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**\*\*\*\*\* Hot NH Horses 2009/10 \*\*\*\*\***  
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## **About Hot Horses**

Hot Horses has been put together to identify 15 horses whom it should pay to follow and provide you with a profitable NH season. Written by Alan Kelly, a former Senior Trader @ Pagebet, and winner of the Scoop6 and multiple top 20 finisher in the Tote Tentofollow competition.

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## **Nenuphar Collonges**

8yo

A.King

OR 145

F6111F2121214/017634-

French-bred gelding joined Alan King in 2006 and on debut recorded a victory under top weight in a 2m1f novice handicap chase at Bangor. Another success followed at Hereford, before falling at the last at Exeter when staying on to challenge for a place behind Venetia Williams' Avitta. Two more decent performances followed in novice handicaps before being switched to a hurdling campaign.

Beaten by Razor Royale in his first race over the smaller obstacles the gelding overturned the form when winning a Grade 2 novice hurdle over 3m at Cheltenham in December 2007.

2008 started with runner up spot behind Carruthers in a Grade 2 at Warwick before starting at 9/1 in the Grade 1 Albert Bartlett Novice Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival. A strong pace and a thorough test of stamina proved ideal for the gelding who stayed on strongly to record a comfortable success over Liskennett and The Tother One.

After a decent performance when fourth behind Pettifour at Aintree (unsuited by less demanding course ), Nenuphar Collonges was unable to make an impression when tried in a Grade 1 back in his native France.

The horse reverted back to fences for the 2008/2009 campaign and started off with a gutsy win over Henry Daly's Obaki De Grissay at Bangor in November. Conceding the runner up 18lb Nenuphar stayed on well to win by two lengths without being fully tested. A crack at the Coral Welsh National was the next port of call and although a creditable seventh (beaten just over 10l ) several mistakes meant he could never get in a blow at easy winner Notre Pere. The very heavy ground was probably the reason for a

below par performance when sixth behind Rambling Minster in the Grade 3 Blue Square Gold Cup at Haydock in February, but a visit to the Cheltenham Festival for the William Hill Trophy Handicap Chase produced a career best performance over fences. Always prominent but slightly outpaced going to the last, the horse kept on strongly up the hill to finish third behind an inspired Tony McCoy, on favourite Wichita Lineman, and Maljimar, beaten less than a length.

Nenuphar Collonges last race of the season took place in the Victor Chandler.com Pat Taaffe Handicap Chase at the Punchestown Festival. Although a creditable fourth, beaten 7l by Ambobo, the heavy ground was not what was required to show the gelding at his best.

Although the horse handles plenty of cut in the ground, very heavy conditions are far from ideal and genuine good/good to soft will see the gelding at its best. With form figures at Cheltenham of 2-1-1-3 the horse obviously relishes a stiff track where stamina is at a premium. A valuable handicap chase is sure to come his way before long (Cheltenham's three day November fixture looks the perfect early season target) and with plenty of improvement still likely it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Alan King could have a lively outsider for the Gold Cup come next March.

## **Big Fella Thanks**

7yo

P.Nicholls

OR 150

12112/322U136-

Considering Big Fella Thanks first race over fences was in a Chepstow novice chase in October 2008, it was a remarkable achievement that less than six months later the gelding was capable of running a creditable sixth in the John Smith's Grand National.

Bought by Paul Barber and Mrs (Harry) Findley after showing much promise in two Irish point-to-points the horse's first run for Paul Nicholls resulted in an easy success at Chepstow in a 3m maiden hurdle. Another comfortable victory followed three weeks later when outclassing the opposition in a Taunton novice hurdle. Asked to carry top weight of 11.10 in an Ayr handicap hurdle next time resulted in a second place (beaten just over 3l) by Asian Royale. That defeat can be put down to a lack of experience and a slow pace which didn't suit the gelding's style of racing one bit.

Six months later saw Big Fella Thanks make his debut over fences when third, beaten two necks, behind Wichita Lineman, who went on to victory in the William Hill Trophy Handicap Chase at the Cheltenham Festival the following March.

