

# The GBI Royal Ascot

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# Good things come to those who wait at Royal Ascot

NBC Sport and Racing UK presenter Nick Luck sets the scene ahead of five magnificent days at the Royal meeting

By Nick Luck

My attachment to Ascot is visceral and unbreakable. (Very) nearly 40 years ago, I took my first breath in Heatherwood Hospital, about two furlongs from where Gunner B and Ile de Bourbon had prevailed 10 days before. Until two decades earlier, the site of the maternity unit had been part of the straight track.

My parents were National Hunt enthusiasts really - my Mum pre-trained jumpers on the old Hawthorn Hill racecourse half way to Maidenhead before they went back into full work with Josh Gifford, as well as the odd Flat horse for Norah Wilmot, legendary as the first woman to be officially credited with training a winner.

At the ripe old age of seven, I was sent to board at Papplewick School, whose red brick buildings can be seen from the top of the Grandstand poking out from behind the ten furlong start at Swinley Bottom. Sometimes, on a raceday, I could wander in an idle moment to the back gate and crane my ear just enough to hear the commentary, occasionally enjoying an all-too-fleeting glimpse of hoof and colour.

Other times, our zealous band of sporty teachers would impose the double torture of making us do a cross-country run on Ascot heath while racing was going on around us. I firmly believed this was not what Queen Anne had in mind for the nourishment of the young soul, and only served to make my desire to watch racing as fevered as my disdain for taking part in any organised games.

At Royal Ascot, we were teased even more mercilessly. We would troop across the Windsor Road, under the old tunnel, and stand on the infield at the quarter mile pole in our regulation pale blue Peter Storm wind cheaters to wave at the procession. Then, with Her Majesty and guests safely on the way to the Royal Box, we would trudge back whence we came, crossing back to the school gate just as the runners headed to post for the first.

One year, the science teacher, Penny Parkinson, sensing my displeasure at having to wait until the next day's communal single copy of the *Telegraph* to find out the results, let me sneak into the lecture theatre to watch the coverage of one race on BBC2. So, in the unlikely event that it should ever

pop up in even the most geeky of racing quizzes, I'll always be the man who can tell you that Amigo Menor won the 1991 Wokingham, ridden by Chris Rutter for David Murray-Smith.

Nearly thirty years on, much remains the same: the Queen is still greeted excitedly by wide-eyed schoolchildren, dresses and skirts should still be "of modest length, falling just above the knee or longer," and entry to the Royal Enclosure is by application and recommendation only. The 'greencoats' - the ceremonial guard for The Monarch at Ascot since 1744 - still wear coats and they are still green. There is still singing around the bandstand (though this is a newer tradition), and the Peers that long since lost

knowing that the essence remains the same.

As such, the twelve-year-old Grandstand, subject of some snippy remarks at the time of building, now looks way ahead of its time and is rightly lauded as one of the finest facilities in the world. Four days became five in Golden Jubilee year (2002), and - far from a dilution of quality - the calibre of the sport has only increased and become more instrumental in defining the racing year.

But perhaps the greatest and most satisfying manifestation of Royal Ascot's swelling into the most sought-after event has been the growing International participation. From the mighty Aussie speed-hunk Choisir through American



The Queen is scheduled to attend all five days of the royal meeting

Racingfotos

their right to a seat in the House of Lords still find their right to hereditary privilege alive and well with a space in Car Park One.

But it is perhaps Royal Ascot's sense of timeless elegance, its deep-rootedness and unflinching observance of protocol that has paradoxically allowed it to now stand proud as the most modern and forward-thinking of global racing festivals. If you have confidence in your event, and guard its traditions and idiosyncrasies with loyalty and affection, you can be bolder in your ambition

heroine Tepin, via a bevy of Wesley Ward-trained superbrats, these buccaneering triumphs would have been dismissed as a pure flight of fancy a generation ago.

Now, the Royal meeting is a coveted destination not just for the Tatlerati and blue bloods of Newmarket, but for the best horses, best horsemen and the beautiful people across the globe. Everybody wants a piece of these magical five days and if, like me, you were made to wait for it, it is easy to understand why.





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St James's Palace Stakes favourite Without Parole was bred by John and Tanya Gunther, who bred Triple Crown hero Justify

## Data is an important drop in the Ocean in the fight against the bookmakers

**NO decade has seen such improvement in the analysis of horse racing as the last. The reason? Data – and lots of it. Now professional punters, and those merely curious to discover more about the sport, can interrogate sophisticated records of the performance of horses, trainers, jockeys and stallions.**

A notable area of enlightenment is the study of race times. And Royal Ascot has been a focus for this, owing to the combination of top-class horses, fast going and big fields driving competitive races.

For years, the finishing times of horses were thought to be inconsequential in Britain. The most informative guides about time came from racing on dirt in the USA, but even these pedalled the myth that racing on turf was merely a test of finishing speed.

It should have been immediately obvious that this was false. Finishing speed wins races on the grass alright, but what comes before is important. The implication of a horse dipping under 22 seconds for the final quarter-mile is a lot different if it ran hard to the start of the sectional, compared with if it ran slowly.

Royal Ascot winners like Kingman, in the 2014 Group One St James's Palace Stakes, and the great Frankel

The Racing UK broadcaster, author and journalist James Willoughby looks at the three best horses running at Royal Ascot based on times.

By James Willoughby

– a dual winner at the meeting – gave us a snapshot of the limits that the thoroughbred can reach against the clock. And this only served to encourage many to delve deeper.

