



ASCOT

King George VI Stakes Preview

SATURDAY 25 JULY



Race 1

The Dentakay EBF Crocker Bulteel "Confined" Maiden Stakes (Class 2) (Not Run More Than Once), 6f

Prize Money
£50,000

Race 2

The Princess Margaret Japan Cup Stakes (Class 1) (Group 3), 6f

Prize Money
£80,000

Race 3

The Longines Valiant Stakes (Class 1) (Group 3), 7f 213y

Prize Money
£95,000

Race 4

The Moet & Chandon International Handicap Stakes (Class 2) (Heritage Handicap), 7f

Prize Money
£150,000

Race 5

The King George VI And Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Class 1) (Group 1), 1m 3f 211y

Prize Money
£2,000,000

Race 6

The Ascot Shop Handicap Stakes (Class 4) (GBBPlus Race), 1m 3f 211y

Prize Money
£30,650

Race 7

The Betfred Handicap Stakes (Class 2), 1m

Prize Money
£60,000

Race 8

The Whispering Angel Handicap Stakes (Class 2), 5f

Prize Money
£60,000

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15:35 | King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes

Horse-by-horse Guide

By **Kevin Blake**

Kevin Blake runs the rule over the nine-strong field assembled for Europe's premier mid-season affair on Saturday and reveals his 1-2-3.



1. CALANDAGAN (7)



Jockey: M Barzalona | Trainer: F Graffard

Officially the best middle-distance horse in the world, he has won six Group 1 races around the world including this race last year, the British Champion Stakes, the Japan Cup and the Sheema Classic at Meydan.

A hold-up performer that has an exceptional turn of foot, he bounced back from a poor run on softer ground in the Coronation Cup at Epsom to win a messy renewal of the Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud last time. A sounder pace will suit him, and he sets a very high bar for his opposition.

2. GOLIATH (5)



Jockey: M Barzalona | Trainer: F Graffard

Launched himself onto the international scene by winning this race at 25-1 in 2024. Has been around the world since then, gaining a second Group 1 win in the Grosser Preis von Baden last September.

Last time out, he looked to be coming with a very strong challenge in the Hardwicke Stakes at the Royal Meeting only for his rider to lose an iron inside the final furlong, eventually being beaten 1¾ lengths in third behind Giavellotto and Kalpana. That form gives him a shot.

3. LAMBOURN (2)



Jockey: W Buick | Trainer: A P O'Brien

Winner of the Derby and the Irish Derby last year but hasn't come up to the required standard in open Group 1 company since. He made a winning return to action in the Huxley Stakes at Chester in May but has finished well behind multiple rivals that he meets again here in his three starts since - looks up against it.

4. MASQUERADE BALL (4)



Jockey: C P Lemaire | Trainer: Takahisa Tezuka

A fascinating Japanese raider, he rose through the ranks on the domestic scene as a three-year-old last year with his two runs over a mile-and-a-half, yielding second-place finishes to the top-class Croix Du Nord in the Tokyo Yushun (Japanese Derby) and to Calandagan in the Japan Cup (with Croix Du Nord back in fourth).

His first run outside Japan saw him finish an excellent length second to Romantic Warrior in the QEII Cup at Sha Tin in April. This return to a mile-and-a-half seems sure to suit him and he looks to be a leading contender.

5. WURTTENBERG (3)



Jockey: Oisin Murphy | Trainer: Hiroshi Miyamoto

A six-year-old Japanese raider that has spent much of his career at a much lower level than this, but he leapt to prominence when finishing an excellent nose second to Croix Du Nord in the Tenno So (Spring) at 206/1 back in May. That run came out of nowhere to an extent and he faces a completely different challenge back at a mile-and-a-half in world-class company.

6. KALPANA (6)



Jockey: Colin Keane | Trainer: A M Balding

One of the very best female racehorses on the planet, she has a fine record at this track that includes two wins in the British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes and an excellent second to Calandagan in this race last year. Her most recent effort was a fine short head second to Giavellotto in the Hardwicke Stakes at Royal Ascot. She must be considered a serious contender.

King George Day

Runner by Runner

Continued

7. MINNIE HAUKE (1)



Jockey: Wayne Lordan / Trainer: A P O'Brien

The highest-rated female racehorse on the planet - last season she won the Oaks at Epsom, the Irish Oaks, and the Yorkshire Oaks prior to finishing an excellent second in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. She hasn't been quite as good in her three starts at around a mile-and-a-quarter this year but was not far off her best form when second to Ombudsman in the Prince Of Wales's Stakes at Royal Ascot last time. Returning to a mile-and-a-half will suit her and she has solid claims.

