came out of his race at Kelso in very good order and it was little more than a canter round for him there - a bit of a show-off job!

"We have been suffering a bit with frost up here lately so we have been working him on the beach to keep him fresh. He is all right at the moment but it looks like the Dipper is going to be a tough race to win this year.

"I was happy with his run at The Open - he's just a novice and the inexperience showed with his jumping on a couple of occasions. He is getting better all of the time and has a real big engine in him. Dropping back down in distance will be no problem because he has plenty of gears.

"He won a bumper at Kelso on heavy ground, so we know that he handles soft conditions. We have the RSA Chase to consider for him but we will be seeing how he runs on New Year's Day before deciding where to go next with him."

GOING

The going at Cheltenham is current **Good to Soft** on the Chase and Hurdle Courses.

A decision regarding the deployment of frost covers will be made tomorrow morning (Wednesday).

Simon Claisse, Cheltenham's Clerk of the Course, said today: "We think we will miss the worse of the forecast snow, with a centimetre or two coming after dark and then we will have some sleet but mostly rain through into Thursday. There is no significant frost forecast until at least Thursday night.

"We have delayed a decision about deploying frost covers until tomorrow morning. We will look at the forecast then but will probably not deploy them.

"The ground has dried out since our last meeting to good to soft but we are forecast up to 25 millimetres of rain between now and Friday. The expectation is that we will have soft ground on Friday.

“We are very pleased with the entries for Friday, particularly the Dipper which has 17 including Punchestowns.

“We are looking forward to staging a successful day’s racing on Friday.”

For further information please contact Andy Clifton, Communications Manager at Cheltenham Racecourse, on 07876 330090, or visit the website at www.cheltenham.co.uk