It had been known for many years that the true value of a horse's time is only apparent after discounting factors that have affected it, such as the layout of the track and the speed of the surface. Now, however, thanks to Big Data, we can take a step further: making allowance for the pace of a race.

It is a truism that only when a horse is paced efficiently will it run the best time within its capabilities. If race times only have value when the pace is good, most races on turf will be as useless to the analyst as popularly supposed. However, if we measure the speed of the last three furlongs of all races which yield a fast time, it becomes clear how to make allowance for deviations from the ideal, such as a slow early pace or a premature strike for home.

This is nowhere near so difficult as it sounds. If a horse is paced efficiently, its speed for the final three furlongs will be close to its speed for the whole race. This is only true on a level track, but it is not difficult to collect a large number of data points from horses of known merit and calculate the degree to which



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Crystal Ocean looks to be a typical Sir Michael Stoute improving older horse



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Benbatl scooped the Hampton Court Stakes at Royal Ascot last season

their final time has suffered on undulating tracks also.

Three horses due to be running at Royal Ascot enter the meeting off performances against the clock which would previously have been undervalued before this kind of sectional analysis – employed using video because British racing still does not see the value in sectional times – became possible.

### Benbatl

#### Queen Anne Stakes – Tuesday

Top-class racing in other countries has often been treated by British punters as if it had taken place on the Moon; it has taken us a long time to get over a certain snobbery towards foreign challengers at Royal Ascot and some of the lessons have been painful. Judged by ante-post betting, the quality of Benbatl's victory in the Dubai Turf at Meydan is not being fully recognised, for if it were he would be a clear favourite.

Benbatl won that Group One by three and a half lengths, clocking a very good time for the nine furlongs. And, in terms of acceleration, his earlier victory in the Group Two Al Rashidiya was similarly world-class – when factoring in a final three furlongs of 32.8sec, which is a sensational mark.

### Without Parole

#### St James's Palace Stakes – Tuesday

Trainer John Gosden has few peers when identifying a top-class horse in his yard. Given that he sent this son of Frankel to Newcastle and Yarmouth for his first two starts, however, one wonders if at least this one has grown on him a little. Certainly, few could have been prepared for what Without Parole did in a small race at Yarmouth on his second start. He covered the

straight mile in an amazing 1m 34.83sec – and the sectionals prove he managed to accelerate off that solid pace. When this time was compared with others on the card, it came out at a Pattern-class mark.

At the time, the runner-up Ostilio looked like a maiden with limitations but he has since bolted up at Newmarket and, back in the information dark ages, many would think Without Parole had a lot of improving to do to reach Group One level. That he only scrambled home (on soft going) in a Listed race at Sandown would have bolstered this impression, but, thanks to race times and sectionals, we know Without Parole is already top notch. This race could be where he proves it.

### Crystal Ocean

#### Hardwicke Stakes – Saturday

Crystal Ocean was already widely recognised as a smart horse before the Al Rayyan Stakes at Newbury in May, for which he started odds-on.

That he won easily by six lengths surprised few observers and was attributed to his doing no more than was already apparent in his past performances. Not so.

The five-runner Group Three was run at a slow pace and should have made it difficult for Crystal Ocean to open a wide margin over his very useful rivals. But that he did, running the final three furlongs in an estimated 35 seconds and, according to Timeform, the last four furlongs in 46 seconds. Given this, it is reasonable to see him as an improved horse, and this race will tell us whether he is the candidate for championship honours which his data now suggests.





Olivier Peslier and Recoletos power to victory in the Churchill Coolmore Prix d'Ispahan at the new ParisLongchamp (Racingfotos)

## French can get Royal Ascot off to a flying start with Recoletos

Timeform, the leading British ratings service has come up with their best bets across the five days.

By Nic Doggett

Ratings are not the be-all-and-end-all of everything in racing. However they provide a good indication of a horse's place in the hierarchy of equine talent and they are often an excellent pointer towards working out from where the best performances of Royal Ascot are likely to emerge.

In the absence of the very best horses from the rest of the world, notably Australia's supermare Winx and America's now-retired Gun Runner, Timeform's ratings ahead of Royal Ascot are dominated by the English-trained Battaash and Cracksman, both of whom have a rating of 136.

Cracksman was runner-up in both the English and Irish Derby, before winning his final three starts in 2017, namely the Great Voltigeur Stakes at York, Prix Niel at Chantilly and Champion Stakes at Ascot (most impressively, by seven lengths from Poet's Word).

He started the season well in the Prix Ganay at ParisLongchamp and then stretched his unbeaten record to five when scrambling home against the well-ridden Salouen in the Coronation Cup at

Epsom at the beginning of the month. He is very much the one to beat in the Prince of Wales's Stakes, now returned to the venue of his most authoritative performance to date.

Battaash, meanwhile, has entries in both the King's Stand Stakes on Tuesday, and the Diamond Jubilee Stakes – over a furlong further – on the Saturday of the meeting.

He secured a fourth win of a very successful 2017 campaign when blitzing the field in the Prix de l'Abbaye at Chantilly (beating Marsha by four lengths) and added another win on his reappearance, getting up late on in the Temple Stakes at Haydock (by a head from Washington DC) after missing the break.

The Wesley Ward-trained Lady Aurelia stormed clear in the King's Stand 12 months ago, with connections deciding to target the Nunthorpe Stakes at York in August rather than attempt a quickfire double in the Diamond Jubilee directly after; incidentally, the last horse to complete the famous Ascot double was the Australian sprinter Choisir in 2003.