8. ACTION (8)



Jockey: S M Levey / Trainer: A P O'Brien

Finished second in the Futurity Trophy at Doncaster last season and the Dante this season but has been used as a pacemaker in the Derby and the Irish Derby in his last two starts and looks likely to take up the same role here.

9. BENVENUTO CELLINI (9)



Jockey: R L Moore / Trainer: A P O'Brien

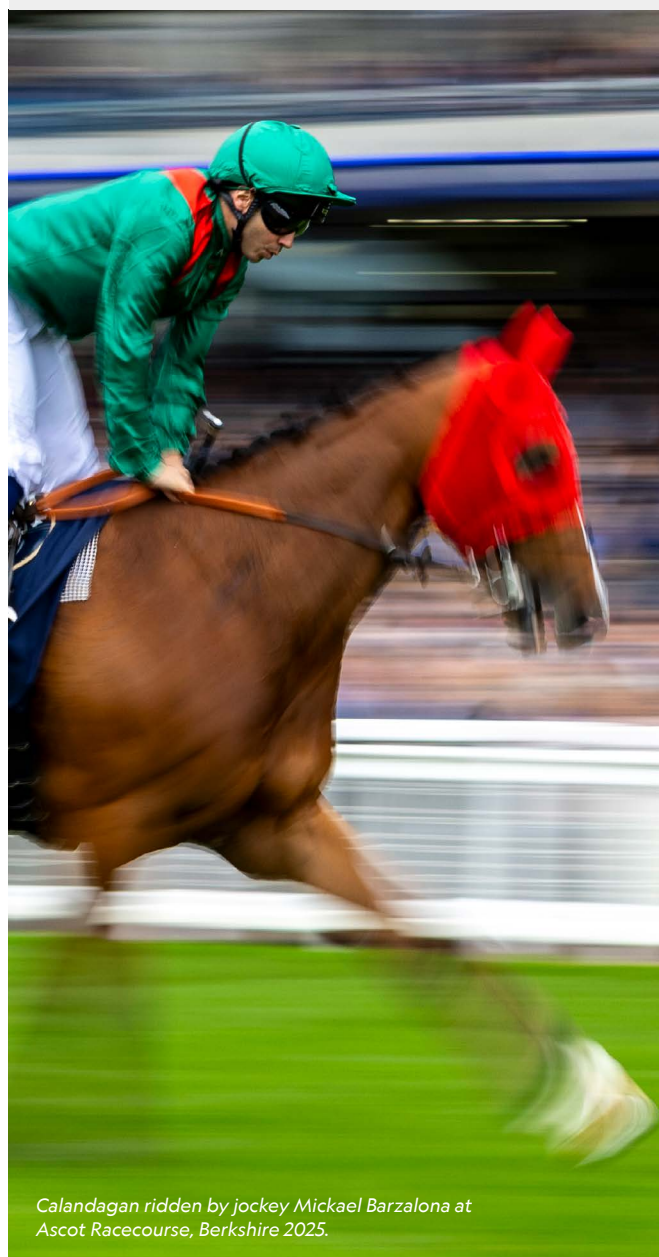
A Group 2-winning juvenile, he created an excellent impression when making a winning return to action in the Chester Vase. Sent off favourite for the Derby, rain-softened ground may have been more to blame for his below-par run than an incident in the stalls that led to him being declared a non-runner after the event. Returned to a sounder surface, he duly righted that wrong by beating the Derby winner Christmas Day in a rematch in the Irish Derby. This course, distance and surface should suit, but he will need to improve again to be involved in the finish.

KEVIN BLAKES 1-2-3

1		CALANDAGAN
2		MASQUERADE BALL
3		KALPANA

KEVIN BLAKE'S VERDICT

CALANDAGAN may not have been at his brilliant best in his last two starts, but returning this course and distance with the promise of a solid pace to run at may well bring him back to his best. The main danger to him appeals as being **Masquerade Ball** who brings a very high level of mile-and-a-half form to the table from Japan.



Calandagan ridden by jockey Mickael Barzalona at Ascot Racecourse, Berkshire 2025.

