

2025 FLAT HORSES TO FOLLOW



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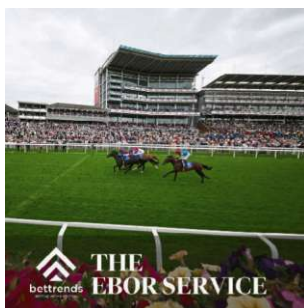
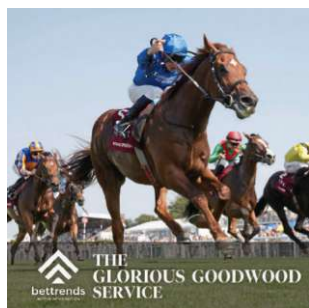
Featuring 40 Flat Horses To Follow for the season ahead

Plus 2yo Focus • Ante-Post Angle • Top Performers

Compiled by Joe Ballard & William Urch

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Two-Year-Old

FOCUS

Written by Joe Ballard

2025 Flat Horses To Follow

DARTREY

Lope de Vega – Falling Petals (Raven's Pass)

RALPH BECKETT

AT GOFFS ORBY Book 1 in 2024, Juddmonte went to €750,000 to secure a son of *Lope De Vega*. The colt – now named **Dartrey** – is in training with Ralph Beckett for the upcoming season, who has proved himself perhaps the top trainer of two-year-olds in the UK. The dam *Falling Petals* won once as a two-year-old over seven furlongs and is a half-sister to *Hunt Down*, who was placed in a G1 Middle Park Stakes. The *Raven's Pass* mare has produced two individual winners from four progeny that have hit the track and one of those is the very smart *Saffron Beach*. Jane Chapple-Hyam's former star won the G3 Oh So Sharp Stakes as a two-year-old and continued to improve, winning the G1 Sun Chariot Stakes as a three-year-old and the G1 Prix Rothschild as a four-year-old. Dartrey is likely to be a forward juvenile, but anything we see this season is only a bonus and he will only improve with age into his Classic season.

HARPER VIOLET

Lope de Vega – Ajman Princess (Teofilo)

KARL BURKE

KARL BURKE celebrated two Royal Ascot victories in 2024 courtesy of *Leovanni* and *Shareholder* and again looks to have plenty of two-year-olds to start getting excited about for this season. One such horse is *Lope De Vega* filly **Harper Violet**, who will fly the famous colours of Sheikh Mohammed Obaid Al Maktoum. The filly is out of *Teofilo* mare *Ajman Princess*, a G1 winner in the Prix Jean Romanet for the owner and Roger Varian back in 2017. She herself can count a number of top-level horses as siblings, including G1 Queen Anne winner *Triple Time*, G3 Bengough Stakes winner *Cape Byron* and G2 Prix Daniel Wildenstein winner *Ostilio*. The mare has had two of her progeny hit the racecourse, both winners. The first of those is Kevin Ryan's Commonwealth Cup hero *Inisherin*, whilst the latest is Richard Hannon's seven-furlong novice winner *King Of Cities*. There is a perfect blend of both speed and stamina in the filly's pedigree and she is no doubt in the right hands to enjoy a successful season.

MELISMATIC

Space Blues – Faradays Law (Lawman)

JOSEPH PATRICK O'BRIEN

JOSEPH O'BRIEN has proved an incredibly adept trainer of two-year-olds since leaving the saddle and has in fact trained the winner of the G1 National Stakes in three of the last six years, including last year's winner *Scorchy Champ*. He may well have another candidate on his hands for the Curragh Group 1 in 2025 in the form of **Melismatic**. Three-time Group 1 winner and seven-furlong specialist *Space Blues* will see his first crop hit the track in 2025, and €160,000 Goffs Orby Book 1 purchase *Melismatic* is one of note. Whilst not overly effective on the track herself, the dam *Faradays Law* is a full sister to the smart *Just The Judge*. Charles Hills' mare was unbeaten as a two-year-old – winning a Listed race as well as the G2 Rockfel Stakes – before finishing runner-up in the 1000 Guineas and going one spot better to land the Irish 1,000 Guineas. She is also a half-sister to G3-placed two-year-old *Allayaali* and this colt can give his dam a first winner.

MOLDIRA

Showcasing – Dotted Swiss (Swiss Spirit)

ROGER VARIAN

ROGER VARIAN and owner Nurlan Bizakov celebrated a terrific year together in 2024 thanks to champion miler *Charyn* and the partnership have seven two-year-olds to go to war with together for the upcoming season. The most intriguing of those is *Showcasing* filly **Moldira**, out of low-level sprinter *Dotted Swiss*. The *Swiss Spirit* mare has proved much more effective in the breeding shed than the racecourse though and from her only two foals of racing age, has produced a G3 winner and Listed winner. The first of those was Karl Burke's *Elite Status*, who was a wildly impressive five-length winner of the Listed National Stakes before a third in the G2 Norfolk Stakes and a G3 victory over in France. The other is Simon and Ed Crisford's *Soldier's Heart* who signed off last year by making all on route to a comfortable victory in the Listed Champion Two Yrs Old Trophy at Ripon. By prolific sire of two-year-olds *Showcasing*, this filly can take high rank in the build up to Royal Ascot.

OUTFLANK

Churchill – Enrol (Pivotal)

JOHN & THADY GOSDEN

THE Wathnan Racing operation have never shirked from spending big money, and the powerful owners splashed 750,000gns at Tattersalls Book 1 on *Churchill* colt **Outflank**. The expensive purchase has headed to Clarehaven Stables to go into training with John and Thady Gosden and has a lovely pedigree. He is out of *Pivotal* mare *Enrol*, who was placed at Listed level over six and seven furlongs and rated 100 at her peak for Sir Michael Stoute. That makes Outflank a full brother to *Encountered*, an impressive Doncaster novice winner as a two-year-old for Marco Botti before moving to Hong Kong and winning seven times in all, racking up over £1 million in prize money. *Enrol* has also produced a *Gleneagles* colt in the form of *Royal Scotsman* for Paul and Oliver Cole. *Royal Scotsman* showed electric form as a two-year-old; third in a red-hot edition of the Coventry Stakes behind *Bradsell* at Royal Ascot, a G2 winner in the Richmond Stakes before being denied by just a head in the G1 Dewhurst Stakes by subsequent 2000 Guineas winner *Chaldean*.

SECRET SANTA

Lucky Vega – Gilded (Redback)

RICHARD HANNON

SECRET SANTA was purchased for just 20,000gns at the Somerville Yearling Sale 2024 and could prove one of the top bargain purchases of the year. The *Lucky Vega* colt will run in the silks of Mrs J Wood for Richard Hannon and has the pedigree to outrun his lowly price tag this season. The dam – *Redback* mare *Gilded* – was a prolific two-year-old for Richard Hannon Snr, scoring five times from eight starts in a busy campaign that included victories in the Listed Marygate Stakes and G2 Queen Mary Stakes at Royal Ascot. Secret Santa is also a half-brother to Edward Lynam's *Fort Del Oro*, a multiple Listed-winning sprinter who herself has produced a G3-winning two-year-old, whilst connections' *Xanthe* is another son of *Gilded* who won on debut for the trainer last term before a decent sixth in the Queen Mary at Royal Ascot. By top-class two-year-old *Lucky Vega* – a G1 Phoenix Stakes winner – this colt appeals as an early season juvenile with plenty of early speed packed in his pedigree.

WILD DESERT

Too Darn Hot – Winters Moon (New Approach)

CHARLIE APPLEBY

CHARLIE APPLEBY and the boys in blue enjoyed a stellar year with their two-year-olds last term, registering 42 victories and being responsible for four individual Group-winning juveniles. One of those was G1 Middle Park and Dewhurst Stakes winner *Shadow Of Light*, and the powerful operation have a *Too Darn Hot* half-brother to the champion two-year-old colt set to hit the track in 2025. **Wild Desert's** dam – *Winters Moon* – only won a maiden as a two-year-old but did close that season with a third in the G1 Fillies' Mile, beaten just a half-a-length. The *New Approach* mare is no stranger to producing top-level performers, her first foal was in fact Andre Fabre's *Earthlight*. In 2019, the *Shamardal* colt posted a mesmerising, unbeaten two-year-old campaign that included victories in both the G1 Prix Morny and Middle Park Stakes. Whilst *Shadow Of Light* will be lining up with 2000 Guineas ambitions, the next generation could be just as exciting.

UN-NAMED

No Nay Never – Muirin (Born To Sea)

AIDAN O'BRIEN

WESLEY WARD'S Group 1-winning two-year-old *No Nay Never* has proved an elite source of precocious talent for the Coolmore operation, with the likes of *Little Big Bear*, *Ten Sovereigns*, *Meditate* and *Whistlejacket* immediately springing to mind. Another *No Nay Never* colt who was a crack two-year-old is *Blackbeard*, who raced a whopping eight times as a juvenile before being retired to stud. The quirky character was beaten just twice in the 2022 season and signed off the impressive campaign with back-to-back victories in the G1 Prix Morny and Middle Park Stakes. The dam *Muirin* was a winner at two – as was granddam *Girouette* – and as well as *Blackbeard*, she has also produced the Listed-placed *Run Away* and *Tunbridge Wells*, who won over six furlongs at the Curragh last term and was subsequently sent off favourite for the G2 Railway Stakes. This unnamed colt is a full brother to all three and appeals as one with potential to be a top-class two-year-old for Aidan O'Brien and Ballydoyle.



BLACKBEARD

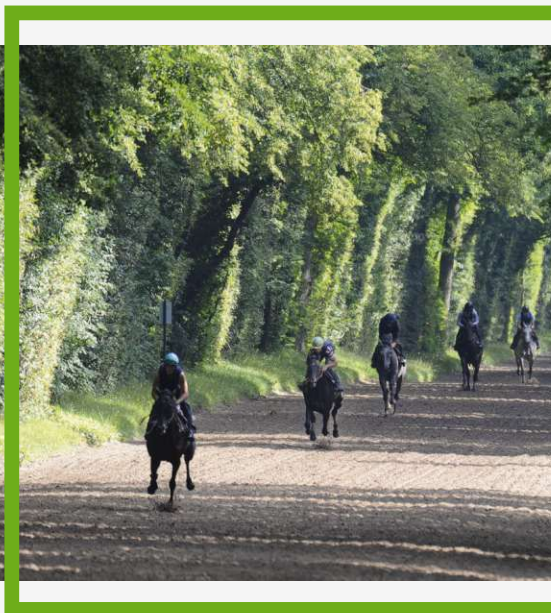


BAY CITY ROLLER

Three-Year-Olds TO FOLLOW

Written by Joe Ballard

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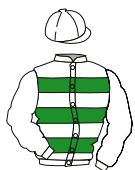
Dubawi – Je Ne Regretterien (Galileo)

AIDAN O'BRIEN

THE *Dubawi-Galileo* cross is one that has produced the likes of *Ghaiyyath* and *Night Of Thunder* for Godolphin, and is an avenue that is beginning to be explored more recently by Coolmore; the likes of *Wingspan*, *Henry Longfellow* and *San Antonio* bred on the same cross. The *Galileo* mare in question is *Je Ne Regretterien* who was G3-placed over a mile-and-a-half for Andre Fabre in France, is a full sister to 2018 Ribblesdale Stakes and Australian G1 winner *Magic Wand* and is a half-sister to 2013 Irish Oaks winner *Chicquita* – the dam of classy stayer *Emily Dickinson* – and 2021 Prix du Jockey Club runner-up *Philomene*.

Acapulco Bay caught the eye on debut over seven furlongs at the Curragh, shaping with plenty of promise behind stablemate *Delacroix*, who has been a great advertiser of that form with a G3 Autumn Stakes win and nose defeat in the G1 Futurity Trophy on his accomplished resume. Held up and kept wide, he shaped encouragingly late on in the race from a long way back, flying home down the outside from another parish to finish second, never nearer than at the finish.

He benefitted from a change in tactics next time up to a mile at the same track, making the running and just kept up to his work to run out an impressive winner. He built on that initial promise and looked stronger the further he went he went, barely scratching the surface of what is underneath the bonnet. The form is decent enough for a maiden too, the runner-up a winner next time and rated 95 and same for the third, who is now rated 99. He is bred for middle-distances and, seeing some of the stayers through the pedigree, appeals as one who could develop into a St Leger type by season's end.