Lady Aurelia warmed up for the defence of her crown with a slightly disappointing defeat at Keeneland in April, but is expected to be cherry ripe for this assignment.

The 134-rated Enable was the leading three-year-old filly last season, but she suffered an injury setback last month so will miss Royal Ascot. There's a potential clash to savour amongst this year's crop of Classic-generation fillies, though, with the winners of the English, Irish and French Guineas all set to run in the Coronation Stakes on Friday.

Billesdon Brook vastly improved when winning the 1000 Guineas at Newmarket (by one and three quarter lengths from subsequent Group One winner and Prix De Diane fancy Laurens), and her big price that day (66-1) may mean that the form is underestimated. Alpha Centauri resumed her progress when winning the Irish 1000 Guineas at the Curragh. Teppal, meanwhile, took the step up in grade in her stride after eight months off when winning the French 1000 Guineas at Longchamp.

All three are leading contenders, but they could have it all to do if Clemmie arrives here in peak form. She looked an excellent prospect when reeling off a hat-trick on her final three starts as a juvenile, and this daughter of leading sire Galileo left the impression she would come into her own over this longer trip aged three; Aidan O'Brien's filly looks sure to take plenty of beating if coming on as expected for last month's return at the Curragh.

Other fascinating clashes over the week include the likes of Stradivarius, Torcedor and Vazirabad taking dead aim at Order Of St George in the Gold Cup on Thursday, with Stradivarius fancied to improve past the 2016 winner.

He was very progressive last season, his wins including the Queen's Vase at this meeting, and the fact that he was still full of running at the line when winning the Yorkshire Cup last month suggests that the longer trip by a whole six furlongs won't be a problem.

Perhaps the best value bet of the week, however, comes in the very first race of the meeting – the Queen Anne Stakes. It looks one of the most open renewals in recent years, with several you can make a legitimate case for, but the one that makes the most appeal is the French raider Recoletos. He was thought good enough to take on Cracksman in the Champion Stakes at the end of last season and has looked better than ever this year, making his breakthrough at Group One level in the Prix d'Ispahan at Longchamp (by one and three quarter lengths from Almodovar) last time. He remains unexposed at a mile, and is preferred to the Lockinge Stakes one-two Rhododendron and Lightning Spear.





Alpha Centauri

# Five superstars to keep an eye out for during Royal Ascot

From Lady Aurelia to Redkirk Warrior, there is no shortage of top horses across the five days writes Racing UK's Geoffrey Riddle.

By Geoffrey Riddle

## Lady Aurelia King's Stand Stakes – Tuesday

Royal Ascot is loaded to the front and the opening day on Tuesday has three Group One races. There is no more keenly anticipated horse across the five days, however, than Lady Aurelia. Wesley Ward's flying filly stunned the racing world with her runaway win in the Queen Mary two seasons ago, and she became a rare winner of the Group One King Stand Stakes by three lengths 12 months ago with her power-packed display in the five-furlong sprint. That she faces another superstar in Battaash, officially rated the best five-furlong turf sprinter in the world, makes it a race to savour.



Cracksman



Lady Aurelia



Order Of St George



Redkirk Warrior

## Cracksman Prince Of Wales's Stakes – Wednesday

Was it just a blip, or are we seeing the terminal decline of a brilliant talent? Cracksman is a red-hot favourite for Wednesday's Prince Of Wales's Stakes over ten furlongs and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, Europe's most important all-aged race in October, but showed signs that all was not well and last time when he scraped home from Salouen in the Coronation Cup at the Derby meeting last time. He did not look the most enthusiastic, had to be roused along by regular partner Frankie Dettori, and only got going when he met the rising ground under a furlong out. The following day trainer John Gosden said that the horse had rammed his head against the stabling stalls, which was not something Dettori had mentioned in dispatches after the race. It remains to be seen whether that was a reason for the under-par performance, or an excuse.

## Order Of St George Gold Cup – Thursday

There is no Big Orange, last year's brilliant winner, but Order Of St George returns to try to reclaim the crown he majestically won in 2016. Aidan O'Brien's six-year-old son of super sire Galileo won the Gold Cup by three lengths two seasons ago and went down in an absolute belter 12 months ago. He is unbeaten in three runs since he ran fourth to Enable in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe and faces a top field including John Gosden's Stradivarius and French raider Vazirabad, who showed his class on the international stage for a third time at Meydan in Dubai in March.

## Alpha Centauri Coronation Stakes – Friday

The fourth day of Royal Ascot is all about promise. The Group One Commonwealth Cup is just three years old and showcases the burgeoning talents of sprinters who may well make their marks on the international stage later in their careers. Although the Group One Coronation Stakes is worth the same at £500,000 it remains the feature and with three Guineas winners it is the highlight. Alpha Centauri was touched off in the Albany Stakes at the meeting last season, and roared back to form on suitably fast ground in the Irish 1,000 Guineas last month. She faces Billesdon Brook, the winner of the English Guineas, and Teppal, the winner of the French. A mouthwatering prospect.

## Redkirk Warrior Diamond Jubilee Stakes – Saturday

It was a generally accepted rule in the past that Australian sprinters were better than British ones, but in Harry Angel the home team look to have a serious prospect. There was no better sprinter in the world last year than Clive Cox's representative, but his mettle will be put to the test by the raider from down under in Redkirk Warrior. Harry Angel has never won in four starts at Ascot, whereas Redkirk Warrior has proved himself at the track to a certain extent when he won there over ten furlongs when trained by William Haggas in Newmarket four years ago! Turned into a multiple Group One sprinter in Australia by David Hayes and Tom Daberning, who have campaigned horses at Royal Ascot before, Redkirk Warrior looks a fearsome opponent and could well prevail at a decent price.