TIMEFORM Tips

Race 1	1st Never Enough (5) 2nd Tumishi (9) 3rd Izuba (4)
Race 2	1st Dark Issue (2) 2nd Alta Regina (1) 3rd Moonrise (8)
Race 3	1st Touleen (8) 2nd Kon Tiki (3) 3rd Sukanya (5)
Race 4	1st Amazing Journey (17) 2nd Completely Random (2) 3rd Back In Black (8)
Race 5	1st Calandagan (1) 2nd Kalpana (6) 3rd Minnie Hauk (7)
Race 6	1st Patrol (5) 2nd Ohara (10) 3rd Edwin Hubble (11)
Race 7	1st Crown Board (2) 2nd Hickory (7) 3rd Asmen Warrior (4)
Race 8	1st Getreadytorumble (1) 2nd Rocking Ends (7) 3rd Bolo Neighs (4)



Touleen ridden by Jim Crowley on their way to winning the Get Best Odds Guaranteed With BetVictor 'Newcomers' Maiden Fillies' Stakes at Newbury racecourse.



Calandagan ridden by jockey Mickael Barzalona at Ascot Racecourse



Two Tribes ridden by David Egan (right) on their way to winning the Moet & Chandon International Handicap at Ascot Racecourse



Kevin Blake's King George Day tips

14:20 | LONGINES VALIANT STAKES

SKYDANCE



The Longines Valiant Stakes is a fascinating race and while most of the attention is likely to be on the Owen Burrows-trained Touleen, my preference is for the Willie McCreery-trained **SKYDANCE**.

The daughter of Night Of Thunder kept exceptionally strong company last season and acquitted herself well, finishing in the frame in both Group 3 and Group 2 company prior to running a fine race to be beaten just 3¼ lengths in the Moyglare Stud Stakes.

Stepped up to a mile for her seasonal return in a maiden at Leopardstown, she took a very notable scalp when getting the better of Thundering On by a short-head. She may have help a slight edge on the day by coming down what might well have been a favoured outside line, but the merit in what she achieved has very much been advertised by the winner since, with her having won the Oaks.

This round mile should suit her well and while she has obviously had a little hold-up since her winning return, her connections wouldn't be travelling her over for this contest bar they felt she was in top order. She is a very interesting contender.

14:55 | MOET & CHANDON INTERNATIONAL HANDICAP COMPLETELY RANDOM



There are some unexposed three-year-olds in the Moet & Chandon International Handicap (2:55) that are likely to be very popular in the market, but my preference is for more hardened contenders and the one that makes the most appeal to me is the Harry Charlton-trained **COMPLETELY RANDOM**.

The five-year-old was trained to peak for the Wokingham at Royal Ascot and ran huge on the day, arguably being a little bit unlucky not to win, with him ultimately coming up a head short of Double Rush.

He responded really well to first-time cheekpieces that day and he looks as though he is ready to carry the best of his form up to seven furlongs now. He appeals as being drawn in the right part of the track and while a career-best effort will be required off a 4lb higher mark, he might well be capable of delivering it.



14:20 | Longines Valiant Stakes

Horse-by-horse Guide

By Tom Collins

1. ARISAIG (8)



Jockey: Jamie Spencer | Trainer: Charlie Johnston

You have to go back 23 years to find Jamie Spencer's last-to-first victory in this race aboard the James Fanshawe-trained Soldera. Old habits die hard as the veteran rider is likely to employ similar tactics over two decades on, this time aboard Arisaig, who has been slowly bumped up the ratings despite failing to win since July 2024.

Placed in the Group 2 Celebration Mile as well as two Listed fillies' races, Arisaig clearly has the class to play a role in the finish at a big price here. The negatives are her losing streak and the significant lack of front-runners among her rivals that could leave her pace compromised.

2. CHESHIRE DANCER (1)



Jockey: Colin Keane | Trainer: Hugo Palmer

Every athlete - human and equine - peaks at a certain point and it's fair to say that Cheshire Dancer's zenith came in this very race 12 months ago. Sent off at 22-1 against rivals rated as much as 10lb superior, one of whom she had to give weight to, Cheshire Dancer surged inside the final furlong to record her first Group 3 success and give hope that more was to come.

A similar performance came on her next start in an ambitious trip to Kentucky Downs, but five subsequent efforts have been underwhelming and now she enters this year's renewal as an even bigger price than 12 months ago. Maybe that peak has passed.



