

CHELTENHAM RACECOURSE MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN PAIR ON COURSE FOR THE CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

**Meeting - The Festival, Dates - Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday,
March 16 - 19**

First race - 1.30pm each day

**Tickets available from www.cheltenham.co.uk or by calling 08445 793
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Following a 40-hour journey half-way across the world, trainer Anthony Cosgriff is pleased with the progress of **Gorge** and **Onajet** as the pair prepare to become the first Australian-trained runners at the Cheltenham Festival.

Both horses arrived in Britain on Friday (February 5) and are settling in to their new surroundings at Mark Johnston's stables in North Yorkshire, where Cosgriff was a vet for four years prior to setting up as a trainer in his homeland in 2005.

Talented dual-code performer Gorge notched his third victory on the Flat when producing a storming late run to take a 12-furlong handicap at Hanging Rock on New Year's Day.

The eight-year-old gelding comfortably landed a two-mile maiden hurdle at Warrnambool in April and was fourth in one of Australia's premier jump races, the Grand National Hurdle at Sandown, Victoria, in August. He is being aimed at the three-mile £100,000 Grade One Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle on totesport Cheltenham Gold Cup Day, Friday, March 19.

Onajet, a maiden winner on the Flat at Mornington, Victoria, in June, 2008, has made the frame on seven of his 17 starts over hurdles, and the giant eight-year-old is being considered for the £100,000 Grade One Neptune Investment Management Novices' Hurdle, run over two miles and five furlongs on St Patrick's Day, Wednesday, March 17.

Cosgriff reported: "Gorge has settled in very well now - he can be highly strung and he was getting himself very stressed in the first 48 hours or so, but that's not abnormal for him.

"We changed a few things around with his routine and it's good that he has Onajet with him. He's eating everything now and his weight is basically right on ideal because he didn't lose a lot coming over.

"Richie McGrath gave him a first schooling session with Onajet on Monday morning and everything went very well. It's pretty unbelievable that we have managed to get so much done in the space of five days.

“Hayley Kelly used to work with Yavana’s Pace, who was a notoriously difficult horse for Mark, so she has been helping us out along with Nick Bentley, who can school the horses. It’s been good to have the people of that quality around so that we can really hit the ground running - back home it’s very difficult to get people of that calibre on board and it makes the job that much easier.

“Most of Gorge’s best runs in Australia have come on the back off a two-week break so I am hoping to give him a prep run in the Grade Two totepool Premier Kelso Hurdle on March 6. It’s over two and a quarter miles, which is a bit shorter than ideal, but it will just be a bit of a pipe-opener before the Albert Bartlett Novices’ Hurdle.

“One of the reasons that we are here is because he has always been crying out for three miles and there aren’t the opportunities for him in Australia. The different style of racing over here may play against him but he has certainly looked to be wanting a trip.

“The Grand National Hurdle, in which he was fourth, is the furthest hurdle race in Australia and it’s just over two and three-quarter miles. He actually lost his position over the last and rattled home. The low jumps in Australia means that some pretty handy Flat horses run in the best jumps races and they often quicken, which can take Gorge off the bridle at a crucial stage.

“Onajet is more of a big tall chasing type of horse and it would be interesting to see how he got on in a chase over here. The trouble is that the fences are so much higher than anything that he is used to back home so we decided to start him off over hurdles and see what happens.

“On his form at home, he is not anywhere near Gorge’s standard but conditions here might suit Onajet a bit more. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if he improved markedly with taking on the stiffer hurdles over here.

“We gave him an entry in the Neptune Investment Management Hurdle and there is every chance that he will go to The Festival. At the moment, I am not saying with any confidence that he would run well and he would have to run a long way above his Australian form to be considered competitive in a race like that.

“We have pencilled him in for a maiden hurdle over two and a half miles at Ayr on February 25 but the trip over here tired him out and he has been a bit quiet since arriving at Middleham. It has taken him a while to get back on his food but he started eating up a lot better on Tuesday. We want him to show us that he is 100% before deciding whether to take him to Ayr.

“It’s a big time dream to race a horse at The Festival. I used to go religiously when I worked over here and it will be big buzz to return with a runner - the other big meetings like Aintree are also special, but Cheltenham is the number one for jump racing fans.

“It’s going to be huge for the owners, who have never been to a big meeting like this and they are all coming over to take in the atmosphere. It’s certainly going to be an extra special thrill for everyone involved.”

The Festival offers four days of outstanding racing action, with more than £3.4 million in prize money up for grabs. Champion Hurdle Day (Tuesday, March 16) features the £370,000 Grade One Smurfit Kappa Champion Hurdle, while the highlight of St Patrick’s Day (Wednesday, March 17) is the £320,000 Grade One Seasons Holidays Queen Mother Champion Chase.

There is a brace of Grade One contests on Ladies Day (Thursday, March 18) in the £250,000 Ryanair Chase and the £260,000 Ladbrokes World Hurdle and all eyes on Gold Cup Day (Friday, March 19) will be on **Kauto Star** and **Denman**, who are set for an epic third encounter in the £475,000 Grade One totesport Cheltenham Gold Cup.

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