# Royal Ascot Wallchart

Local Time	UTC	EDT	CDT	MDT	PDT
2:30 PM	1:30 PM	9:30 AM	8:30 AM	7:30 AM	6:30 AM
3:05 PM	2:05 PM	10:05 AM	9:05 AM	8:05 AM	7:05 AM
3:40 PM	2:40 PM	10:40 AM	9:40 AM	8:40 AM	7:40 AM
4:20 PM	3:20 PM	11:20 AM	10:20 AM	9:20 AM	8:20 AM
5:00 PM	4:00 PM	12:00 AM	11:00 AM	10:00 AM	9:00 AM
5:35 PM	4:35 PM	12:35 AM	11:35 AM	10:35 AM	9:35 AM

## Day 1 – Tuesday, June 19

Time (Local)	Race	Distance	Prize Money	Age
2:30 PM	The Queen Anne Stakes (Group 1)	One Mile	£600000	4+
3:05 PM	The Coventry Stakes (Group 2)	Six Furlongs	£150000	2
3:40 PM	The King's Stand Stakes (Group 1)	Five Furlongs	£500000	3+
4:20 PM	The St James's Palace Stakes (Group 1)	Old mile	£500000	3
5:00 PM	The Ascot Stakes (Handicap)	Two miles, four furlongs	£90000	4+
5:35 PM	The Wolferton Rated Stakes (Listed)	One mile, two furlongs	£100000	4+

## Day 2 – Wednesday, June 20

Time (Local)	Race	Distance	Prize Money	Age
2:30 PM	The Queen Mary Stakes (Group 2)	Five furlongs	£110000	2
3:05 PM	The Queen's Vase (Group 2)	One mile, six furlongs	£200000	3
3:40 PM	The Duke of Cambridge Stakes (Group 2)	One mile	£175000	4+
4:20 PM	The Prince of Wales's Stakes (Group 1)	One mile, two furlongs	£750000	4+
5:00 PM	The Royal Hunt Cup (Heritage Handicap)	One mile	£175000	3+
5:35 PM	The Jersey Stakes (Group 3)	Seven furlongs	£90000	3

## Day 3 – Thursday, June 21

Time (Local)	Race	Distance	Prize Money	Age
2:30 PM	The Norfolk Stakes (Group 2)	Five furlongs	£100000	2
3:05 PM	The Hampton Court Stakes (Group 3)	One mile, two furlongs	£90000	3
3:40 PM	The Ribblesdale Stakes (Group 2)	One mile, four furlongs	£200000	3
4:20 PM	The Gold Cup (Group 1)	Two miles, four furlongs	£500000	4+
5:00 PM	The Britannia Stakes (Heritage Handicap)	One mile	£120000	3
5:35 PM	The King George V Stakes (Handicap)	One mile, four furlongs	£90000	3

## Day 4 – Friday, June 22

Time (Local)	Race	Distance	Prize Money	Age
2:05 PM	The King Edward VII Stakes (Group 2)	One mile, four furlongs	£225000	3
2:30 PM	The Albany Stakes (Group 3)	Six furlongs	£90000	2
3:40 PM	The Commonwealth Cup (Group 1)	Six furlongs	£500000	3
4:20 PM	The Coronation Stakes (Group 1)	Old mile	£500000	3
5:00 PM	The Sandringham Stakes (Listed) (Handicap)	One mile	£90000	3
5:35 PM	The Duke of Edinburgh Stakes (Handicap)	One mile, four furlongs	£90000	3+

## Day 5 – Saturday, June 23

Time (Local)	Race	Distance	Prize Money	Age
2:30 PM	The Chesham Stakes (Listed)	Seven furlongs	£90000	2
3:05 PM	The Hardwicke Stakes (Group 2)	One mile, four furlongs	£225000	4+
3:40 PM	The Windsor Castle Stakes (Listed)	Five furlongs	£90000	2
4:20 PM	The Diamond Jubilee Stakes (Group 1)	Six furlongs	£600000	4+
5:00 PM	The Wokingham Stakes (Heritage Handicap)	Six furlongs	£175000	3+
5:35 PM	The Queen Alexandra Stakes (Conditions)	Two miles, six furlongs	£90000	3+





Eminent has reportedly got over his heart condition and is a big price to beat Cracksman

PA Images

# Five long shots to look out for at Royal Ascot

Geoffrey Riddle looks at five favourites who may be vulnerable and offers up a possible value play.

By Geoffrey Riddle

There is a graveyard of big-race favourites down the years at Royal Ascot and you only have to look at the names of beaten horses from meetings past to see that any horse is beatable, given the right set of circumstances.

Only last year Aidan O'Brien's Churchill was beaten at 1-2 in the St James's Palace Stakes, Wesley Ward's Happy Like A Fool was turned over at 10-11 in the Queen Mary, and Order Of St George was also beaten at odds-on in the Gold Cup. Other notable scalps were Godolphin's Jack Hobbs, who was last at 2-1 in the Prince Of Wales's Stakes and The Queen's Dartmouth failed to reward favourite backers at 9-4 in the Hardwicke Stakes.

Obviously all of the favourites I am taking on in this column have a good chance, it is just that there are reasons for thinking that they are probably too short in the market for what they might have achieved, or what their current form illustrates.