ALMERIC

Study Of Man – Alvarita (Selkirk)

ANDREW BALDING

A HOMEBRED *Study Of Man* colt for Lanwades Stud and Kirsten Rausing, **Almeric** hails from a terrific family that we have come to love over the last two decades. He is a half-brother to G3 winner *Alla Speranza* – who herself has produced a G2 winner – whilst his dam is a Listed winner out of dual Champion Stakes winner *Alborada*. *Alborada* is a half-sister to multiple G1 winner *Albanova* whose progeny has produced the likes of St Leger winner *Eldar Eldarov* and Arc heroine *Alpinista*. It is an outstandingly deep family and *Study Of Man* looks to be a stallion on the rise who had an excellent season with his first crop of three-year-olds last term – Andrew Balding's G1 winner *Kalpana* chief amongst them.

Almeric showed evident promise when fourth at Sandown on debut, coming home from off the pace full of running, and the third gave that form a fair look when readily scoring at Kempton in December from a mark of 85. He built on that encouraging debut when winning a similar contest at Sandown under more testing conditions on his next start. The front pair went at it from a way out, and he displayed a willing attitude to find most and asserted strongly close home. That appeals as a good performance, pulling five lengths clear from a next-time-out winner in third who is now rated 80.

He showed a real engine to win that sustained battle and the way he came home, especially in testing conditions, suggests he will be one to follow over middle distances this season. He has the physique and pedigree of one who will only improve with age, and he will be exciting to follow stepping up in trip. Taking in a novice under a penalty will likely allow connections to see where they stand and he has been handed an entry in the Irish Derby, whilst there are plenty of middle-distance handicaps for him to tackle if not quite up to stakes level.



BAY CITY ROLLER

New Bay – Bloomfield (Teofilo)

GEORGE SCOTT

VICTORIOUS RACING and George Scott are no strangers to each other, having teamed up for *Isle Of Jura*'s breakout season in 2024 in which he landed the Hardwicke, and their partnership blossomed in the form of unbeaten two-year-old **Bay City Roller**.

The *New Bay* colt displayed plenty of promise when winning both of his first two starts over seven furlongs at Sandown and Chelmsford City, knowing his job from the outset and shaping as mature professional as soon as he stepped foot on the track. Stepping up in class for the G2 Champagne Stakes at Doncaster, his unblemished record remained intact as he took another leap forward to secure the hattrick. Travelling well just in behind the front pair, he came there strongly on the near side to take it up in the final furlong. He quickened away smartly from the leaders once passed and kept to his work nicely to hold off the late challenge from Aidan O'Brien's *Monumental*. The form doesn't look extremely strong, for all the third has bolted up in a maiden since, but the contest does boast an illustrious roll of honour with *Chaldean*, *Bayside Boy* and *Too Darn Hot* amongst the recent winners – all of whom took home GI honours as three-year-olds.

He has shown plenty of speed as a juvenile and the step up to a mile in the Guineas will suit, whilst there is plenty of stamina in the pedigree to suggest he will have no problem going further. The dam is a Listed winner over 1m6f, and he is a half-brother to the 110-rated *Botanical*, whose best form has come over ten furlongs. Three of the last seven winners of the Derby took the 2,000 Guineas as their route, and I would favour the same path.



BYBLOS

Frankel – Bird Flown (Oasis Dream)

JOHN & THADY GOSDEN

YOU won't find many better-bred three-race maidens than **Byblos** entering this season. John and Thady Gosden's colt is by *Frankel* out of an *Oasis Dream* mare called *Bird Flown*. The dam hails from the family of Dewhurst winner and champion two-year-old *Xaar* whilst she herself has already shown a proficiency in producing top-class progeny. Her 2017 foal – *Siskin* – was unbeaten as a two-year-old, culminating in a GI Phoenix Stakes win before going on to land Classic honours in the Irish 2,000 Guineas. Her only other foal to hit the track, whilst not as smart, did win twice for Ger Lyons in eight starts and was rated as high as 90.

Byblos looked in need of experience on racecourse debut at Kempton and ran as green as grass but was an eyecatcher as he finished full of running from off the pace, and he did improve next time when pulling clear of the field in behind a promising *Too Darn Hot* colt of Saeed Bin Suroor's. He again shaped with plenty of promise on turf debut at Newmarket on his final start, travelling noticeably well on the front end but unable to quicken behind the impressive *I Am I Said* – who looks an exciting type with Classic entries. That looked a hot maiden – a race that has been in won in recent years by *Hurricane Lane* and *Military Order* – and indeed the third has advertised the form with a victory at Lingfield since.

I would expect him to take in a maiden to start the campaign before progressing from there. He has been handed what could prove a lenient-looking opening mark of just 84, and he appeals as the type to rise through the handicap through the season. There are plenty of milers in his pedigree, but he does shape as though he would get ten furlongs too, and he could be aimed at a Royal Ascot handicap like the Britannia or Golden Gates Stakes.



COSMIC YEAR

Kingman – Passage Of Time (Dansili)

HARRY CHARLTON

HARRY CHARLTON'S **Cosmic Year** made just one appearance in 2024, but stunned in a sensational winning debut at Sandown that immediately marked him out as a future stakes-level performer.

In a seven-furlong novice event in which fellow *Kingman* colt *Palace Pier* blew away his rivals back in 2019, the Juddmonte-owned colt tracked the leader in second throughout and was always a looming danger as he travelled powerfully under Oisín Murphy. He breezed easily alongside *Rock D'Oro* – previously a close second to Group 2 winner *Bay City Roller* on debut – before kicking away at the furlong pole and quickening clear in a matter of strides to put the race to bed in emphatic fashion to record a six-and-a-half length victory. Despite conceding experience to the odds-on runner-up, he went through his race like the utmost professional and skipped beautifully along the turf under just light pressure from the saddle. The third has won a maiden since before chasing home Godolphin's smart *Opera Ballo*, and the form looks solid.

Not only did he run to a high level on debut, but he has the pedigree to match and a page that will take your eye out. By *Kingman*, he is out of *Dansili* mare *Passage Of Time*, a Group 1-winning two-year-old who would go on to win the Musidora Stakes and place in both the Prix Vermeille and Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Turf as a three-year-old. That Sir Henry Cecil-trained mare is also the dam of multiple Group-level winners *Time Test* and *Tempus* whilst she herself is a half-sister Group 1 Falmouth winner *Timepiece*. A Guineas Trial beckons, and he is sure to go on to better things as a three-year-old, such was the impression of his taking debut performance. If he can win the Greenham Stakes on reappearance, he can take high in the Newmarket Classic itself.



DASH DIZZY

Wootton Bassett – Dream The Blues (Oasis Dream)

CHARLIE JOHNSTON

SIoux NATION has been making quite the splash as a stallion, but before that he was a top-class operator on the track. He won the Norfolk and Phoenix Stakes as a two-year-old and went on to finish third in the Group 1 Flying Five as a three-year-old. His *Wootton Bassett* half-brother, **Dash Dizzy**, was purchased for €300,000 and flashed serious potential in 2024 for Charlie Johnston.

Quickly away on debut, he took them along for the first half of the race and stuck well with the eventual winner *Powerful Glory* until giving way entering the final two furlongs when looking to tire. That winner landed the Group 2 Mill Reef on his only other start and *Dash Dizzy* is a big, heavy-set individual who did look as though he would have needed the run. That proved true as he took a step forward to deny an odds-on favourite at Kempton next time out. Rather fizzy in the preliminaries and going with plenty of enthusiasm, he showed an impressive engine to keep galloping into the straight and asserted nicely to win by over two lengths. It is clear the esteem in which the Johnston yard hold this colt, as he was chuckled into Group 1 company on his very next start when taking his chance in the Cheveley Park. He again raced freely on the front end but showed good early pace to take them along. He stuck to his task admirably when overtaken for the lead by subsequent Dewhurst winner *Shadow Of Light* and was only passed for second late on by another Group 1 winner.

A huge, scopey individual, he appeals as one who will improve as a three-year-old as he matures and grows into his powerful physique. His pedigree is all speed, and he could develop into a top-class sprinter in 2025. We know connections aren't scared to play at the top table and something like the Commonwealth Cup Trial or Sandy Lane could be early targets.



DESERT FLOWER

Night Of Thunder – Promising Run (Hard Spun)

CHARLIE APPLEBY

ALTHOUGH not the case for the last two winners – it is worth noting that the 2022 winner never raced again – five of the seven winners of the Fillies' Mile between 2015 and 2021 went on to win Group 1s as three-year-olds. **Desert Flower's** performance in 2024 edition rates as impressive as any of those before her in the race.

Encountering softer ground for the first time, she was restrained early by William Buick in behind a sound gallop. Heading towards the dip, she was asked to quicken and pick up the leaders, and that she did. Ryan Moore looked to be travelling a dream aboard main market rival *January*, but once Desert Flower was produced alongside, she began to pour it on and surged further and further clear in a final furlong showstopper. She beat Aidan O'Brien's Listed winner by five-and-a-half lengths, four lengths further than she had in the G2 May Hill a start prior and the widest winning margin in the race since it was switched to Newmarket, truly stamping her class on the division. Prior to her pattern-class exploits, she had immediately struck us as a top-class operator when striding away to a brace of wide-margin victories on the July course and the daughter of *Night Of Thunder* was four from four in an inch-perfect juvenile season.

Charlie Appleby's filly can, unsurprisingly, be found at the head of the 1000 Guineas market alongside *Lake Victoria* and that promises to be a heavyweight clash between 2024's top juvenile fillies. Desert Flower is already a course and distance winner and represents the best chance Appleby has ever had in the Newmarket classic, one of the few prizes he has yet to add to his glistening collection. Whilst similarly up towards the head of the market for the Oaks, she is out of a *Hard Spun* mare and I would imagine that trip would stretch her. There will be plenty of prizes to be won over a mile, with the potential to tackle ten furlongs later in the campaign.



FALAKEYAH

New Bay – Alafalak (War Front)

OWEN BURROWS

OWEN BURROWS' *New Bay* filly **Falakeyah** hails from an exceptional Shadwell family, a granddaughter of GI Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Turf winner *Lahudood*. That would make her unraced *War Front* dam a half-sister *Aghareed*. Whilst a Listed winner on the track, *Aghareed* is renowned for her exploits in the breeding shed. All five of her foals to have hit the racetrack have won at least twice, and she can boast six-time GI winning superstar *Baaeed* as well as Owen Burrows' King George and Coronation Cup hero *Hukum* amongst her star-studded progeny.

The family haven't exactly been forward types and Owen Burrows isn't a trainer synonymous with two-year-old speed and precocity, he is a patient trainer that will allow his horses time to develop with age. Falakeyah's half-sister *Rowayah* probably posted her best effort as a four-year-old whilst *Baaeed* didn't race as a two-year-old, *Hukum* showed his best form at five and six and even *Lahudood* was winless until the end of her three-year-old campaign. Therefore, the fact Falakeyah was punted off the boards and made a striking debut at Wolverhampton in November are both signs that this could be another special horse for the Shadwell operation.

She didn't beat a strong field by any means, but she travelled powerfully in midfield, making smooth headway through the field before coasting into the lead turning into the home straight and stretching right away from them in taking fashion. She cruised to a five-and-a-half length victory without Jim Crowley really asking a question of her and the experienced jockey was glowing in his review, stating he could hardly pull her up after the line. It was a promising start for one whose best days lie ahead of her, and she has plenty of scope for improvement this season. She is bred in the purple and will stay ten furlongs and further, so she could prove a stakes-level performer before long with middle distance classics on the agenda.



FALLING SNOW

Justify – Winter (Galileo)

DONNACHA O'BRIEN

US TRIPLE CROWN winner *Justify* has enjoyed an electric start to life at stud, already having produced seven individual Group/Grade 1 winners. That list is no doubt headlined by *City Of Troy*, but five of the other six were in fact fillies and **Falling Snow** may well be the next filly destined for the top. Donnacha O'Brien's filly is well and truly bred in the purple, the fourth foal out of dual Guineas and four-time Group 1 winner *Winter* to hit the track. It took the high-class *Galileo* mare until her third start to enter the winners' enclosure before improving leaps and bounds as a three-year-old, so the fact that Falling Snow was a winner on debut is a sign that she could prove very smart.

She made her debut in a Curragh juvenile race in August, a race won by *Hydrangea* and *A Lilac Rolla* in the past, the former a constant adversary to *Winter* throughout many meetings in their three-year-old season. Arriving at the race on the back of a barrier trial, she was always close up and tanked through the race. She showed a terrific attitude to run down the front-running *Ballet Slippers* close home, with the front pair pulling well clear of the rest and appealing as top-class prospects. The runner-up proved that assumption correct, going on to win a maiden before finishing third in the GI Fillies' Mile, and so it was some effort from Falling Snow to reel her in on debut.

