

Cumberland Handicap Chase preview for Carlisle Sunday

Written by Paul Binfield

DAVID PIPE has an amazing 80% strike rate here in the last five seasons so his **Gentle Ranger**, despite having to carry top weight of 11st 12lb in today's £40,000 Cumberland Handicap Chase, deserves plenty of respect.

The Somerset trainer saddled Twelve Paces to land this event in 2006 and this year's representative was extremely game on his last outing to outpoint Minella Four Star in a decent handicap at Cheltenham in April.

This leading stable clearly thinks a lot of their charge as he also holds an entry in next month's Hennessy Gold Cup Chase at Newbury which Pipe won with Madison Du Berlais in 2008.

The legendary Ginger McCain won this 3m 2f contest in 2003 courtesy of Ebony Light and son Donald junior will be desperate to emulate his father with **Palace Merano**, who is also among the 17 runners and makes his first start for the Cheshire trainer today.

The seven-year-old has a similar profile to Gentle Ranger in that he also won his last start, when tutored by Irish champion Willie Mullins, in a handicap chase at Punchestown in April. The ground was officially described as good that day, but he should not be inconvenienced by a bit of cut as he has prevailed on a heavy surface previously.

Howard Johnson is another trainer to have earlier scored in this race with Grattan Lodge in 2004. His **Bay Cherry** won a couple of novice handicap chases last year and has been placed on his last two outings, including in the totescoop6 Handicap Chase at Carlisle in April.

The worry is that he has risen a couple of pounds in the handicap without winning, but, saying that, he certainly looks capable of winning another race off around this sort of mark and prevailed first time out last season.

The Peter Bowen-trained **Mizen Raven** has the assistance of today's dream stable interviewee Noel Fehily in the saddle and if there are no ill effects after his tumble in a Listed handicap chase at Market Rasen last month, his previous form would indicate that the seven-year-old has a shout.

He won a handicap chase at Cartmel in July and on his three subsequent starts has always been in the first five, including a second at Stratford on his penultimate outing.

The biggest worry might be if the ground came up very soft, but there was a bit of dig in the ground when he was victorious at Cartmel.

All of Victor Dartnall's **Nicto De Beauchene's** three career wins have come with the word 'soft' somewhere in the going description, including when he too won on his last racecourse appearance in a three mile handicap chase at Kempton in February, when continually holding off a persistent challenge from runner-up Le Burf to score by a length and a quarter.

Today's additional quarter of a mile should be well within his capacities as he won at around this trip as a seven-year-old when trained by Robert and Sally Alner.

An initial glance at the form of **Jaunty Journey** might lead many to strike his name through as Nigel Twiston-Davies's charge has failed to finish on his last three starts. But, and it's quite a big but, if his very capable trainer, who landed this race with Naunton Brook in 2007, has now managed to get him right, he could be well handicapped off a mark of 125.

This is because he finished just three and a quarter lengths behind Great Endeavour, who went on to win the Byrne Group Plate at Cheltenham and is a leading fancy for next month's Paddy Power Gold Cup, despite a blunder at the second last which is good form.

Officier De Reserve hasn't won for around two years but he has been highly tried on his last three outings which would, at least, suggest that connections still believe that he retains a lot of ability.

He ran a fine race in the 2008 Welsh National at Chepstow, where he finished only seven lengths behind Notre Pere, and as the Sleeping Car gelding has slid down the handicap since then, he is another who, if he can bounce back to earlier form, could have a hand in the finish.

Vodka Brook is another interesting contender as he finished last season in fine fettle but although he has always run well first time out, he has never won on his seasonal bow.

Selection

Nicto De Beauchene