## Kachy King's Stand Stakes – Tuesday

Trying to take on Lady Aurelia and Battaash may well be madness, but the point of this column is to search for big prices and Kachy is certainly that.

Since Lady Aurelia won the King's Stand Stakes 12 months ago she has yet to win in three starts, and there is the possibility that trainer Wesley Ward has gone to the well of precocity one too many times. Battaash is harder to oppose, but he was awfully sluggish out of the gates at Haydock last time and should that happen once again he will struggle to reel in his main rival and Kachy at the business end up Ascot's hill.

Trained in Cheshire by Tom Dascombe, Kachy pinged out of the gates at Chester last month, pinned his ears back and went hell for leather. From the worst of the draw, he powered to a monstrous



Thomas Hobson almost completed the double at Royal Ascot last year

PA Images

nine-length win from a Group performer in Growl.

Last time when pitted against Battaash at Haydock in the Temple Stakes, he was isolated on the far side of the track and had to run largely on his own. He may not turn that form around, but at double-figure odds he should outperform that expectation.

## Eminent

### Prince Of Wales's Stakes – Wednesday

Cracksman won the ugly way last time at Epsom, and if he is back to his best then he should win the second day feature with some ease.

He looked a shadow of his former self in the Coronation Cup last time through, and if that is the case then there is scope for significant profit.

Eminent was three quarters of a length behind Cracksman in the Derby last year and it is fair to say he has not progressed as well.

He beat Salouen, who gave Cracksman such a hard time at Epsom, with some ease at Deauville and ran a solid if unspectacular race when third in the Irish Champion Stakes in September.

He has returned poorly this season, too, due to a fibrillating heart, but trainer Martyn Meade is a man who loves nothing better than heart-rate monitors and the latest kit and all the signs are that Eminent is back to his best. And over his troubles. The son of Frankel could run well at a big price.

## Thomas Hobson Gold Cup – Thursday:

Thomas Hobson was not seen at his best when sixth in the Melbourne Cup in November. He did not pick up and really grab the bridle, and as a result he has been given the interim as time off.

The eight-year-old has run just five times over staying distances on the Flat, and narrowly failed to complete the Royal Ascot double last year when going down to Oriental Fox in the Queen Alexandra Stakes, having won the Ascot Stakes over the Gold Cup course with consummate ease.



Undrafted became Wesley Ward's first older horse to win at Royal Ascot in 2015.

PA Images

There is scope for the gelding to improve over the marathon trip, and should some of the main players such as Order Of St George, Vazirabad and Stradivarius falter he could well be staying on at the end to pick up the pieces.

## Headway

### Jersey Stakes – Wednesday

Headway put up an amazing performance when he won at Lingfield on his reappearance in March.

Last season's Coventry Stakes runner-up was five lengths down and motored through the gears to make up the ground with the leaders in a furlong.

Headway had little to no chance in the English 2,000 Guineas last time out as he was in a hopeless position from the start under Jamie Spencer.

This son of Group One-winning miler Havana Gold will relish the return to quick ground at Ascot and should go well at a price. John Gosden's pair of favourite Emaraty and Purser are interesting, too.

## Bound For Nowhere Diamond Jubilee – Saturday

From a personal point of view I think the Australian sprinter Redkirk Warrior has a massive chance of upsetting Harry Angel, the Godolphin favourite.

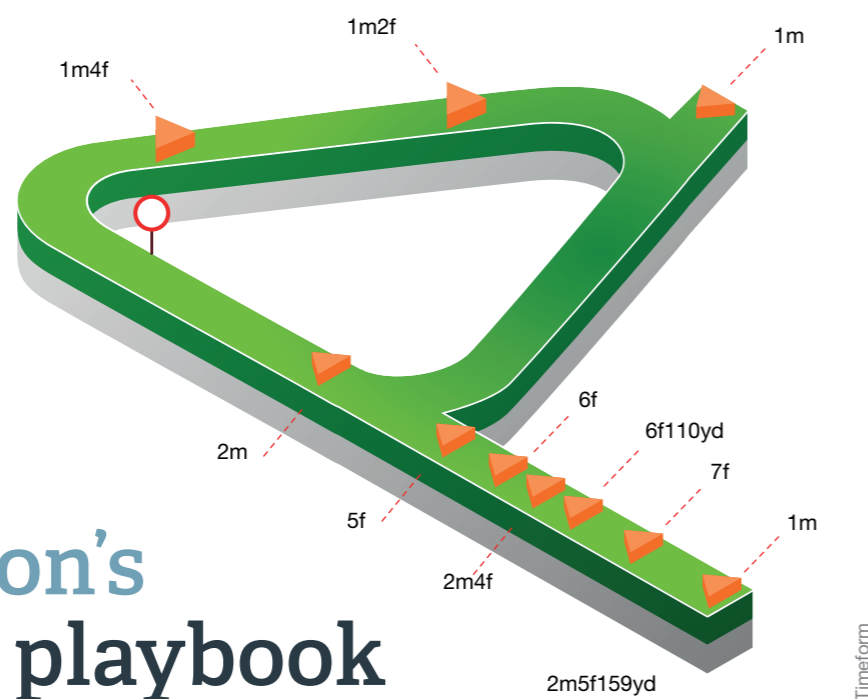
That said, the American raider Bound For Nowhere would not be totally out of calculations and could be primed to cause a huge upset.