A long, rangy type who is clearly bred to do better at three, she is open to any amount of improvement in her classic season. I would expect to see her reappear in a Guineas Trial, whilst there is enough stamina in her pedigree – a full sister to mile-and-a-half winner *London City* – to suggest she will have no problems staying beyond a mile as the season progresses.



GISELLE

Frankel – Newspaperofrecord (Lope De Vega)

AIDAN O'BRIEN

DESPITE being placed at Group 3 level and being handed a rating of 96, **Giselle** was perhaps disappointing as a two-year-old given her breeding and lofty reputation. The *Frankel* filly is the first foal to hit the track out of Chad Brown's wide-margin 2018 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies Turf winner *Newspaperofrecord*, who also went on to score at the top level as a four-year-old, whilst her granddam was runner-up in a Cheveley Park Stakes for Peter Chapple-Hyam.

Giselle was well supported to make a winning debut at Leopardstown, and was the pick of Ryan Moore, but failed to justify the odds when beaten by stablemate *Bedtime Story*. She displayed plenty of greenness that day and was arguably unfortunate not to get closer having been hampered on the home turn and forced to switch for a run in the final furlong. Her stablemate went on to blaze a trail at Royal Ascot with a magnificent victory in the Chesham followed by Group 3 and Group 2 wins, but Giselle was met with a setback and wasn't sighted again until a comfortable victory in a Curragh maiden four months later. She was, for the second time in her career, beaten at odds-on in her final start of the campaign when third in the Group 3 Staffordstown Stud Stakes but shaped with more promise than the result suggested. Just three weeks after her belated return, she was keen early and met trouble, so had to make her challenge from further back than ideal before being carried left in the closing stages – that performance can be marked up somewhat.

She is clearly a work in progress, but she did have excuses last term, and I doubt we have even scratched the surface with her true ability. We haven't seen the best of her yet and, hopefully with an uninterrupted season and a clean go at it in her three-year-old campaign, she can develop into a stakes-level, and possibly Oaks-level, filly.

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MERCHANT

Teofilo – Ceistiu (Vocalised)

WILLIAM HAGGAS

WHILST William Haggas will have plenty to go to war with in 2025 from Somerville Lodge, one of the more interesting types from a handicap perspective is *Teofilo* colt **Merchant**. The Highclere-owned three-year-old cost €135,000 as a yearling and is out of an unraced sister to G3 winner *Steip Amach* and half-sister to G3 winner *Ceisteach*.

Whilst not evident from looking at the racecard, he caught the eye on debut as he was slowly into stride on his first time leaving the stalls and ran green. The penny only seemed to drop for him late and he finished full of running in the closing stages. He improved, with that experience not lost on him, when denied just a neck over a mile at Newcastle next time, again doing his best work late after appearing a little outpaced as the race developed. He stayed on extremely strong and impressed with how he bridged the gap to the leaders, only bested by a potentially smart half-brother to *Phoenix Of Spain*. That is a maiden that has worked out well in the past, *Without Parole* landing the spoils in 2017 whilst Royal Ascot winner *Surefire* is also amongst the roll of honour.

Merchant finally put it all together to shed his maiden tag at Wolverhampton at the end of December, emerging from the fog having conceded first run to run down the leader in the shadows of the post. He has undoubtedly a work in progress but has improved with every outing and having finished strong in all of his three races, should relish stepping up to middle distances this season. He has been handed a potentially lenient looking mark of 82 and he can do damage from that rating if continuing to improve, with high-class three-year-old handicaps such as the London Gold Cup and King George V Stakes possibly on the agenda.



RED LETTER

Frankel – Red Impression (Dark Angel)

GER LYONS

WHILST *Lake Victoria* took home Cartier honours as the top two-year-old filly in 2024, on a line through Aidan O'Brien's three-time Group 1 winner then surely **Red Letter** is being overlooked for Ger Lyons. The Juddmonte-owned *Frankel* filly was a real eyecatcher on debut at the Curragh behind that rival and shaped with plenty of promise. Waited with under Colin Keane, she was briefly short of room when making her move and just conceded first run to *Lake Victoria* before flying home down the outside with wind in her sails to be denied just a head.

She built on that encouragement when running out a wildly impressive winner back at the track next time and again, that is form that has been well advertised since with the third filling the same position in the GI Fillies' Mile and the fourth landing G3 honours before seasons end. She once more met her old foe *Lake Victoria* in the GI Moyglare Stud Stakes, her first start in pattern company, but similar to round one, she was hampered by the way the race developed around her. Short of room down the inner and forced to suspend her challenge until the favourite moved off the rail, it was already too late as the winner came down the outside and she finished in a heap for fourth in an extremely strong field.

Whilst only a maiden winner entering the season, her form stacks up remarkably and she has plenty of scope for improvement up to a mile. The County Meath trainer often keeps his horses at home in Ireland – for all she does hold an entry at Newmarket – and she looks set to be a big player in the Irish 1,000 Guineas. She has also been afforded an entry in the Irish Oaks, but her pedigree wouldn't suggest she wants any further than the mile.



RULING COURT

Justify – Incharge of me (High Chaparral)

CHARLIE APPLEBY

THE star-studded team at Moulton Paddocks looks stacked heading into 2025, and Charlie Appleby looks set to have endless ammunition at his disposal. Appleby trained four stakes-winning two-year-old colts last season, but the one who could be just as, if not more, exciting as those is *Justify* colt **Ruling Court**. *City Of Troy*, and to a slightly lesser extent *Opera Singer* and *Ramatuelle*, paid rest to the feeling that *Justify*s don't train on, and Ruling Court blew away any of those concerns with his explosive victory in the Jumeirah 2000 Guineas at Meydan. Waited with, he moved stylishly through proceedings and once pulled outside and asked for his effort, he showed an electric burst of pace to draw clear by a widening six lengths. Whilst form in Meydan can often be overlooked, it was hard not to be taken with the style of his victory.

The €2,300,000 purchase did also flash plenty of ability as a two-year-old, making a remarkable debut at Sandown when readily striding to a five-length success from an 87-rated rival in second and a 111-rated Group 3 runner-up in third. He was then sent off favourite for potentially the strongest two-year-old contest of the summer when finishing third behind *The Lion In Winter* and *Wimbledon Hawkeye* in the Group 3 Acomb Stakes, appearing to be let down on that occasion by a lack of maturity.

Whilst there is a host of speed in his pedigree, he shapes as one who could develop into a top-class middle-distance performer. He is entered in the 2000 Guineas, but I would prefer him to aim towards the Dante Stakes and then the Derby, especially as Appleby will be mobhanded at Newmarket. If it doesn't go as planned back on European shores, he has the perfect profile – like many for the yard in recent years – to go globetrotting and valuable races such as the Belmont Derby would appeal. He is a hugely exciting prospect, wherever the season takes him.



SMOKEN

Too Darn Hot – Miss Marjorie (Marju)

RALPH BECKETT

2024 was no doubt the year of Ralph Beckett and he will look to bring his electric form into the next season with an exciting team at Kimpton Down, with *Too Darn Hot* filly **Smoken** chief among them.

She made her debut against the boys in a Nottingham maiden, a race that has unearthed Group 1 winners in *Eldar Eldarov* and *King Of Steel* in recent years, and looked a very smart prospect in winning by two-and-a-half lengths from the 86-rated *Archivist*, conceding experience. Tracking the pace, she travelled stylishly to take it up in the final quarter of the race and asserted strongly in the closing stages from Sir Michael Stoute's good yardstick. Stepped up in grade for the Listed Montrose Fillies' Stakes at Newmarket to close her juvenile campaign, she again drew attention with the way in which she travelled into the race before quickening smoothly away to score by a length. All of the next five behind her were last-time-out winners and she did appear to win with a fair bit in hand from the field.

Already seeing out the mile with ease and out of Pinnacle Stakes winner *Miss Marjorie*, she should have no problem going out further in trip and has clearly shown her liking for softer conditions. There is plenty of pattern performers of a variety of distances in her pedigree, her dam out of a half-sister to multiple Group 1-winning miler *Soviet Song* whilst also hailing from the same family as the top-class sprinter *Marsha*. She is also a half-brother to two-mile winner *Duke Of Oxford* and so has plenty of options entering a three-year-old campaign and promises to be an exciting prospect. A Classic trial must surely be on the agenda though and this filly looks to have the perfect profile for the Irish Oaks, a race the trainer landed with *You Got To Me* last season following positive efforts at Epsom and Ascot.



STAR OF LIGHT

Frankel – Star Catcher (Sea The Stars)

JOHN & THADY GOSDEN

THE NOTEBOOKS should always be at the ready when a filly from Clarehaven debuts on the All-Weather at the end of the year. The likes of *Friendly Soul*, *Emily Upjohn* and *Enable* all made winning winter debuts before developing into Group 1-winning three-year-olds. The latest of those that made us stand up and take notice was **Star Of Light**, who run out a striking winner over 1m1½f at Wolverhampton in December.

The *Frankel* filly is bred in the purple, the first foal of the yard's superstar mare *Star Catcher*. Also owned by Anthony Oppenheimer, she won five of her six starts as a three-year-old including three Group 1 contests in the Irish Oaks, Prix Vermeille and British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes. *Star Catcher* also a half-sister to Group 1 winner *Cannock Chase* and two-time Group winner *Pisco Sour*.

Her dam was beaten on debut and the family hasn't exactly proved to be precocious, so her debut victory can be upgraded somewhat, especially as she was a drifter in the market, suggesting she wasn't too forward. Held up off a steady gallop, she made rapid headway up the inner entering the straight to rush up into the lead in smart style. She just appeared to run a bit green in the final furlong, idling a little in front, so did appear to have more up her sleeve than the winning margin. The form wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary by any means, but she appeals as an exciting prospect with the best yet to come. A novice event would look the likely starting point, as the experience will go a long way, before having a crack at an Oaks trial like the *Musidora* – a race the trainer has won five times in the last 11 years. She is bred for a mile-and-a-half and the Gosden team have such a fabulous record with their fillies, so don't be surprised if she develops into a real Classic contender.



STARZINTHEIREYES

Starspangledbanner – Crystal Hope (Nathaniel)

RALPH BECKETT

WE HEAD back to Kimpton Down Stables for another exciting three-year-old, in the form of Marc Chan's 160,000gns purchase **Starzintheireyes**. The son of *Starspangledbanner* made his debut over seven furlongs at Newmarket's July Festival, showing a promising level of ability and doing his best work late. He stayed on eye-catchingly behind G3 Solario Stakes winner *Field Of Gold* in what has proved a hot maiden with the third winning on Arc weekend and placing in GI company at Saint-Cloud. A high-actioned sort, he appeared to relish the softer conditions when opening his account at Leicester next time – another with winning form in front of *Archivist* – but still looked a work in progress, taking an age to organise himself and really get motoring.

He flashed a big engine under the bonnet though, and it was no surprise then to see him assert himself as the strongest stayer in the 1m2f G3 Zetland Stakes on his final start. Dropped right in by Rossa Ryan, they went a strong gallop out in front and it became a real stamina test as he toughed it out well in the business end. The form could also prove pretty useful, the runner-up filling that same spot in the Group 1 Criterium de Saint-Cloud.

Whilst by sprinter *Starspangledbanner*, he is clearly taking plenty from the dam side of his pedigree – the granddam a half-sister to *Crystal Ocean* and *Crystal Capella*. Stamina clearly looks his forte, and I would expect to see him take in a Derby trial before having no problem stepping up in distance for the big race itself. He still has plenty of learning to do but has raw talent in abundance and should go on improving as a three-year-old.



THE LION IN WINTER

Sea The Stars – What A Home (Lope De Vega)

AIDAN O'BRIEN

THE GROUP 3 Acomb Stakes at York's Ebor meeting has produced a couple of Classic winners in recent years – in the form of *Chaldean* and *Phoenix Of Spain* – but no performance was more impressive than **The Lion In Winter**'s record-shattering victory in 2024.

Swiftly into stride, the son of *Sea The Stars* raced on the front end throughout and repelled all challengers as he stayed on powerfully down the centre of the track without a brush of the stick from Ryan Moore. This stylish success looked nice to the eye but was mesmerising on the clock too as he smashed the course record in the process, slashing a whopping 0.75s off the previous record. The time does need to be taken into context, as the ground at York was rattling quick and they did benefit from a tailwind, but the form has worked out extremely well too. The runner-up landed the G2 Royal Lodge on his very next start, the fourth an impressive winner of the G3 Tattersalls Stakes a month later and even the 8th and 9th have posted good efforts since out in Qatar. Even his debut victory prior to his big breakthrough was an indicator of a potential star, impressively striding clear of subsequent G3 winner *Idles Of March* at the Curragh.