Cheshire Dancer ridden by Billy Loughnane on their way to winning the Longines Valiant Stakes at Ascot Racecourse

3. KON TIKI (2)



Jockey: Ryan Moore | Trainer: Jane Chapple-Hyam

As four-year-olds go, Kon Tiki is extremely lightly raced with just six starts to her name. She began with a faultless three-from-three record, which included a victory in the Listed Michael Seely at York in May 2025. But a slightly lacklustre display followed when pitched in at the deep end in the Group 1 Coronation Stakes last season, and then she was then kept on the sidelines for the next 11 months.

On face value, Kon Tiki's two efforts this term have been solid if not sparkling. However, on both occasions she ran behind Blue Bolt, who boosted the form by plundering the Group 1 Falmouth Stakes just over a fortnight ago. With Ryan Moore (0/2 for Chapple-Hyam) taking over in the saddle, Kon Tiki may float your boat.

4. PINA SONATA (4)



Jockey: Daniel Muscutt | Trainer: James Fanshawe

The Fanshawe yard has hit excellent mid-summer form as proven by their excellent 30% strike-rate in July thus far. For that to be enhanced, this daughter of Pinatubo will have to produce a career-best performance but that is not beyond the realms of possibility given she still remains unexposed after seven starts.

A keen-goer, Pina Sonata may be forced to lead in this contest given the apparent lack of other prominent racers. She adopted a forward style when successful in Listed company at Kempton in March, but that result may have come about due to her preference for the all-weather rather than her running style. Pina Sonata is 2/2 on synthetic surfaces and only 1/5 on turf, which presents a big question mark.

Longines Valiant Stakes

Runner by Runner

Continued

5. SUKANYA (6)



Jockey: Tom Marquand / Trainer: Jack Channon

Unbeaten at Newbury (2/2) and winless elsewhere (0/6), Sukanya's versatility is now up for questioning. That being said, her defeats have largely come about due to ambitious placing rather than a lack of handling certain venues. Since her maiden debut victory 13 months ago, Jack Channon's filly has been tried in a Listed race, two Group 3s, a Group 2, and two Group 1 contests. Those tilts at the top level have come recently, so this is a bona fide drop in class.

Sukanya wasn't beaten far by Precise when sixth of 11 in the Coronation Stakes at Royal Ascot last month and she was eroding the deficit towards the line, which suggests she may be better over slightly further. However, her Fred Darling victory off level weights over Touleen gives her leading claims here at a mile. Maybe she is the overpriced horse in this field.

6. ESNA (5)



Jockey: Mickael Barzalona / Trainer: Brian Meehan

A victory over the now 108-rated Morshdi in a Sandown novice in September 2025 made the sky look like the ceiling for this daughter of Starman, and she still looked progressive when successful in a Listed contest at Newbury in May over 1m2f. A subsequent last-placed finish in the Group 1 Prix de Diane may have curtailed the enthusiasm a touch.

Brian Meehan now opts for a drop in trip to a mile, a distance that was largely passed over in her development barring a fourth-placed finish in the Prix Marcel Boussac. A step forward is necessary to see her play a major role, but you cannot discount her.

7. SKYDANCE (3)



Jockey: Oisin Murphy / Trainer: Willie McCreery

Willie McCreery has sent over more horses than the majority of his Irish counterparts with a 6/60 strike-rate in England since 2009. One of those defeats came via Jancis, who finished fourth in this race 12 months ago. This year's entry is Skydance, a three-year-old who beat subsequent Oaks winner Thundering On in a Leopardstown maiden in April.

Albeit her victory only came by a short head, there was absolutely no fluke about it. Not only was Thundering On in behind, but so was Cromac Quay, who has subsequently won a maiden by nine-and-a-half lengths and is now rated 95. Prior efforts in Group company were fine without wowing and fast ground is a question mark, but Skydance must have sound claims under Oisin Murphy.

8. TOULEEN (7)



Jockey: William Buick / Trainer: Owen Burrows

Oh, what could have been. Touleen appeared to be travelling well in the Group 1 Coronation Stakes only to be held in a pocket on two separate occasions. Once she got out it was too late, eventually finishing second behind Precise. Judging by the post-race interviews, Saffie Osborne and Owen Burrows thought she could have gone one better with a clear run.

Nevertheless, that was a big step forward for Touleen who had previously lost at 11/10 and 5/4 in a Group 2 and Group 3 respectively, as well as finishing sixth of 19 in the 1000 Guineas. The handicapper pushed her official rating up to 112 after her Royal Ascot display and she is categorically the horse to beat in this field as a result. But at odds-on you aren't being given much leeway for error.