He was a big colt last year when fourth behind Caravaggio, Harry Angel and Blue Point in the Commonwealth Cup and put in a monstrous performance when slamming King's Stand Stakes-bound and Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint fourth Bucchero last time at Keeneland.

That marks him out as an improved performer, and should Harry Angel blow out – he has yet to win in four starts at Ascot in his career – trainer Wesley Ward could be looking at win number two in the race after Undrafted upset the supposed order three years ago.



# Mark Johnson's Royal Ascot playbook



Former Churchill Downs track announcer and now ITV and Racing UK commentator Mark Johnson opens up his playbook for international bettors.

By Mark Johnson

Before an analysis of specific plays, I have tried to answer a few questions that I am regularly asked by handicappers in the United States about the Ascot track, its configuration and how "Across The Board" payouts work in Britain.

Ascot is a triangular right-handed, all turf, galloping track with a testing uphill finish. There is a straight mile course – used for races such as the Group One Queen Anne Stakes and the Royal Hunt Cup Handicap – and a round mile course which is used for the Group One St James's Palace Stakes.

The straight course, which stages all the week's sprint races run over five furlongs, six furlongs & seven furlongs (as well as straight mile races) is almost entirely gradually uphill, while the round course, which hosts all races from a round mile upwards is steeply uphill from seven furlongs out until joining the straight course just over a quarter of a mile from home. A complete circuit of the round course is one and three-quarter miles.

All races on the straight course across the five days will have the starting gate positioned against the stands' side (outer) rail which means that horses with a high post position will be against the rail. In a field of approximately 10 to 14 horses that would put the horse drawn one in the center of the racetrack.

In the huge field handicaps, such as the Wokingham Stakes (six furlongs) and the Royal Hunt Cup (straight mile) the runners will be spread right across the track.

Races beyond a mile and a half start on the straight course and then complete a full circuit of the round track. The run between the mile and a half gate and approximately 1m1f from home is steeply downhill. That three-furlong section can often result in front runners going too quick and inexperienced horses getting disorganized.

With regards to "Across The Board" payouts, be aware that some international operators will use the British system of calculating which horses qualify for, as some would put it in the United States, Place & Show payouts.

In Britain – wagers are either deemed to be "win" or "place," however the place terms vary according to the number of runners and the type of race:

- two-four runners – win only bets, there is no place wagering.
- five-seven runners – a place wager pays on the first two horses home
- eight or more runners (in a non-handicap) – place wager pays on first three
- 16 + runners (only in a handicap) – place wagers pays on the first four

Also be aware that if there is a late scratch, which reduces the number of runners to the lower payout category – even if most of the horses have already been loaded into the gate – the lesser payout rule applies.



English 1,000 Guineas winner Billesdon Brook is one of the leading lights in Friday's Coronation Stakes.

## The Blackjack Split:

In huge field races run on the straight course such as the Royal Hunt Cup (Wednesday) & the Wokingham (Saturday) it is usually a sensible play to effectively handicap them as two races.

First handicap the horses in the low half of the post position draw, then handicap the horses in the high half of the post positions.

If you find a standout in both halves of the post positions play "The Blackjack Split" and back both as the races usually develop into two distinct groups.

For more exotic plays it could pay to play three box tickets – one loaded to high gates, one loaded to low gates and an amalgam ticket in the event of an even split across the track.

## Don't Ignore Jumps Form:

In races such as the Ascot Handicap on Tuesday over two and a half miles and the 2m 5½f Queen Alexandra on Saturday take a close look at horses with solid jumps form, over hurdles, in their past performances.

Especially take note of horses with form at the likes of Aintree (Ain), Cheltenham (Chm) & Punchestown (Pun(IRE)).

These races are ultimate stamina tests for flat horses and play to the extra conditioning jump horses receive.

## International ATM

Arguably the best race at Royal Ascot for international runners is the Group One King's Stand Stakes over five furlongs on Tuesday.

Since 2000, eleven overseas-trained raiders have won



Runners fan across the track for the handicaps staged on the Ascot straight.

coming from the US, Spain, Hong Kong, Australia, France & Ireland.

This year America is represented by last season's winner Lady Aurelia and Breeders' Cup turf Sprint fourth Bucchero.

## Best Race For The Chalk:

As at all major racing festivals around the world it is never easy to win any race but, at least statistically, the best race for playing The Chalk is the Group One Coronation Stakes on Friday. The favorite has won the mile race 31 times in 72 runnings. The reason for that?

The Coronation Stakes is for the top three-year-old fillies over a mile and most of the runners have already raced against each other several times during the year thus establishing a clear pecking order. There are very few "new shooters" in a race like this.



# The Royal Ascot stats pack

The team from At The Races break down the trainers and jockeys to look out for and provide a wealth of information to keep you ahead during the royal meeting.

## The Trainers to look out for:

With 94 Royal Ascot winners between them since 2008, Aidan O'Brien, Sir Michael Stoute, John Gosden and Mark Johnston are four trainers to look out for, with O'Brien showing a clear level +£25 stakes profit with all runners during the last 10 years.

### Aidan O'Brien

Royal Ascot tally last five years:

**2017:** 6-36

**2016:** 7-26

**2015:** 5-18

**2014:** 2-25

**2013:** 4-26

**Best races (all-time):** Coventry Stakes (8); St James's Palace Stakes (7); Gold Cup (7); Queen's Vase (5); Chesham Stakes (4); Jersey Stakes (3); Queen Anne Stakes (3); Prince of Wales's Stakes (3); Coronation Stakes (3); Hardwicke Stakes (3); Norfolk Stakes (3); Tercentenary Stakes (2); Ribblesdale Stakes (2)

Aidan O'Brien's numbers have grown here in recent years, with an army of 36 runners in 2017 producing another six winners, taking his tally over the last three Royal Meetings to 18 winners.