The Lion In Winter was not sighted thereafter having picked up an injury but, provided he has wintered well and recovered, he has the world at his feet in 2025. A powerful traveller who already looked a mature professional as a two-year-old, he should relish stepping up in trip and has Derby written all over him for all a crack at the Guineas will likely be first on their agenda. Both of Ballydoyle's last two Derby winners were beaten in the Guineas first, and I would imagine all roads lead to Epsom as the ultimate target with a pedigree stacked full of middle-distance performers.



THE WATCHER

Invincible Spirit – Lunar Vega (Lope De Vega)

KARL BURKE

KARL BURKE enjoyed an incredible year in 2024, racking up both the most prize money and total wins in the UK in his career. He no doubt has plenty of horses to note this season, however it is hard not to be impressed with what **The Watcher** has shown in two starts.

Sheikh Mohammed Obaid Al Maktoum was a big supporter in Karl Burke's stellar season, the pair combining for the likes of *Poet Master*, *Elite Status*, *Ice Max* and more. This *Invincible Spirit* homebred didn't make his racecourse debut until late December but was well supported to make a winning start in a six-furlong novice at Newcastle. The Watcher travelled smoothly and easily breezed into the lead at the furlong pole, before quickening clear to put the race to bed in smart style. Whilst he was receiving 7lbs from the runner-up, William Haggas' colt already had winning experience on side and the form has been given a slight boost, with the fourth winning a maiden since. Such was the impression he made on his taking debut, he was sent off at 1/5 up in trip at Wolves in February and dominated proceedings from the front on route to a comfortable five-length success under a penalty. That form wouldn't be anything to write home about, but he impressed with how he increased the tempo around the home straight and opened up to draw clear.

The unbeaten colt is the third winner from as many runners for an unraced *Lope De Vega* mare, with one of those siblings being the 92-rated *Sisyphean*. The dam is also a half-sister to the once 99-rated *Blue Lemons* and hails from the family of John Dunlop's Prix de Diane third *Time Away*. Whilst he would have no problem stepping up in trip to a mile, he has flashed a great deal of speed in his two victories and could be one for top sprint handicaps from an opening mark of 89.



TRAD JAZZ

Sea The Moon – Kirstenbosch (Mount Nelson)

JAMES OWEN

JAMES OWEN enjoyed a breakthrough season on the flat here in the UK last year, hitting 63 winners in 2024, and the astute dual-purpose operator revelled in a terrific winter over jumps too, racking up over £650,000 in prize money. Whilst he has plenty of nice horses to go to war with in 2025 from his Newmarket base, towards the top of the pecking order must stand *Sea The Moon* filly **Trad Jazz**. Owned by the Gredley Family, she is out of *Mount Nelson* mare *Kirstenbosch* and hails from a deep Aga Khan family that features the likes of Derby winner *Kahyasi* and Irish St Leger winner *Kastoria*. Whilst not a stakes-level winner, her dam was rated as high as 104 and chased home the likes of *Alpinista* and *Enable* as a four-year-old.

Trad Jazz is bred to progress with age, as well as trip, and so that is why her debut success at Kempton over a mile was so taking back in August. Unfancied in the market, they couldn't give her away in the betting ring as she drifted from 10/1 out to a 22/1 SP, suggesting she wasn't exactly forward. Sitting in midfield, she made strong headway at the top of the home straight before slicing through the front rank to hit the lead at the furlong pole and powering away in smart fashion, scorching a trail from the odds-on favourite.

Whilst it was a shock victory, the closing sectionals were excellent and the right horses finished in behind, suggesting they didn't disappoint rather Trad Jazz put up a mighty performance in victory. She should only improve the further she goes in trip, and I would expect to see her take in a novice under a penalty, before perhaps taking her chance in an Oaks Trial. She looked pretty special on debut and the James Owen team should have lofty ambitions over middle-distances for this filly.



TREBLE TEE

Persian King – Sefroua (Kingmambo)

SIMON & ED CRISFORD

PERSIAN KING has made a good start to his second career as a stallion and saw his first crop hit the track in 2024. Andre Fabre's son of *Kingman* improved year to year on the racetrack, winning the G1 Poule d'Essai des Poulains as a three-year-old and adding another two GIs to his sparkling CV as a four-year-old. He will have his first Classic crop in 2025, and if following on from their sire, his progeny should make significant progress from two to three.

From those that did hit the track, it would be hard to be more impressive on debut than **Treble Tee** was. Simon and Ed Crisford's colt made his sole start in a seven-furlong maiden on the Rowley Mile in October in a race that had plenty of depth. The yard clearly knew what they had in their hands as he was well gambled right up until the off and rewarded his supporters in emphatic style as he powered clear to win by over two lengths. He travelled strongly just tucked in behind the leaders but what really marked him out as a smart type was the way in which he breezed alongside before surging out of the dip with an electric turn of foot – leaving the rest of the field in his rearview mirror in a matter of strides. That is form that could rate highly in time too with the runner-up a half-brother to high-class *Mostahdaf* whilst the third has won twice since and is now rated 86 and the fifth also went on to score on his very next start.

His pedigree is packed full of winners, his Listed-winning dam already having produced both a G3 winner and a Listed winner whilst his granddam is the G1 Coronation Stakes winner *Sophisticat*. He will have no problem stepping up to a mile this season and would expect him to appear in one of the Guineas trials, the Craven Stakes appealing as an astute option having already excelled on the Rowley Mile.

Ante-Post

ANGLE



Written by William Urch

DESERT FLOWER

Ante-Post betting is all about finding value.

THE key is simple – try and find a horse who you think will be a shorter starting price than the ante-post price available. Sounds simple right? If only!

UNLIKE its jumping counterpart, ante-post punting on the Flat is a different beast and is much less focused around a certain week in March or to a lesser extent the Grand National. There are a few reasons as to why this is the case, the fact we have a new crop of three-year-olds every year is probably the most obvious and as such we don't have the same horses coming back to contest the same races each year. Of course, this isn't true for the 'older horse' division but these aren't as popular to bet on ante-post as the Classics. The three-year-olds also become an important part of these races as the season goes along, so the bookmakers can't form these later season races until we've seen which three-year-olds contest the earlier races.

We only really have their two-year-old form to go on and when you add in the unpredictability of how they have wintered, it makes for an exciting market to get stuck into. The first Classic of the season is the 2000 Guineas, with *The Lion In Winter* currently heading the betting for none other than leading trainer, Aidan O'Brien. His credentials are obvious after winning the Acomb Stakes at York back in August in impressive style, but this wouldn't be a usual route for

an O'Brien winner. He was due to run in the Dewhurst but was declared a non-runner and as such we've only got his two runs to judge him by, in lesser company than he would be facing in May. Due to his unproven credentials against better types, I'd be happy to take him on at this stage in a race in which O'Brien hasn't had the winner for the last five years.

Charlie Appleby and Godolphin have the next four in the betting, with *Shadow Of Light* the shortest of these. He was quite busy last season, racing five times and was beaten just once in the Gimcrack. Originally raced over just six furlongs, he stayed on pretty impressively in the Dewhurst to run down stablemate *Ancient Truth* and *Expanded* late on. There is enough to suggest in his pedigree that he'll get a mile, but quicker conditions would be a question mark.

The one I'd like to be on at this stage is **COSMIC YEAR**, for Harry Charlton and Juddmonte. The son of Kingman could hardly have been more impressive when hacking up around Sandown Park at the end of last season and shaped as though he's going to be an impressive three-year-old. There's plenty in his pedigree to suggest a mile and may even get



FALLING SNOW

one-mile-two-furlongs in time. The form of that race also stacks up, with the second placed horse, *Rock d'Oro* beaten on debut by the now 110-rated *Bay City Roller*. Less than a length separated the pair on that occasion whereas *Cosmic Year* beat *Rock d'Oro* by six-and-a-half-lengths, so he must be pretty useful on that evidence.

The 1000 Guineas looks to be more of a done deal if the betting is anything to go by. *Desert Flower* is pretty short at the head of the market but she's hard to oppose after remaining unbeaten as a juvenile. She's beaten *January* twice, including in the Fillies' Mile and looks to be a cut above the majority of those in the betting. Her form ties in nicely with a few of the others and providing she's trained on, she'd be the pick of them here. One I think that is worth chancing is **FALLING SNOW** for Donnacha O'Brien. There is more of a risk attached with this daughter of *Justify* as she may stay in Ireland, but I was mightily impressed by her attitude when beating *Ballet Slippers* at the Curragh. As a full-sister to *London City*, she is sure to get further in time but a stiff mile at Newmarket could well be perfect for her at this stage. O'Brien had the second last year in *Porta Fortuna* and she could well follow in her footsteps this year.

The Epsom Derby is usually wide open at this stage and this year looks no different. The Master of Ballydoyle will no doubt have his usual host of hopefuls, but it is with his other son Joseph that my

first pick comes from. **TENNESSE STUD** looked every inch a stayer when finishing in behind *Hotazhell* (who also looks a very nice type at this stage), and the Derby was already suggested as a target by his trainer. He looked to be a bit green when finishing second in the Beresford and got his act together late on to finish strongly. On his final start as a juvenile, he went to France where he won on ground that wouldn't have suited him and it is a testament to his ability that he got the job done. The Beresford has served as a good trial in recent years, with *Luxembourg & Japan* both contesting the race, so bear any in mind who show up in June from here.

The second colt who interests me is **SALLAAL** for Roger Varian. He needed every inch of the seven-furlong trip at Yarmouth to get up on the line and put up an RPR of 89, which is pretty impressive for a debut run. Leaving the stalls he was quite green and continued to do plenty wrong throughout the race before being swept off his feet as they kicked for home. Jack Mitchell, however, remained calm and once this colt found his feet, he hit the line very strongly to score. You'd have to love his attitude and when looking at his pedigree, he looks as though he is a serious animal, related to the likes of *Benbatl* and 1000 Guineas winner *Elmalka*. They may well try him over a mile first, but I think he will only improve when upped in trip and may well make up into a proper Derby type for the Varian team.

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Written by Joe Ballard

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ALMAQAM

Lope De Vega – Talmada (Cape Cross)

ED WALKER

ALMAQAM is out of a Group 1-placed *Cape Cross* mare and proved progressive in a short period of time last term. Racing just once as a two-year-old, he was beaten at Newmarket when very green but ran on from off the pace to finish fourth, with the front two now rated 98 and 100 respectively.

The *Lope De Vega* colt built on that promise on return at Yarmouth over a mile, travelling smoothly and breaking his maiden as he asserted nicely close home. Whilst that race didn't quite work out as expected from those in behind, he took a huge step forward when running out an extremely impressive winner of the Listed Heron Stakes at Sandown next time. Tracking the leaders, he raced very freely and was left in front turning the bend. Once asked to quicken clear by William Buick, the response was exceptional, and he stretched right away to a striking three-and-three-quarter length victory. That is form that has actually worked out well too, the runner-up filling the same spot in the Jersey Stakes next time and the fourth a Group 2 winner before season's end. Almaqam was stepped up markedly in grade for a red-hot edition of the St James' Palace Stakes but just appeared to lack the gears and speed on rattling quick ground. He was duly moved up in trip at Deauville next time, although proved no match for two smart rivals in *Economics* and *Jayarebe*. He got much closer to the latter when producing a career-best in the Group 2 Prix Dollar, staying on extremely well late and only just beaten by a head.

He still appears to struggle settling, so the hope is with another year of experience on his back, he can mature and go on progressing again as a four-year-old. Already a winner at Sandown, the Gordon Richards Stakes appeals as starting point, whilst he has been entered in the Group 1 Tattersalls Gold Cup at the Curragh.



APOTHEOSIS

Night Of Thunder – Beautiful Ending (Exceed And Excel)

SIMON & ED CRISFORD

SIMON AND ED CRISFORD'S **Apotheosis** is out of *Exceed And Excel* mare who has an illustrious list of siblings that makes for an impressive pedigree. *Beautiful Ending* is a half-sister to five-time Group winner and multiple Group 1-placed *Nayyir*, Group 3 winner and St Leger runner-up *Highest* and two-time Group winner and Prix du Jockey Club third *Sky Hunter*.