TOM COLLINS'S VERDICT

There is more depth to this race than the market will let you believe. As much as I respect Touleen after her unlucky Coronation Stakes defeat, I would rather try to find some more value. Sukanya and Skydance have place chances at decent prices, but my preference is for **KON TIKI**, who may be capable of giving weight away to her three-year-old foes.

Key Races Stats Guides

By **Paul Jones**



Fitzella ridden by Oisin Murphy on their way to winning the Sodexo Live! Princess Margaret Stakes 2025

RACE 2 Princess Margaret Japan Cup Stakes 13:45PM (BST)

Fillies' Group 3 | Class 1 | 2YO only

✓ POSITIVES:

- The favourite
- A top-six finish in the Queen Mary or Albany Stakes
- Once-raced
- Made race debut at Newmarket
- Drawn in stall 1

✗ NEGATIVES:

- Outside the first two in the betting
- Beaten on debut



Friendly Soul ridden by jockey Kieran Shoemark winning the Longines Valiant Stakes 2024

RACE 3 Longines Valiant Stakes 14:20PM (BST)

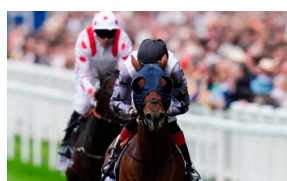
Fillies' And Mares' Group 3 | Rnd 1 | Class 1 | 3YO plus

✓ POSITIVES:

- Last-time-out winners
- Drawn in stall 7 or higher

✗ NEGATIVES:

- Aged 5 or older
- Fewer than three starts earlier in the season



Two Tribes ridden by David Egan on their way to winning the Moet & Chandon International Handicap at Ascot Racecourse

RACE 4 Moet & Chandon International Handicap 14:55PM (BST)

Heritage Handicap | Class 2 | 3YO plus

✓ POSITIVES:

- Contested the Royal Hunt Cup, Buckingham Palace Stakes or Bunbury Cup
- Four-year-olds
- Trained by Richard Fahey, Charlie Johnston or John & Thady Gosden
- Towards the front of the market

✗ NEGATIVES:

- Drawn low



Goliath ridden by jockey Christophe Soumillon after winning the King George VI And Queen Elizabeth 2024

RACE 5 King George VI And Queen Elizabeth Stakes 15:35PM (BST)

Group 1 | Class 1 | 3YO plus

✓ POSITIVES:

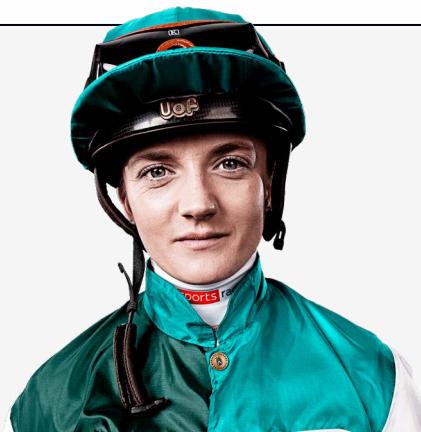
- Owned (or part-owned) by Juddmonte or Michael Tabor
- Fillies/mares
- A high-half draw
- Contested a Coronation Cup

✗ NEGATIVES:

- Outside the first four in the betting
- Beaten in last year's race
- Aged six or older

Hollie Doyle's Blog

Our ambassador reveals her thoughts on the best of a stellar King George Weekend at Ascot



MOMENTOUS SUCCESS ON CARDS FOR JAPAN

MASQUERADE BALL



Japan has held a special place in my heart since riding in Tokyo for three winters, so I'll be rooting for their superstar **MASQUERADE BALL** in the **King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (3.35)** at Ascot on Saturday.

Takahisa Tezuka's colt has unfinished business with the mighty Calandagan after losing out right on the line in the Japan Cup back in November. Since then, he has finished a gallant second to Hong Kong's Romantic Warrior in the QEII Cup while the French ace has added the Sheema Classic and the Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud to his amazing CV.

Whatever happens, it's going to be a thriller with Aidan O'Brien's Irish Derby winner Benvenuto Cellini getting a lot of weight from the pair but I have a feeling that everything is in place for Masquerade Ball to give the Japanese one of their most momentous successes ever. A year younger than Calandagan and still capable of better, he can take revenge as long as the uphill finish doesn't catch him out.