As for the areas in which O'Brien delivered, then avoiding his Group One runners and sticking to just Group Two/Group Three/Listed races showed at 22-127 (+£61), while those arriving in form having been beaten no more than four lengths last time struck at 34-149 (+£57). Checking the odds of O'Brien's performers is also key, for those in the 13/2 to 20/1 bracket offered value at 10-95 (+£38).

### John Gosden

**2017:** 2-31

**2016:** 2-22

**2015:** 2-18

**2014:** 4-18

**2013:** 1-18

**Best races:** Prince of Wales's Stakes (3); Britannia Stakes (3); King Edward VII Stakes (3); Wolferton Stakes (3); Jersey Stakes (2); Windsor Forest Stakes (2); Tercentenary Stakes (2); Coronation Stakes (2); Chesham Stakes (2); Royal Hunt Cup (2); Ribblesdale Stakes (2)

It's not often John Gosden leaves the Royal Meeting without at least a double, and the Newmarket handler is always a man to respect when teaming up with William Buick (11-61, +£28), while his two-year-olds and four-year-olds returned a healthy 11-56 (+£38). It also helped in sticking with Gosden's realistic chances at 12/1 or shorter: 20-100 (+£39), along with his runners not moving up in trip: 17-106 (+£20).

### Sir Michael Stoute

**2017:** 0-13

**2016:** 2-15

**2015:** 1-17

**2014:** 4-14

**2013:** 3-16

**Best races:** Hardwicke Stakes (10); King Edward VII Stakes (7); Duke of Edinburgh Stakes (5); King George V Stakes (4); Coronation Stakes (4); Queen's Vase (4); Windsor Forest Stakes (3); Jersey Stakes (3); Ribblesdale Stakes (2); Wolferton Stakes (2); Queen Alexandra Stakes (2); Tercentenary Stakes (2)

It was a rare blank for Sir Michael Stoute here 12 months ago, but it's hard to think he'll leave empty-handed again, with races like the Hardwicke Stakes and King Edward VII Stakes having provided 17 winners alone. Stoute also excelled with his four-year-olds here at 12-53 (+£23), while those who arrived at Royal Ascot from Epsom, Goodwood, Newbury or York connected at 10-49 (+£24).

### Mark Johnston

**2017:** 2-22

**2016:** 0-20

**2015:** 2-20

**2014:** 2-19

**2013:** 0-19

**Best races:** Queen's Vase (7); King George V Stakes (4); Hardwicke Stakes (4); Ascot Gold Cup (3); Chesham Stakes (3); Duke of Edinburgh Stakes (3); King Edward VII Stakes (3); Sandringham Handicap (2); Queen Alexandra Stakes (2)

Mark Johnston has been a regular on the royal scoreboard for decades, and the one major clue to his runners hitting the target are their odds, with each of his 13 winners since 2008 having returned at 14/1 or shorter (13-73, +£34), compared to those bigger at 0-127.

Gradually making his way up the Ascot leaderboard is the American trainer, Wesley Ward, who offers excellent value to punters courtesy of a 9-47 record (+£19), including the 20/1 winner, Con Te Partiro, 12 months ago.

Saeed Bin Suroor is next in the table and is respected in races such as the Queen Anne Stakes (7 wins), Ascot Gold Cup (5) and Ribblesdale Stakes (5). Suroor was on the scoresheet in the 2017 Hampton Court with Benbatl, but having sent out a total of just under 50 losers either side of Benbatl sends out a word of caution. It might also be worth treading carefully with Willie Haggas's runners here, as they struck just once from 82 runners since 2011.

One trainer who did end a drought at this meeting in 2017 was James Fanshawe, whose four winners here since 2008 all moved up in class at Ascot (4-19 +33), while Willie Mullins also entered the winner's enclosure 12 months ago with Thomas Hobson in the Ascot Stakes at 4/1 – all of Mullins's five winners returned at 8/1 or shorter (5-15 +£12).

## The jockeys to look out for:

### Ryan Moore

**2017:** 6-30

**2016:** 6-29

**2015:** 9-29

**2014:** 6-29

**2013:** 3-29

**Best races (all-time):** Hardwicke Stakes (4); Duke of Edinburgh Stakes (3); Ascot Stakes (3); Queen of Alexandra Stakes (3); Tercentenary Stakes (2); Queen's Vase (3); Chesham Stakes (3); Britannia Stakes (2); Wolferton Stakes (2); Gold Cup (2); Ribblesdale Stakes (2); Coventry Stakes (2); Norfolk Stakes (2); Coronation Stakes (2)

With another six winners here 12 months ago, Ryan Moore's tally during the last four Royal Ascots now stands at 28 winners.

Moore's portfolio of winning big races is growing too, with last year seeing a third victory in the Ascot Stakes – all of which came for Willie Mullins.

Moore also has a strong association here with Aidan O'Brien (30-135 +£17), while punters can rely on him when partnering a fancied selection at 8/1 or shorter, where his record is 44-182 (+£30).