The *Night Of Thunder* gelding caught the eye when making a promising debut at Kempton over seven furlongs, extremely keen even in a hood but running on nicely into third, with the now 95-rated *Storm Star* back in fourth. The four-year-old built on that encouraging start as he recorded back-to-back victories in seven-furlong novice events at Haydock and Lingfield, the second of those a comfortable three-and-a-half length victory. What made those victories so impressive, and means they can be marked up, is that he downright refused to settle on both occasions but still showed remarkable ability to come out on top regardless. His final start of the campaign can be readily excused, not appearing to handle the softer conditions and looking extremely awkward under pressure as he wandered around in the closing stages.

He has already been gelded, so the training partnership will have to work some magic to channel his enthusiasm as a four-year-old as he has been his own worst enemy. However, the fact he has won twice already and is rated 90 despite his free-going, exuberant nature is a testament to the natural ability he possesses. If he can mature this season, he has bags of untapped potential and can prove better than his current mark. A big-field handicap scenario run at a good clip should help him settle and he is a classy type, just with learning still to do.



AULD TOON LOON

Belardo – Snowtime (Galileo)

TOM DASCOMBE

TOM DASCOMBE'S **Auld Toon Loon** hails from an extremely smart family, out of an unraced *Galileo* mare who is a half-sister to top-class Group 1-winning miler *Ali-Royal*, four-time Group 1 winner *Taipan* and 1000 Guineas winner *Sleepytime*. The *Belardo* gelding was a fairly useful handicapper for David O'Meara in 2023, but it is not very often you see a horse bred like this jumping a hurdle.

The six-year-old never took to jumping and as a result, abandoned that idea and joined Tom Dascombe in October to return to the level. Retaining the tongue strap his former trainer had introduced over hurdles, he made an emphatic return and asserted his preference for the Flat when bolting up by over eight lengths at Bath from a mark of 83. The six-year-old travelled extremely strongly just in behind the leaders before sauntering to the lead on the inside and drawing clear in comprehensive style. Stepped up in trip to a mile-and-a-half for the always-competitive November Handicap at Doncaster a couple of weeks later, the gelding progressed again as he stayed on strongly at the finish into fourth from a 10lb higher mark. His effort can probably be marked up somewhat too, all three in front making their challenge up the rail whilst Auld Toon Loon made his move down the centre of the track. That was an extremely competitive handicap, and he posted a career best on just his second start for the stable.

He found the step up to Listed company off the back of a short break a step too far at Lingfield last time, unsuited by a steady gallop and a sprint finish. The six-year-old is seen to best effect with a sterner stamina test over that trip whilst he has also proven a dour stayer at a mile-and-a-half. Tom Dascombe's gelding remains on a mark of 94 and looks primed to score in a middle-distance handicap, especially when there is cut in the ground.



BULLET POINT

Advertise – Crying Lightening (Holy Roman Emperor)

WILLIAM HAGGAS

ADVERTISE gelding **Bullet Point** became the third winner for *Holy Roman Emperor* mare *Crying Lightening*, who was a seven-furlong Listed winner for Peter Chapple-Hyam. The four-year-old was campaigned with handicaps in mind by William Haggas to begin his career, soundly beaten in three novice events under minimal pressure.

On the back of a gelding operation then, he returned off a short break to make his handicap debut from a mark of 75 at Wolverhampton. He was well supported in the market and dictated out in front, but just appeared to tire on the back of a layoff as he weakened away. He came forward massively for the outing though, making all the running from a 1lb lower mark at Newcastle – controlling the tempo and displaying an impressive switch of gears to stretch on and away to a rather comfortable four-length success. Stepped up in grade to a much stronger race back on the turf at Newmarket to close the campaign then, he proved his progressiveness with another victory, this time from a 9lb higher mark. Always prominent and on the lead, he showed a real determined attitude – especially on heavy ground – to fend off all challengers in gutsy fashion. He held on from the fast-finishing challenge of *Tribal Chief* to win by half-a-length at the line and that rival was an improving gelding chasing the four-timer, so that could work out as strong form.

Bullet Point has been raised another 6lbs by the handicapper for that performance but, after just the three handicap starts in his career, I would doubt that a rating of 89 is his ceiling and he can develop into a classy mile handicapper this season. Already proven on the Rowley Mile, there is a mile handicap at the Craven meeting that would look an ideal target whilst a shot at the Suffolk Stakes up slightly in trip at the Guineas meeting could also be considered.



CROWN BOARD

Lope De Vega – Against Rules (Aussie Rules)

JANE CHAPPLE-HYAM

DESPITE being a five-year-old, **Crown Board** is still very lightly raced with just the three career starts despite costing 180,000gns as a yearling. The *Lope De Vega* gelding made a taking a debut at the back end of his three-year-old campaign in a Wolverhampton novice though, looking as though he may well live up to his price tag. He looked an extremely strong prospect in making a winning start as he travelled stylishly into the lead and quickened clear in impressive fashion despite evident greenness to a six-length victory.

Jane Chapple-Hyam's gelding again spent some time off the track and returned after over eight months off at Glorious Goodwood in a Conditions Race over nine furlongs. He begun sweating and was very keen held up out the back, and just didn't appear to take to the unique track as he was unable to quicken and finished a soundly beaten sixth of seven. He did post a much more encouraging effort when fourth in the Listed Fortune Stakes at Sandown a month later however and kept on nicely to be beaten just two lengths at the line.

He hasn't been seen since and has clearly been a horse that is tough to keep sound and get to the track but holds plenty of ability if they get a clear run with him in 2025. He is clearly well regarded by the stable, last year holding an entry in the GI Champion Stakes at one time, and does have the look and physique of one who is much better than he has shown. His dam is a three-time Listed winner up to two miles, his granddam is a King George V Stakes winner and he shapes as one who would benefit from a step up in trip. He will have to learn to settle better, but a good run of outings should help, and he is rated 105 after just three racecourse starts and the talent is there.



DURAN

Invincible Spirit – Dolma (Marchand De Sable)

NIGEL TINKLER

NIGEL TINKLER is an adept trainer of sprinters and one such horse who looks capable of notching a few sprint handicaps this season is **Duran**. The *Invincible Spirit* gelding is out of a 7f Listed winner and is a half-brother to Australian Group 3 winner *McCreery* and Pretty Polly Stakes winner *Thistle Bird* – who is also the dam of smart performers *Epictetus* and *Jumbly*.

The four-year-old proved an extremely keen-going sort at the start of the season but got off the mark over six furlongs in a Brighton maiden and three starts later scored in a big-field handicap at York from a mark of 73. Despite hanging a little once hitting the lead, he showed a real game and determined attitude to hold off the challenge of a subsequent winner, with the pair pulling nicely clear of the rest. After a below-par run at Nottingham, Duran bounced right back to form down at the minimum trip at York to enter the winners' enclosure for a third time in six starts. From a 6lb higher mark than when scoring at the track previously, he did his best work late as he rattled home along the stands rail to lead close home. Back at York for his final start of the season, he ran better than his eighth placed finish suggested. Poorly drawn in a race dominated by those in single figure stalls and slowly away, he ran on nicely from well off the pace but was on the wrong side of the track.

He remains on a mark of 83 and, whilst he hasn't proved the most consistent, has the ability to continue winning sprint handicaps when on a going day. All his best form has come at York, and there will be ample opportunities for him on the Knavesmere. He probably needs cut in the ground when racing over the minimum trip but, if it is quick ground, will be seen to best effect over slightly further.



ENVIRONMENT AMIGO

Golden Horn – Madame Defarge (Motivator)

JAMES FANSHAWE

THE GREDLEY FAMILY have enjoyed a magnificent 12 months in both codes and, just a day after *Wimbledon Hawkeye's* Royal Lodge success, James Fanshawe's **Environment Amigo** continued the celebrations with a demolition job at Southwell.

A huge, imposing son of *Golden Horn*, the gelding has been a work in progress and took his time to piece it altogether but has displayed plenty of ability in his final three starts. Out of a *Motivator* mare who had already produced a Cesarewitch Trial winner, staying was always going to be his game, and he got off the mark at Southwell when stepping up in trip to 1m6f. Under more positive tactics, he was ridden up to the lead in the back straight before kicking on for home from a long way out. Despite running around a little under pressure, he displayed a huge engine and willing attitude to hold on from challengers in behind. Given a similar ride on turf next time at Yarmouth, he was unable to repel *Charging Thunder* when inconvenienced by the slow gallop, a sprint finish never going to suit this galloping type. The gelding left that form well behind on his final start of the campaign back on the All-Weather at Southwell, up in trip to an extended two miles. On this occasion, he was patiently ridden by Hollie Doyle and travelled extremely powerfully through proceedings before taking it up turning the home bend. With the rest of the field paddling in behind, he stretched away from them in striking fashion en route to a mightily impressive seven length victory.

He relished the step up in trip and, although raised 9lbs, has plenty of scope to progress in marathon handicaps. His physique and breeding suggest he will only go on improving into his four-year-old campaign and leave a mark of 83 behind. He does appear best suited to an artificial surface, and he may well develop into a leading contender for the Northumberland Plate.



ESTRANGE

Night Of Thunder – Alienate (Oasis Dream)

DAVID O'MEARA

NIGHT OF THUNDER filly **Estrange** posted one of the most taking debuts of the entire season at Goodwood, the gallant grey breezing effortlessly clear basically on the bridle to record a five-and-a-half length success. David O'Meara's filly made plenty of appeal on paper, the 425,000gns yearling out of an unraced half-sister to St Leger winner *Logician* and talented Gordon Richards winner *Okeechobee*.

Whilst the form in behind has had mixed results, the well beaten fourth did go on to record a four-timer thereafter and is now rated 100, and it was hard not to be impressed as the filly glided away from them without breaking a sweat. It was perhaps a little disappointing to see her finish midfield in the Listed John Musker Fillies' Stakes next time then. However, that was a messy race in which she was short of room, and, off a modest gallop, she just lacked that change of gears on much quicker ground than had been the case on debut. She bounced right back to form and even improved on the promise of her debut back in testing conditions on her final start at Doncaster, readily landing the Listed Gillies Fillies' Stakes. Despite still appearing green under pressure, she began motoring home from the rear and surged to the front in the final furlong, asserting strongly close home.

After just three starts, and still displaying slight inexperience, she is open to plenty of scope for improvement as a four-year-old and bigger prizes surely await. Soft ground does seem almost essential for her to be seen to best effect, and she will have to be plotted around conditions. Based on pedigree and how she shaped at Doncaster, she should stay and may even improve for a mile-and-a-half in time. Whilst only a Listed winner at the moment, if progressing as expected through the season, the British Champion Fillies and Mares Stakes on Champions Day could be the bold target to build up to.



GHOSTWRITER

Invincible Spirit – Moorside (Champs Elysees)

CLIVE COX

ALTHOUGH unbeaten as a two-year-old, which included a victory in the Group 2 Royal Lodge Stakes, **Ghostwriter** was winless as a three-year-old. However, the *Invincible Spirit* colt raced exclusively in Group 1 company and held his form admirably well, posting consistently excellent efforts in defeat.

Despite taking a keen hold in the 2000 Guineas on reappearance and clipping heels towards the start, he ran a cracker to finish fourth when just unable to quicken behind out-and-out milers. Based on his pedigree – his dam a mile-and-a-half winner – his best form was always going to be over slightly further, and the rest of his runs were all over around 10 furlongs. He finished fourth in the Prix du Jockey Club, just a length-and-a-half behind Grand Prix de Paris winner *Sosie*, before a third in the Coral-Eclipse. **Ghostwriter** put Derby winner *City Of Troy* under extreme pressure and made him work hard to see off his challenge, before having his run cut off as the winner drifted over to the rail. He continued to run up to form with a third-place finish in the Juddmonte International and a fifth in the Irish Champion Stakes, beaten just two lengths.

Whilst he most likely would have been able to pick up a victory at a lower grade, trainer Clive Cox never wavered from the fact that he has a Group 1 colt on his. He is a powerhouse of a horse and is the type to improve again physically into his four-year-old season. He has proved to be keen and free on occasions so, whilst his pedigree suggests he would get a mile-and-a-half, it would be best to remain at 10 furlongs until he has proven he can settle, with the Tattersalls Gold Cup a good starting point in the season. If he continues to perform so consistently, that elusive Group 1 prize could be just around the corner.