MOONRISE CAN BUILD ON ROYAL ASCOT FORM

MOONRISE



MOONRISE can enhance her reputation in the big two-year-old fillies' race at Ascot, the Group 3 **Princess Margaret Japan Cup Stakes (1.45)**.

Andrew Balding's daughter of Churchill took a step up in grade in her stride when finishing a close third in the Windsor Castle Stakes at the Royal Meeting and the combination of a good attitude and track form can make her hard to beat.

Richard Hannon's Dark Issue was fourth in the Group 3 Albany Stakes at this track last month – form that has since been franked by the runner-up, Sun Goddess, taking a Group 2 in Ireland for Aidan O'Brien – but Oisin Murphy's filly offers better value.

MOORE BOOKING LOOKS SIGNIFICANT IN VALIANT

KON TIKI



There is no denying that Owen Burrows' filly Touleen was unlucky in the Coronation Stakes last time when she split two Guineas winners, despite enduring such a difficult passage.

She'll be a worthy favourite for the Group 3 **Longines Valiant Stakes (2.20)** under William Buick, but I prefer to side with Jane Chapple-Hyam's **KON TIKI** with Ryan Moore another significant booking.

Open to improvement, she is more than capable of winning at this level and shouldn't find this quite as demanding at the Group 2 Duke Of Cambridge when she chased home Blue Bolt for the second time this year.

UNBEATEN ZAIN TO TAKE ULTRA-TOUGH INTERNATIONAL

EXTREMELY ZAIN



My husband Tom (Marquand) holds a favourite's chance in the **Moet And Chandon International Handicap (2.55)** at Ascot on the unbeaten **EXTREMELY ZAIN**, who has the potential to ply his trade in Pattern races later in the year.

He didn't enjoy the best of runs in a hot handicap at York last time but still found a way through to post an impressive success under Cieren Fallon and has the scope to defy an 8lb rise from what looks a decent draw.

This is ultra-tough though so keep an eye on Jack Channon's Mezcala, the Buckingham Palace winner for Tom who also has more to offer despite re-appearing off a stiffer mark of 98.

Guide to Ascot

By Classic-winning jockey and Sky Sports Racing presenter
Jason Weaver

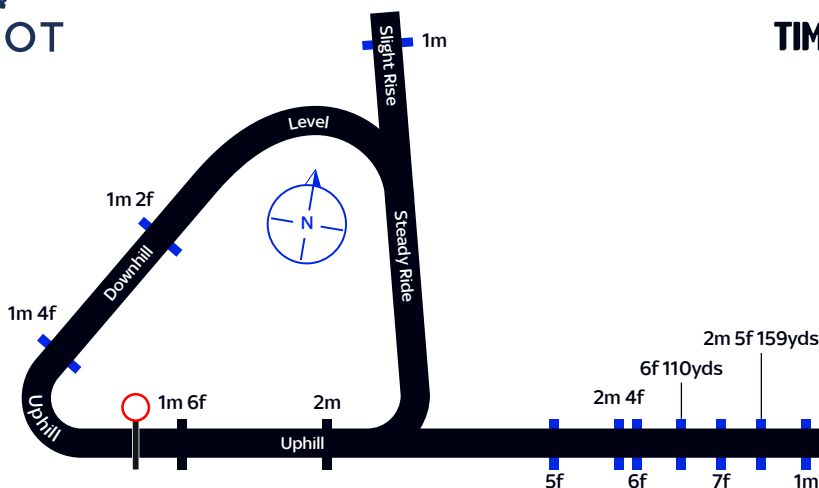
“ Because the run-in on Ascot’s round course is relatively short, positioning - jockeyship in other words - is key. It goes without saying that in steadily-run races you want to be towards the sharp end but, whatever the pace, you can get into trouble trying to come through rivals late on. We’re still learning about the straight course, following the relaying a few years back, but in my view it’s more pace-dependent than draw-dependent. Given the right pace to chase, I reckon you can win from anywhere.

”




ASCOT

TIMEFORM



The round course is a right-handed, triangular circuit of fourteen furlongs, with a run-in of 2.5 furlongs. There is a straight mile course and the Old mile course which joins the round course in Swinley Bottom. Despite the downhill run into Swinley Bottom and relatively short run-in from the final turn, Ascot is galloping in character. Since the redevelopment, the turn into the straight has become more sweeping and those ridden prominently can be difficult to peg back. Nowadays, the ground in the straight drains quicker than the rest of the course, meaning going descriptions can vary.

