

GRAND NATIONAL

JOY!



COUNTRY SPARK: Country Member, ridden by Luke Harvey (top) represents solid value for today's race

I'm a Member of his fan club



By CHARLES FAWCUS
No 1 for racing

been aiming Country Member at the Aintree trail all year.

"It's just a coincidence that he won the same amateurs race at Sandown that Maori Venture finished second in before he won the National, but it has put him right for this.

"Whether he's got the same speed since his accident I don't know, but I do know that he's very well," said Turnell.

Country Member has got the dry ground he likes as well and there was plenty of spirit in

his recent Sandown win when he fought back to catch Buckboard Bounce.

Long time favourite Master Oats has been on the slide in the spring weather all week, but more worrying than the going is his jumping which almost let him down in the Gold Cup and put him on the floor in this race last year.

Riderless

But there are plenty of other fast ground specialists around — not least Young Hustler, first to finish but riderless last year, and the likely favourite.

Crystal Spirit likes it too, but may lack the bottle required, something you can't say about

the two old mares, Dubacilla and Ebony Jane, who finished fourth here last year after running third in the Irish National just five days before.

Dean Gallagher is confident of a great run round on Dubacilla. "She seems the ideal type for the race," he said. "And with a steadier pace, it won't be as hard work for me as it was in the Gold Cup.

"Master Oats has beaten her twice, but that was on his ground and now it's in her favour."

Lean Lusty Light looks the best of Jenny Pitman's six. He was in good form on faster going earlier in the season.

"The biggest problem with him is getting him to eat," says the trainer.

Party Politics and Minnehoma are the previous winners and should go well while the best long shot could be Topsham Bay, twice the Whitbread winner when his hooves were rattling. And he ran another good race at Sandown the last time conditions were right.

But 'Leg Lock' will do me, so Member gets my vote.

A day in the Aintree life of JENNY PITMAN

SIX-HIT Jenny Pitman has tasted the ecstasy and the agony of the Grand National, but no woman has a mightier record in the world's greatest race.

Back in 1983, a horse called Corbiere put Jenny on Aintree's roll of honour. The same horse was later to run third twice while Garrison Savannah ran a brave second in 1991 before Esha Ness went past the winning post in front two years ago.

But that win isn't shown in the list of Grand National heroes — two false starts meant the race was void.

"Never in your worst nightmare could you imagine something like that happening. It was a disaster all the way," she recalls.

Undaunted she goes into battle again today with a record six runners, spearheaded by Lusty Light. This is how she expects her day to go.

6am: Time to get ready and have a quick cuppa before setting off to the track.

7am: We meet some of our owners in the hotel, the others will already be on the course. Seeing the horses out early has become a big tradition of National Day and they need the exercise anyway.

Our runners will have been fed at six and the lads will have them tacked up and ready for the jockeys. I'll check them over and put the riders on for just a bit of light exercise. That's all they need, but psychologically they think they've done their work for the day which relaxes them.

It's going to be a long day for them with all the noise from the tannoy and so on in the background. We tuck our horses away in a small yard which tends to be quieter and more secure as well.

9am: Time for our exercise, walking the course — owners, jockeys and trainer. We start on the bend past the winning post and by the time we get to Becher's, we've already got some white faces. The fences always look bigger from the ground!

We are looking for the best ground and the best places to jump. I try get the jockeys to look on each fence as an individual and you don't get obstacles like these anywhere else.

9.45am: The concentration breaks as we get to the last fence — the jockeys start riding imaginary finishes and doing Peter O'Sullivan impressions, racing up the run-in until they suddenly see The Chair. That stops them and I'll quieten them down even more by telling them to remember they've got two circuits to jump not one.

10.00am: Check the horses and make sure everything is in the right place, colours and so on, before going back to the hotel for breakfast. Try to get a quick lie down, but it doesn't usually work. I'm trying to kid myself it's just another day!

11.30 am: Ready to go back to the course. I usually buy a new blouse or something to wear and then decide it's too cold!

12noon: The tension is already getting to us and no one speaks much as we drive to the track. Another check on the horses and all the gear in the weighing room and then it's a question of killing time.

2.45pm: Time to start saddling the horses and I will probably be a nervous wreck already. The lads will have got them ready and brought them over and I'll get my jockeys to weigh out as soon as possible with six to do. I'll check all six when they are ready, hopefully one or two will have a little tremble, it shows they are on their mettle.

3.20pm: In the paddock with six sets of owners and six jockeys who all believe they are going to win. We will have discussed tactics long before, so just time for a brief word with everyone. I don't wish the jockeys luck, I just hope they have a good ride round — that's what it's all about.

Last check and out they go for the parade — I'm in a sort of cocoon by now, my mind's gone numb. People talk to me but I don't take it in.

David, my partner, Mark, my son and Jesse, one of our assistants, will be at the start to cope with any last minute problems. The year of the false starts they got the horses out far too early which was part of the problem as it just built up more tension in everyone.

3.45pm: They're off. My legs have gone to jelly and all I want to do is faint, but I light a cigarette instead and hope it lasts for the race. I'll be trying to pick my horses out, but it's not easy with all the different camera angles. However, once they have jumped a few fences I'm back together. I hope the horses are settled into a rhythm.

4.00pm: It's all over. If you've won, you are dragged from place to place and you are on

Many hands make Light work!



SMACKER: Jenny with National hope Do Be Brief



FLASHBACK: Pitman's Corbiere (right) holds off Greasepaint to win the 1983 Aintree spectacular

a massive high. If you are placed you are delighted because your horse has been so brave. If you fall all you want to do is check the horse over and win lose or draw I'll go straight back to the stables with them afterwards.

4.30pm: We bandage all our horses' legs after their races as a precaution and we will check for any minor cuts and things. They are washed down and led around for an hour to recover.

6.30pm: The horse's are given a small feed but only if they have drunk some water.

7.00pm: Back at the hotel — knackered. All you want to do is collapse, watch a bit of television and sleep. But I make myself get changed and go down for dinner whatever the result.

8.00pm: Dinner with the owners and have a good laugh about the day. We will watch the replay later and we will probably be making plans for next year.

11.00pm: Bed.

INTERVIEW: CHARLES FAWCUS

Daily Mirror

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Ladbroke's CHARITY BET.

TOMMY Stack (left), who rode Red Rum to the third of his three Grand National triumphs, goes for MINNEHOMA to land a second win today and names him as his Ladbroke's celebrity £100 charity bet.

"The horse won in great style a year ago," said Tommy.

"If he does it again, I'd like the winnings to go to The Woodlands Hospice Macmillan Appeal, which is in aid of a new cancer hospice near Aintree."

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