MOON FLIGHT

Sea The Moon – Miss Margarita (Scat Daddy)

LINDA PERRATT

A CLASS 2 handicap over five furlongs at Hamilton on 2nd June 2024 proved incredibly strong form and was a race to follow throughout the season. The winner ended the year with a fourth in the G1 Prix de l'Abbaye, the runner-up won the Portland Handicap from a 12lb higher mark and the third won a Listed race. It is rock solid form, and a horse who caught the eye that day finished back in fifth on turf debut. That horse was Linda Perratt's **Moon Flight** who blew the start and ran into plenty of trouble when still travelling well, having to pick his way through traffic, a strong performance in the circumstances.

The five-year-old backed up that effort down in class when scoring at Ayr, overcoming a messy start to reel in the longtime leader with a gutsy finish. Once again, that form reads extremely well with the runner-up *Jordan Electrics* winning all of his next four starts and finishing runner-up in the Symphony Group Handicap at York's Ebor meeting from a 21lb higher mark. The gelding could only finish third back at Hamilton next time when running too free, whilst again denied a clear run, and was subsequently given the summer off before returning in February on the All-Weather. The son of *Sea The Moon* pulled far too hard on return when running no race at Newcastle and whilst settling better in a hood at Southwell, still looked in need of the run with the betting telling the story as a huge drifter in the market before the off.

As a result, Moon Flight has now dropped back to his last winning mark of 80 – 11lb lower than that Hamilton fifth place finish – and can make his mark returning to the turf this summer over the minimum trip. He looks extremely well-handicapped and can take advantage of this mark, the quicker the ground the better.

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MY CLOUD

Blue Point – Beach Frolic (Nayef)

ROGER VARIAN

THE unraced *Nayef* mare *Beach Frolic* hails from a nice family – a half-sister to Dante winner *Bonfire* and Musidora winner *Joviality* – and is proving incredibly successful in the breeding shed. She has produced five individual winners, including *Palace Pier* and *Castle Way*. The former won nine of his 11 starts and was a high-class, five-time Group 1 winner whilst the latter is a 110-rated Group 3 winner. Her 2021 foal by *Blue Point* – **My Cloud** – got off the mark at the third time of asking in a Newcastle novice in wildly impressive fashion when last seen.

Roger Varian's four-year-old is clearly bred in the purple – and did cost €325,000 – but was found wanting in experience when beaten a neck by a now 75-rated rival on debut. He was slowly away out the gates and despite travelling best into the closing stages, just ran a little green and was passed by one with two starts under his belt. He was then slightly disappointing when soundly beaten by the now 74-rated *Ghaihaban* on the back of an extended break, again slowly away. However, it was his final start at Newcastle last time that really marked him out as a horse with utmost potential. Up in trip to a mile, he could hardly have done it any easier as he cantered to an extremely impressive 13-length victory with Jack Mitchell barely having to move a muscle on him in the saddle. He was sent off a prohibitive 1/6 favourite and the form is nothing to shout about, but it was hard not to be taken with how he achieved it.

My Cloud has had just the three career starts and is completely unexposed, so an opening mark of 80 can be exploited at the beginning of the season. He is impeccably bred and can go on progressing to greater things, potentially even a stakes-level performer by season's end.



NAEPOINT

Blue Point – Moon Shaddow (Galileo)

EDWARD BETHELL

EDWARD BETHELL enjoyed a terrific 2024 in just the fourth year of his training career, sending out 58 winners and racking up over £1 million in prize money. Four-year-old son of *Blue Point* **Naepoint** accounted for three of those victories, scoring twice over a mile at Redcar to sign off a progressive three-year-old campaign.

Naepoint was never able to score in a maiden in three starts last season but did improve with every start before making a winning handicap debut at Doncaster from an opening mark of 74. Despite taking a keen hold, he showed a real determined attitude in the finish from the fast-finishing *Havanarama*. He couldn't build on that at Yarmouth next time, held up and far too keen, unable to make any inroads from the rear and not running his race. He bounced back from that disappointing outing with back-to-back victories at Redcar however with a change in tactics working wonders. From a mark of 78, he made all and travelled much better on the front end, dominating the race on the rail and galloping on steadfastly all the way to the line. Bumped up 6lbs for the victory, Paul Mulrennan again employed positive tactics to good effect as he registered another course and distance victory. A little free as he contested the lead, he made his move and kicked on just shy of three furlongs from home, and again remained strong in the closing stages.

Given his free-going, enthusiastic nature it was not surprising to see he has been gelded over the winter. The four-year-old has been raised another 5lbs to a mark of 88, but this progressive type appeals as one with further scope for improvement and still looks well-handicapped from his revised mark. A winner on both good-to-firm and soft ground, he is versatile in terms of conditions and will have plenty of options in handicaps over a mile this season.



NATIVE WARRIOR

Wootton Bassett – Beauty Salon (Dutch Art)

KARL BURKE

WATHNAN RACING made the quite the splash when arriving on the scene here in the UK in 2023 with their expensive purchases and big-race wins, and that continued in a 2024 which saw the operation record three victories at Royal Ascot. The owners purchased Karl Burke's **Native Warrior** after he had ran in a red-hot Conditions Stakes race at Kempton behind 2000 Guineas winner *Notable Speech*.

The son of *Wootton Bassett* wasted no time in giving his new owners something to cheer about as he scored on his first start in new colours to shed his maiden tag at Nottingham, winning with more in hand than the winning margin suggested, always in command. Native Warrior was not one of their three winners at the Royal meeting, but did run a stormer from the rear to finish third in the Britannia Stakes on handicap debut from a mark of 90. Racing on the near side, he came home first in his group as he flew home strongly but just had too much to do to reel in the front pair who had already gotten away on the other side of the track. Given a six week break, he was subsequently sent off favourite for a 1m1f handicap at Glorious Goodwood. Whilst he couldn't reward his supporters, he still ran a fine race to be beaten less than a length in second. He was a little keen on the front end but was still going best in the straight and was just headed late on. He disappointed on his final start of the campaign at Doncaster, racing freely and a little awkwardly in midfield, ultimately unable to quicken.

He has since been gelded and that effort can be forgiven, in the right hands to bounce back and well worth another chance this season having had just the seven starts under rules. He still looks well-handicapped from a mark of 93 – same as at Goodwood and 3lbs higher than the Royal Meeting – and a stiff mile looks his perfect trip, so a return to Ascot for the Royal Hunt Cup could be on the cards.



OMBUDSMAN

Night Of Thunder – Syndicate (Dansili)

JOHN & THADY GOSDEN

NIGHT OF THUNDER enjoyed a magnificent 2024, led by the likes of *Desert Flower* and *Economics*, and he is a growing force as a stallion. One horse who can take the step up in 2025 and become his sire's sixth individual GI winner is John and Thady Gosden's **Ombudsman**, who was unbeaten in four starts as a three-year-old last term.

The 340,000gns yearling made his belated debut last June at Newmarket and, if judging by the market, was still very backwards. However, the Godolphin-owned colt defied inexperience as he absolutely stormed home once the penny dropped to make a winning start in impressive fashion. That was a novice won by *Baaeed* once upon time and again it has proved a red-hot contest, with the next five home now all rated in the 90s. Up in trip to ten furlongs at Leicester, he didn't need to improve to win with plenty in hand and was subsequently upped in grade for the Listed Prix Nureyev at Deauville next time. Ombudsman continued his rapid rise to stardom and completed the hattrick in dominant fashion, the rise in class causing no issues as he drew clear to record a three-and-a-half length success. He was made to work a little harder to secure Group 3 honours at Longchamp next time in the Prix du Prince d'Orange – a race won by *Ghaiyyath* in 2018 – but Ryan Moore did report the colt to still be a little green and inexperienced. That form has worked out strongly for its grade; the third an impressive winner of the Qatar Derby, the fourth a Group 3 winner on return and the fifth a Listed winner next time.

They have clearly been taking it slow with Ombudsman and he is learning all the time, but he looks set for a big leap in 2025. We look to have barely scratched the surface on his true ceiling, and Group 1 assignments call – he can go to the very top. With form in France already, the Prix Ganay appeals as an early season target.



ROUGE SELLIER

Lope De Vega – Screen Star (Tobougg)

SIR MARK PRESCOTT BT

SIR MARK PRESCOTT is a master with fillies and mares, sending out a whole host of top-level performers from *Alborada* to *Alpinista*. Even last season, *Tiffany* secured Group-level prizes and four-year-old **Rouge Sellier** has the perfect profile to join this list.

The *Lope De Vega* filly is a half-sister to Group 1 Cheveley Park winner *Lumiere* and Group 1 E.P.Taylor Stakes winner *Sheikha Reika*. Winless in two starts over a mile as a two-year-old and undergoing wind surgery, she returned last season with a wildly impressive 15-length victory in a Kempton novice. The race was run at a decent clip but was blown apart by Rouge Sellier, who took it up cantering on the bridle at the two-furlong pole and sauntered away from them in breathtaking fashion. She proved too keen off a steady gallop when a soundly beaten fourth behind *Kalpana* in Listed company but did shape encouragingly when runner-up in a Listed race at Galway behind *Beechwood*. Held up, she was left with too much to do behind the well-positioned winner, but did plug on well to finish second. Her final performance of the season was no doubt her best, stepping up markedly in class for the Group 1 Prix de Royallieu over 1m6f at Longchamp. Again given a very patient ride by Luke Morris, she was never nearer than at the finish, taking the inside route as they turned for home and staying on strongly all the way to the line to be beaten less than two lengths in fifth.

That was her first start at the trip, and she saw it out well to open up plenty of options. Sir Mark is a shrewd placer of horses, and it may be that she is aimed at mile-and-a-half Group races in Germany, those races proving good opportunities for some black type. Back home, a race like the Lancashire Oaks before stepping back up in trip for the Lillie Langtry at Goodwood could also prove a viable route.



SARDINIAN WARRIOR

Saxon Warrior – La Collina (Strategic Prince)

JOHN & THADY GOSDEN

LA COLLINA was extremely successful on the track over a decade ago, winning the Group 1 Phoenix Stakes as a two-year-old and the Group 1 Matron Stakes on her penultimate start as a four-year-old. The *Strategic Prince* mare has yet to really pass her ability on to her progeny, however her success as a broodmare looks set to change with John and Thady Gosden's **Sardinian Warrior**.

The *Saxon Warrior* colt was seen just once as a two-year-old but proved incredibly progressive at three with an unbeaten run of three starts. On reappearance in a Southwell novice, he drew right away to score emphatically by over four lengths. That form reads well too – the second, sixth and seventh all rated in the 90s and the ninth a 105-rated Listed winner – and he kicked them out the way with ease. He was then given a lengthy break and returned under a penalty with a comfortable all-the-way victory. The runner-up won next time out to advertise the form, and he won in the style of one destined for greater things. We have seen Sardinian Warrior just once more, making his handicap debut from a mark of 97 and making a mockery of the handicapper as he tanked along to a dominant four-length victory. Again making the running, he set to sail for home turning into the straight and never saw another rival, scoring with plenty in hand. That was a strong contest too, the runner-up *Silver Sword* a solid yardstick who has since won in Meydan whilst the third has won both of his next two starts.

Unsurprisingly, the handicapper has taken a stern view and raised him 10lbs for that impressive performance but, after just the four career starts, he is unlikely to have reached his ceiling yet. Rated 107, he looks a Group horse in the making and expect to see a step up in class this season.



SMART HERO

Shamardal – October Queen (Iffraaj)

JAMES TATE

SHAMARDAL gelding **Smart Hero** is a half-brother to the useful *Sea The Casper* – rated 105 – and the dam is an unraced full sister to G1 Coronation Stakes winner *Rizeena* and Group 2 winner *Summer Romance*. The family has proved most effective at around a mile, and so it was that much more impressive that James Tate's four-year-old was able to score comfortably in a six-furlong maiden at Southwell last August.

Smart Hero struggled on his next three starts at six and seven furlongs, and it wasn't until he stepped up in trip to an extended mile at Wolverhampton that he found the winning thread once again. He appeared to settle better in a hood for the second time, dropped right out under a patient Clifford Lee ride and making eye-catching headway up the inside rail entering the straight. The jockey timed his ride to perfection, flying home with wind in his sails to take the lead in the shadows of the post. Returning to the same venue up another furlong in trip, he improved again to record back-to-back victories and did so in much more impressive fashion. Raised just 2lbs for his course victory a month earlier, he had plenty more in hand on the handicapper here. Waited with and ridden with supreme confidence by Clifford Lee, he travelled sweetly on the inner and easily picked up the leader in the home straight as he swept away from the field with an electric burst of pace.