As for other clues pinpointing Moore's strengths at this meeting, then the following criteria is worth looking out for:

**Round Course:** 30-135 (+£22)

**Beaten a neck to 5l last time:** 19-100 (+£35); those that won last time offered poor value at 24-120 (-£21)

### William Buick

**2017:** 4-24

**2016:** 2-26

**2015:** 2-22

**2014:** 3-26

**2013:** 1-23

**Best races:** King Edward VII Stakes (3), Duke of Edinburgh Stakes (2)

William Buick recorded his second-best tally of four winners here 12 months ago, two of which came for Charlie Appleby at odds of 20/1 and 16/1. Buick's record for John Gosden reads better at 11-61 (+£28), though, while the biggest clue was found via those Buick rode last time out at 17-106 (+£47) – runners Buick didn't ride prior to Ascot were 2-87 (-£69).

### Frankie Dettori

**2017:** N/A

**2016:** 4-23

**2015:** 3-20

**2014:** 2-21

**2013:** 0-20

**Best races:** Queen Anne Stakes (6); Ribblesdale Stakes (6); Ascot Gold Cup (5); Chesham Stakes (4); Sandringham Handicap (4); King Edward VII Stakes (4); Norfolk Stakes (3); Prince of Wales's Stakes (3); Royal Hunt Cup (2); Queen's Vase (2); Queen Mary Stakes (2); St James's Palace Stakes (2)

You can't discuss Ascot without mentioning Frankie Dettori, who is still riding to a very high standard and scooping the big races. Having missed last year's meeting, Dettori will be keen to get back on the scoreboard, and should be noted when riding in all the major races – his record away from Listed/Group races is just 1-48.

He also rode a couple winners for Wesley Ward (2-6 +£12) and Richard Hannon (2-8 +£8), while those Dettori rode last time won here at 11-76 (+£31).

### Jamie Spencer

**2017:** 2-18

**2016:** 1-16

**2015:** 1-16

**2014:** 0-19

**2013:** 2-26

**Best races:** Albany Stakes (4); Britannia Stakes (3); Coventry Stakes (2); Sandringham Handicap (2)

The 2017 Royal Meeting once again demonstrated Jamie Spencer's effectiveness on the famous Straight Course (9-98 +£23), partnering both Bless Him (25/1) and Con Te Partiro (20/1) to success – Spencer's record on the Round Course is just 2-71 (-£65). One of the aforementioned winners also came for David Simcock (2-17 +£13), while Spencer also has a better record with the younger 2-3yo horses (9-90 +£20).

Just three winners behind Spencer on the leaderboard is James Doyle, whose record during the first two days of the meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday stands at 7-44 (+£42), compared to Thursday, Friday and Saturday (1-75 -£69).

Elsewhere, Adam Kirby followed up his 2016 treble here by riding the winner of the Queen Mary 12 months ago for Clive Cox, for whom he has a record of 5-29 (+£16).

Another jockey enjoying a good partnership here is Joe Fanning for Mark Johnston, with his most profitable distances being 1m4f+ (6-34 +£22), though Silvestre De Silva enjoyed less luck here at 3-106 (-£54).

## Racecourse form:

**It is crucial to consider horses with form last time out at courses such as Ascot, Newmarket, Newbury, Epsom, York and the Curragh. Together those courses have provided 138 royal winners between them during the last 10 years, though the fact they returned a level stakes loss means a touch more digging is required.**

### Newmarket form

When considering a runner that ran at Newmarket (Rowley) last time, make sure they are fancied at Ascot in the 10/1 or shorter bracket, as they delivered at 30-170 (+£24).

### Epsom form

With the Epsom Derby meeting staged just weeks prior to the Royal Meeting, it's no surprise that 24 Ascot winners arrived via that route during the last 10 years. As with Newmarket runners, the biggest pointer came via the market, as plenty of Epsom runners were sent here with unrealistic chances, but concentrating purely on

those at 16/1 or shorter returned 22-146 (+£42).

### Newbury form

It paid to keep things simple when studying a runner from Newbury last time, as those that ran in a handicap at Newbury delivered at Ascot to the tune of 8-68 (+£37).

### Curragh form

Runners crossing the Irish Sea and heading to Ascot from the Curragh supplied the second most winners at the meeting since 2008. As for those punters should look out for, then in-form performers that made the top two at the Curragh struck at 24-118 (+£63).

## The draw:

**The draw is always a major talking point across the five days, during which time the big-field events staged on the Straight Course cause punters headaches. It may therefore prove worthwhile looking at the stats from the last five years of this fixture to see if there were any trends – more so the 'live' clues which can develop as the week develops, as a race like the Royal Hunt Cup (1m) may influence what happens in the Britannia over the same trip.**

### Straight Course

High numbers featured more so last year when the fast ground returned, but overall there were a mixed bag of results. Possibly the best approach could be in siding with those very high or very low in big fields with 25+ runners, and ignoring those drawn in the centre. In fact, splitting the 25-runner+ fields from the last 10 years shows a clear bias towards those on either flank (low or high).

### 25-runner+ races 2008-2017

Lowest stalls: 12-271 (4% -£75)

Centre stalls: 13-570 (2% -£280)

Highest stalls: 15-263 (6% +£14)

Clearly, despite having the smallest number of qualifiers, the highest quarter of stalls (for instance, stalls 19-24 in a 24-runner race) provided the best strike-rate for a clear profit.

### Round course (1m2f/1m4f)

As for distances on the round course over 1m2f-1m4f, then double-figure stalls dominated, with runners fanning out down the middle in an attempt to avoid getting caught on the inside (low stalls). This became more pronounced in bigger fields, as can be seen:

### 16+ runner fields

Stalls 1-9: 1 win

Stalls 10-22: 12 wins