He has been raised 9lbs for that striking victory, but he is still completely unexposed at this sort of trip and can go on progressing up in class. Earlier in the season, he had been his own undoing as a quirky free-going sort, but they looked to have found the key to him, holding him up in a hood and waiting to have one crack at the leaders. He has only had two starts on the turf but does seem more effective on an artificial surface, just as his sibling *Sea The Casper* was.



SPACE TROOPER

Lethal Force – Boonga Roogeta (Tobougg)

PETER CHARALAMBOUS AND JAMES CLUTTERBUCK

APOLLO ONE has been a shining star for the Charalambous and Clutterbuck training partnership, an uber-consistent sprinter who has accumulated over £400,000 in prize money. In 2024, the seven-year-old was runner-up in both the Stewards' Cup and Portland Handicap before taking Group 3 honours in the Bengough Stakes. The dam too was an effective handicapper, scoring 11 times in a lengthy career, and *Apollo One's* half-brother – **Space Trooper** – looks one to keep on side this season.

The *Lethal Force* gelding has clearly been tricky to keep right, and only made his debut as a four-year-old back in September. Space Trooper finished a soundly beaten fourth on debut at Chelmsford, never able to settle and given a tender ride but still shaping nicely enough on debut conceding weight and experience. He was then very well-backed next time dropped right back in trip to five furlongs but again was too keen and dropped away quickly on heavy ground at Windsor. It has been his final two starts though that have flashed his potential, back up to seven furlongs he was just outbattled when runner-up at Newcastle – again, possibly too keen early and tying up late – before getting off the mark in smooth fashion at Chelmsford. He travelled stylishly through the contest in the rear before the grey quickened away to settle the race in a matter of strides in the final furlong. He won by a widening three-and-a-half lengths at the line, and the second and third won easily on their next starts to give the form a nice look.

Afforded an opening mark of 72, handicapping has no doubt always been the plan and he can do plenty of damage and possibly run up a winning streak from this sort of mark. He is completely unexposed and will likely improve for a faster pace to aim at too, with a drop back to six furlongs also an option.



STORY HORSE

Bated Breath – Salutare (Sadler's Wells)

WILLIAM KNIGHT

WILLIAM KNIGHT'S **Story Horse** hails from a deep George Strawbridge owned and bred family, the *Sadler's Wells* dam *Salutare* representing a pedigree that includes the likes of Prix Royal-Oak winner *Montare*, British Champions Fillies & Mares winner *Journey* and multiple Listed winner *Contare*. The dam herself is a multiple winner over staying trips, and Story Horse is a full brother to G2 Dahlia Stakes winner *Worth Waiting*.

The five-year-old had been slow to progress in the early parts of his career, but finally shed his maiden tag at the ninth time of asking last June in a Lingfield handicap from a mark of 72. Racing over just shy of a mile-and-a-half, the *Bated Breath* gelding didn't fully settle but surged clear in really good style to an impressive four-length victory. He probably found the race coming too soon when just held under a penalty six days later but scored again – this time at 1m6f – at Haydock a month later. Always prominent and travelling strongly, he did drift off the rail slightly but was always in command and won with a bit in hand from a mark of 79 – the runner-up winning next time out. He was disappointing on his next two starts but bounced back with an excellent second to the Gosden's *Pappano* at Southwell. He conceded first run to the winner – who went on to finish third in the Listed Noel Murless Stakes next time – but kept on strongly once switched out for a run to go down by just a neck.

Story Horse didn't appear to stay the marathon 2m2f trip at Newmarket in the Cesarewitch and its trial to end the season, weakening away in the final couple of furlongs, but has been dropped 2lbs for those outings. Back down to a mark of 82, he can prove well-handicapped and will be seen to best effect over 1m6f on either surface – with form figures of 2012 at the trip.



WINGSPAN

Dubawi – Hydrangea (Galileo)

AIDAN O'BRIEN

BALLYDOYLE filly **Wingspan** is a horse bred in the purple, a daughter of *Dubawi* and the first foal out of *Hydrangea*. The dam is a *Galileo* mare who is a half-sister to dual Guineas winner *Hermosa* and herself won a brace of Group 1's in the Matron Stakes and the British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes.

Wingspan was unraced at two but made a winning start over a mile at Leopardstown before scoring in Listed company at Gowran Park on just her third start. She was perhaps unlucky not to finish closer than third when hampered making her challenge in a Group 3 at the Curragh and improved again under a bold front-running display when just ran down late in the Group 2 Blandford Stakes. Up in trip next time and bidding to emulate her dam in the British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes, she put up an excellent effort from the front as she gave best before just not able to quicken with the smart *Kalpana*. She was well clear of the rest of a strong field however, the third was three lengths back and was just narrowly denied in Group 1 company when last seen whilst the seventh scored easily in Listed company next-time-out. Taking on the opposite sex for the first time in the Breeders' Cup Turf, she ran right up to form again to finish fifth when probably not ideally suited by a messy sprint finish.

Her below-par effort in the Hong Kong Cup can be best excused and she remains with plenty of potential entering just her second season on the racecourse. Connections will want a Group 1 victory on her page, and it would be no surprise to see her tried at the highest level again. Just as effective at 10 furlongs as a mile-and-a-half, the Pretty Polly appeals as an early season target before coming back for another crack at the British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes at the end of the season.



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Top-Class

PERFORMERS

Written by Joe Ballard

2025 Flat Horses To Follow

SPRINTERS

FOR the past two seasons, the sprinting division has been as competitive and open as ever. Group 1 sprints across the UK and Ireland have been almost unpredictable and we witnessed six different individual Group 1 winners over five to six furlongs in open company. Archie Watson's **Bradsell** was the only sprinter to claim two Group 1 prizes, but he has since been retired to The National Stud. The dual Royal Ascot winner proved uber-consistent at the very top-level as he as he claimed victory in both the Nunthorpe and Flying Five whilst recording a further runner-up finish in the Prix de l'Abbaye. All in all, he brought in more than £1.1million in prize money in his career but the superstar sprinter has now called time on his illustrious career and goes into a well-earned retirement.

The sprinting division is still extremely wide-open then for one horse to take his or her place at the helm, and if last season is anything to go by then it is all to play for. Perhaps the most consistent of all throughout the season was George Boughey's **Believing**, who has since changed hands for 3,000,000gns and is now owned by Coolmore. The mare will remain in training at Saffron House Stables for her five-year-old season, as she searches for that elusive first Group 1 victory. She danced every dance last season, from Sha Tin in April to Longchamp in October and is one of the toughest and most consistent horses in training. The daughter of *Mehmas* did win the Listed Achilles Stakes at Haydock and Group 2 Sapphire Stakes at the Curragh but was beaten in six Group 1 contests throughout the season. She didn't finish outside of the top four on any occasion, however,

and this fast-finishing sprinter can count herself unlucky not to have landed at least one of those. With her style of racing, she has often run into trouble in her races before flashing home with the wind in her sails and her new owners will be confident that, once things fall right, she can achieve that much-deserved Group 1 prize.

One of the more exciting horses in the division is no doubt **Kind Of Blue**. James Fanshawe's four-year-old still very lightly raced having only made his debut as a three-year-old last April. The Wathnan Racing-owned *Blue Point* colt won a pair of novice events before outrunning his odds, and experience, to finish fourth in the Commonwealth Cup. He rose up the ranks rapidly, with a pair of excellent placed efforts before just being denied by a head in the Group 1 Sprint Cup at Haydock. He achieved his crowning moment when scoring on his final start of the campaign in the Group 1 British Champions Sprint Stakes, driven out to come out on top on what was just his sixth career start. James Fanshawe is no stranger to training to top-level sprinters and clearly had plenty of faith in Kind Of Blue to chuck him straight in at the highest level, and his belief has paid off. His dam is, in fact, related to another couple of high-class sprinters trained by Fanshawe in *Deacon Blues* and *The Tin Man* and he looks to have a bright future ahead. He showed he is ground versatile at Ascot on Champions Day, and connections should have plenty of fun throughout the season.



KIND OF BLUE

Inisherin is the other exciting four-year-old we have to look forward to in 2025 and, whilst his form dropped off in the back end of the campaign, he no doubt has the class to bounce back. Kevin Ryan's *Shamardal* colt ran a stormer from the front in the 2000 Guineas, travelling smoothly at the head of a strong gallop before weakening back into sixth over a stiff mile. Dropping back in trip, he was electric when surging to an almost four-length victory in the Group 2 Sandy Lane Stakes before a professional victory in the Group 1 Commonwealth Cup at Royal Ascot. He didn't have it all his own way that day either, facing competition for the lead from an outside draw but he strode away from what has proven to be a top-class field in impression fashion. He didn't appear to have any excuses when soundly beaten taking on his elders at Newmarket and Haydock on his final two starts of the campaign though, and never travelled with the same strength or fluidity. His performances at Haydock and Ascot earlier in the campaign leave plenty of hope though that he can return to being that high-class sprinter. For the same owners, Karl Burke's **Elite Status** is another four-year-old colt who retains plenty of potential despite a disappointing end to the season. His Group 3 Hackwood Stakes victory at Newbury reads extremely well, and he has proved at his best in the first half of the season.

William Haggas has several high-class sprinters to go to war with in 2025, including Sprint Cup winner **Montassib**. An effective handicapper for most of his career, the seven-year-old won the Sprint Trophy at York from a mark of 101 at the close of 2023 before turning his attention to stakes contests in 2024. He landed the Listed Cammidge Trophy on reappearance and two starts later flew home off a strong pace to deny **Kinross** in the Group 3 Chipchase Stakes at Newcastle. A strong end-to-end gallop is key to Montassib's success as a strong-staying hold-up performer at sprint trips, and that was the case when he flew home from the rear to land the Group 1 at Haydock. He closed the campaign with a decent fifth at Ascot, left with too much to do and nothing able to really get involved and make up ground from the rear. He has been rejuvenated as a sprinter and, whilst once thought as needing cut in the ground, his Haydock success proved him more versatile than first believed. The mare **Unequal Love** is another from Somerville Lodge who rose up through the ranks in 2024, scoring in the ever-competitive Wokingham Stakes at Royal Ascot from a mark of 102 before a brace of fine efforts in stakes company. She was, perhaps, a little unsuited by the run of the race when a close third in the Group 3 Summer Stakes, but ran an excellent race in the

circumstances, before running on strongly to fill the same position in the Group 1 Sprint Cup. Her final effort at Ascot can be excused on softer ground, but he still looks to be improving and is relatively lightly-raced for her age.

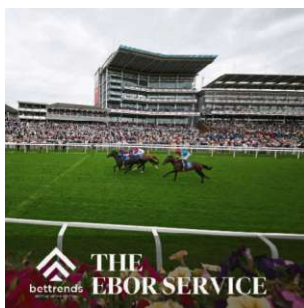
Dark Trooper was runner-up in the Wokingham for Alban de Mieulle and has been in fine form in the Middle East over the winter. The five-year-old *Dark Angel* gelding landed a Listed event at Al Uqda and was last seen finishing fourth in the lucrative 1351 Turf Sprint at Riyadh, flashing home from the rear. He has been operating over seven furlongs of late but showed plenty of pace at Royal Ascot over six last term, suggesting he will have no problem dropping back this summer. He has a mark of 104, so could revert to handicap company first to take advantage of what could be a lenient mark.

Yann Barberot's **Beauvatier** didn't appear to stay the mile in his Classic campaign in 2024 but filled the top four on all four his starts in Group 1 company when dropping back in trip. The *Lope De Vega* colt finished third in the Prix Maurice de Gheest and has the perfect profile for another crack at the race in 2025. Softer ground is essential, and he will likely be kept in France before another try on Champions Day at Ascot, given he was fourth in the British Champions Sprint Stakes on his final start.

MIDDLE-DISTANCE

AS IS often the case with the elite, top-class horses, plenty of those who have competed at the highest level are retired to stud following an excellent campaign and we are yet to see what the upcoming three-year-olds are truly capable of. One such horse who could take advantage of this is Francis-Henri Graffard's **Calandagan**, a gelding who of course has no possibility of being retired to stallion duty. The four-year-old by *Gleneagles* landed a brace of Group 3's at Longchamp before producing one of the performances of Royal Ascot in the King Edward VII Stakes. On his first start on British soil, he travelled powerfully through the contest before making rapid headway up the straight and quickening clear in impressive style en route to an emphatic six-length success. He in fact didn't win again last season, but there was no shame in his defeats; runner-up to *City Of Troy* in the Juddmonte International when given too much to do from the rear before again filling that same spot in the Champion Stakes, a messy race in which he met plenty of trouble. He is ground versatile, and will no doubt prove the leading contender in any of the middle-distance Group 1s he contests. The Prince Of Wales's Stakes at the Royal Meeting is an obvious target, whilst he would have no problem stepping up in trip for races such as the King George.

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The winner of the Champion Stakes, Owen Burrows' **Anmaat**, himself didn't exactly benefit from a trouble-free race at Ascot. He, too, overcame the circumstances when short of room in the straight before squeezing through the gaps with an impressive late surge to come out on top. The *Awtaad* gelding bounced back from a poor effort at Longchamp just two weeks earlier and, whilst he is seven years old, he has been sparingly campaigned with just the 15 starts, and just two of those in Group 1 company (winning both). He took home the Prix d'Ispahan in 2023, and that may well prove his starting point in 2025, and he is another who could line up in the Prince Of Wales's Stakes, provided an interruption-free campaign.

William Haggas' **Economics** was disappointing in the Champion Stakes when a soundly beaten sixth, and it was reported once again that he bled from the nose – as he had done after his impressive Dante Stakes victory earlier in the campaign. The *Night Of Thunder* colt clearly has his problems,

which are a concern, but he possesses a unique amount of raw ability, no more evident than when landing the Irish Champion Stakes from *Auguste Rodin* in what was a thrilling battle to the line. That was a monster effort on just his fifth career start, and he is still open to any amount of improvement if they can keep him sound through the season. He has raced exclusively at 10 furlongs since stepping into stakes company, but he should have no problem venturing further being out of a mile-and-a-half winning *Peinte Celebre* mare.

Charlie Appleby and Godolphin's **Rebel's Romance** needs no introduction, the globe-trotting superstar winning top-level contests in four different countries last year. The seven-year-old *Dubawi* gelding signed off 2024 with a determined victory in the Breeders' Cup Turf – his second win in the race – and has shown no signs of slowing down in 2025, already picking up a valuable pot in the H H The Amir Trophy. He has racked up more than £10 million in prize money now and will be on the hunt to keep increasing that number this season, but he has yet to score at the top level on home soil and they may want to add that to his glistening resume. The King George would be the



obvious race to do this, a race he finished a fine third in last year behind Goliath and Arc heroine *Bluestocking*.

Francis-Henri Graffard's **Goliath** perhaps turned in the performance of the season when brushing aside that pair in the King George, powerfully cantering to such an easy success, the jockey was able to celebrate before the line. He backed that up with a Group 2 victory at Longchamp and, whilst only sixth in the Japan Cup, the five-year-old remains a big player for any race he contests back on European shores. Harry Charlton's **King's Gambit** caught the eye in behind in the H H The Amir Trophy, plugging on well into fourth but unable to get on terms from the rear in a race where those up with the pace dominated. He had demolished the field in the London Gold Cup earlier in the season, before a trio of fine efforts in Group company at Ascot and York. He didn't run his race from out wide in the Champion Stakes, but the *Saxon Warrior* gelding is from a family who improve with age and can make his mark in pattern company this season with the experience now in the book.

Juddmonte do terrifically with their fillies, and just as 2024 was the year of *Bluestocking* for Ralph Beckett, 2025 could be the year of **Kalpana** for Andrew Balding. Only making her debut in January of 2024, the *Study Of Man* four-year-old made rapid progress throughout the season. She destroyed a handicap field at Newmarket from a lowly mark of 78 in April and by season's end was rated 118 – such was the massive leaps of improvement she took. She finished second to subsequent Prix de l'Opera winner *Friendly Soul* at Newmarket before being backed off the boards in the Ribblesdale at the Royal Meeting, but just getting motoring too late as she kept on into third. She signed off the campaign with three successive, emphatic victories however, culminating in a ready two-length victory in the British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes. A first Group 1 for her sire, she tracked the pace strongly before showing an impressive turn of foot to clear away from the field. Unraced at two, there is no ceiling on her ability and Juddmonte may yet have another Arc hopeful one year on from *Bluestocking's* memorable victory.

Another exciting filly set to stay in training for, hopefully, a big 2025 is **Tamfana**. Owners Quantum Leap were initially going to sell the Group 1-winning filly at Arqana but decided against it, and she will remain in training and attempt to repay their faith in her ability. David Menuisier's four-year-old caught the eye when flashing home from off the screen to finish a, perhaps unlucky, fourth in the

1000 Guineas at Newmarket before again finishing strongly when third in the Prix de Diane. The daughter of *Soldier Hollow* was mightily impressive when landing her first Group 1 prize in the Sun Chariot Stakes later in the season and was probably just too keen for her won good, but still ran well in the circumstances, when third to *Charyn* in the Queen Elizabeth II Stakes on her final start. Whilst, as a Group 1-winning miler, she would be expected to start her season off staying at a mile – with targets such as the Lockinge and Queen Anne on the agenda – she is a strong stayer, and it would be no surprise to see her tackle further once again later in the season.

STAYERS

UNLIKE with the sprinters we discussed earlier, the staying division was the opposite of wide open in 2024 and was dominated by one horse and one horse only. That horse was, of course, Aidan O'Brien's **Kyprios**, who revived his career from a life-threatening injury in 2023 and won four Group 1s. It was a miraculous training performance from the Master of Ballydoyle, bringing back his star stayer to an unbeaten campaign with seven victories in all. Whilst it can be argued he hasn't been beating much, he is inarguably one of the best and most consistent stayers we have ever seen, and it truly is hard to envisage another horse knocking him off his elevated perch. The seven-year-old showed no signs of slowing down last season, seeing off all challengers, and will be incredibly tough to beat at any racecourse as he looks to add to his already glistening cabinet of eight Group 1 prizes.

Los Angeles is one who has yet to venture further than a mile-and-a-half, but he hasn't exactly looked full of speed as a three-year-old and he could be open to plenty of improvement if connections opt to step him up in trip. The Irish Derby winner – who also finished a fine third at Epsom previously when forcing a ferocious gallop – attempted to make use of all his stamina when leading the pack in the Arc and kept on well when passed to still finish third. He was, as expected, unsuited by the drop back in trip at Ascot in the Champion Stakes but that run can be easily forgiven. There are plenty of options for him over a mile-and-a-half – such as the Coronation Cup early in the season – but he could increase his ceiling if tackling staying distances.

Away from Aidan O'Brien then and onto son Joseph, his six-year-old **Uxmal** could be one who takes a big step forward in 2025. The *Galileo* gelding has never raced in top company but was incredi-

bly impressive when surging clear to a five-length success in the Queen Alexandra Stakes at the Royal Meeting. We haven't seen him since, so he may be going under the radar, but he clearly has stamina in abundance and is well worth a step up to stakes company when we next see him. John and Thady Gosden's **Courage Mon Ami** is one who hasn't seen the racecourse in even longer, his last run back in August of 2023 before missing the whole of last season through a setback. He was a revelation for the Gosden team two seasons back though, rising through the handicaps to land the Ascot Gold Cup on just his fourth career start, a marvellous training performance. The new-kid-on-the-block, however, couldn't assert his dominance in the division on his next two starts but did stay on well into second in the Lonsdale Cup on his final start. The six-year-old still has had just the six runs to date and is a leading player in the division if the team at Clarendon can get him fit and back to that form. The Gosden team also have **Sweet William**, who was second in the 2023 Ebor and was uber consistent at the top-level last season. Although no match for **Kyprios** on the three occasions the pair clashed, the six-year-old son of Sea The Stars did get closer with each encounter and was an impressive winner of the Group 2 Doncaster Cup on his penultimate start, worth more than the winning margin suggested having idled in the finish. Whilst it is hard to see him reversing form with Kyprios, he will be primed to take advantage in his absence with races like the Sagaro Stakes, Doncaster Cup and Lonsdale Cup likely up for the taking and all to play for.

As is the case in almost every division, Aidan O'Brien holds plenty of aces in his pack and, although none more so than the aforementioned Champion Stayer, he still has plenty of depth to his team. The Ballydoyle battalion always have further darts at the top level, and if St Leger winner **Jan Brueghel** opts to go down this route, he could be extremely interesting. The imposing son of *Galileo* hails from a staying family and, having made his racecourse debut only in May, won the St Leger at Doncaster on just his fourth career start. After a debut win at the Curragh, he scored against older rivals in Group 3 company at the same track next time before defying a penalty in the Group 3 Gordon Stakes at Goodwood. He got very warm beforehand and was forced to tough it out in the closing stages over a mile-and-a-half but showed a determined attitude to be in front at the line. He was again a little keen in the St Leger but relished the extra distance as he showed real fight to assert in the closing stages from stable-mate **Illinois**. Unbeaten at three, he was won all of his last three starts by less than a length and it feels we are only just scratching the surface on his true ability. He should only improve with age and experience, as well as going out further in trip. Fellow *Galileo* colt **Illinois** backed up his St Leger second with a commanding victory in the Group 2 Prix Chaudenay at Longchamp during Arc week-end, always dominating proceedings, and he is another contender for the Coolmore team in the top staying races in 2025.



JAN BRUEGHEL

Trackside offer a unique paddock analysis service, with their expert team providing direct, valuable information straight from the racecourse - assessing the appearance, action and behaviour of each horse. Trackside's Vicki Gibbins has highlighted five exciting names to follow as dark horses for the upcoming Flat season.

TROIA

ED WALKER

THE Ed Walker-trained **Troia** caught the eye on debut when taking a six-furlong Newbury maiden in comfortable fashion and connections chose to miss two further assignments on account of soft ground. The daughter of *Kingman* was unfancied in the market for the six-furlong Group 3 Oh So Sharp Stakes at Newmarket on good-to-soft ground and demonstrated strong late progress to steal fourth behind *Merrily*. A large framed filly as a juvenile, she should have developed physically over the winter and a strong performance in a Guineas trials on faster spring ground would not surprise.



NIGHTWALKER

JOHN AND THADY GOSDEN

NIGHTWALKER was switched to John and Thady Gosden upon the retirement of former trainer Sir Michael Stoute. It is a family that the Gosden duo will know well, with the colt being out of an *Oasis Dream* half-sister to their St Leger winner *Logician*. The grey progressed physically from his win at Yarmouth to placing third in the Group 2 Autumn Stakes at Newmarket on Dewhurst day, but remained green in attitude with room for further improvement. The son of *Frankel* is undoubtedly a talented 'work in progress' and a Group success looks well-within his capabilities as a three-year-old, especially in the second half of the season.

SMOKEN

RALPH BECKETT

THE 1m½f maiden at Nottingham, held during mid-October, has an excellent record for throwing up a future Group performer, with both St Leger victor *Eldar Eldarov* and Champion Stakes hero *King Of Steel* making successful debuts in the contest. An easy winner of the open division on heavy ground, rather than the fillies' equivalent on the same card, **Smoken** immediately went into the notebook. She fulfilled that promise with a victory in the Listed Montrose Fillies' Stakes at Newmarket in early November and has a pedigree to match her ability - out of a half-sister to multiple Group 1 winner *Soviet Song*, from the family of *Marsha*. Smoken holds an entry in the Irish Oaks and could be a dark horse if conditions come up soft in any of the major fillies' Group races throughout the season.

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE ALOBAYYAH

JOHN & THADY GOSDEN

WILLIAM HAGGAS

WHILST fellow Godolphin-owned juveniles *Desert Flower* and *Shadow Of Light* were cementing their positions as top Classic prospects, **Devil's Advocate** was given a quiet debut over a mile at Newmarket before recording a seven-and-a-half length victory at Chelmsford over ten furlongs in mid-October. A well-balanced son of *Too Darn Hot*, Godolphin bought the colt for 350,000 guineas as a yearling and he boasts an eye-catching pedigree, being out of Group 3 Bronte Stakes winner *Precious Ramotswe*. His exploits so far may not make the colt an obvious choice for the Classics, but the combination of talent and a stamina-laden pedigree put him firmly in the mix for latter-season honours – a possible St Leger candidate in the making.

YOU can rely on a late-season Yarmouth maiden to throw up an exciting prospect for next year and **Alobayyah** looks to be the pick of these. Making her debut in the mile fillies' novice contest in late October, the filly was settled in the rear and powered clear for an easy two-and-a-quarter length success, demonstrating no signs of inexperience. Out of a Black Type-winning German maternal pedigree, she was bought for 110,000 guineas as a yearling during Book 2 of the Tattersalls Yearling Sale in 2023 and attracted buyers as a similar stamp to her sire *Ghaiyyath*. He has made a strong start to his stallion career with exciting juvenile prospects and with his offspring expected to improve again at three, Alobayyah appeals as an exciting filly for the future.



NIGHTWALKER

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