The Paul Nicholls inmate looked all over the winner jumping the last but lack of condition told on the run-in and even in defeat the run was one full of promise. Less promising was the gelding's next two outings. A well beaten second receiving 8lb from Ballyfitz at Cheltenham was followed by a short head defeat at the hands of Alan King's Itsa Legend. In both races Big Fella Thanks looked anything but the finished article.

A much better effort followed at Kempton's Christmas meeting. With 11.11

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to carry in the competitive Stanjamesuk.com Handicap Chase, Christian Williams' mount looked anything but well in. Making steady headway from the rear Big Fella Thanks was disputing second place going to the third last only to receive a bump, causing his pilot to be unseated. Whether the horse would have beaten winner Fleet Street is open to debate, but win or lose connections must have been delighted with the performance.

The Listed Skybet Handicap Chase at Doncaster was the gelding's next race and starting at 9/2 there was plenty of confidence despite having to carry 11.2 against some decent handicap chasers. Always going well, Big Fella Thanks took the lead three out and drew right away to beat Ungaro by 11 lengths with Native Coral and the promising According To Pete filling the minor placings.

On the back of that performance it was no surprise to see Big Fella Thanks go off 7/2 favourite for the Grade 3 Racing Post Chase at Kempton the following month. Always struggling to get to grips with the trailblazing Nacarat, he nevertheless stayed on strongly to be a respectable third. With the winner undoubtedly a class act with conditions to suit, trying to concede 2lb on a flat track was asking too much of the young horse.

Given a six week break a crack at the John Smith's Grand National was to be the next and final outing of the season - well fancied at 14/1 in the 4m 4f contest, despite a burden of 11.1. In finishing sixth Big Fella Thanks ran a huge race for one so inexperienced and held every chance until running on at only the one pace from two out behind easy winner Mon Mome.

The 2009/2010 season should see plenty of success for Paul Nicholls' charge. He can handle most ground conditions and stamina is not in doubt. As the horse's performance in the Racing Post Chase suggested, a stiff rather than flat track should bring out the best. The Becher Chase at the end of October would seem the obvious early season target with another crack at the big one high on the agenda. The gelding has so much potential that depending on how connections campaign his season it is possible he could be a Gold Cup horse should anything happen to his more illustrious stable companions.

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## Kandari

5yo

N.Meade

OR 120

2165-

Question: what is the connection between 2009 Champion hurdle third Binocular and County hurdle fifth Kandari, apart from the fact they are both owned by J P McManus? The answer is - the Prix Belleville for unraced colts and geldings run on 15th Oct. 2006 over 1m 1f at Longchamp. For this is the race in which both horses made their racecourse debuts. The result was a win for Binocular with Kandari less than two lengths back in a dead heat for fourth place. Whereas Binocular's flat career went on to include several Listed races, Kandari ended up as no more than a decent handicapper.

Kandari was bought by J P after dead heating for first place in a 1m 4f handicap at Chantilly in July 2008 and went into training with Noel Meade. Only four runs over hurdles in his first season, the gelding improved with each run culminating in an excellent performance to finish fifth behind Americal Trilogy in the Grade 3 Vincent O' Brien County Handicap Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival.

Gowran Park on Dec. 12th 2008 saw Kandari make his debut in a maiden hurdle, starting at 7/1 behind even money favourite Quiscover Fontaine trained by Willie Mullins. Ridden by Paul Carberry, Kandari made good headway to dispute the lead on the run to the line and just got touched off by his more fancied rival without being knocked about.

With that promising run under his belt the gelding was sent off 4/9 in his next race, a 24 runner maiden hurdle at Fairyhouse on New Year's day 2009. Always travelling well, the favourite took the lead going to the last and soon quickened away from the Dermot Weld trained Gentleman Jeff, winning by a cosy four lengths.

Six weeks later saw Kandari make his handicap debut in the Leopardstown.com Handicap Hurdle. Set to carry 11.3 Paul Carberry's mount was the subject of a significant gamble and after being available at double figure odds in the morning was sent off the 4/1 favourite. The form book will tell you that Kandari finished in sixth place but that fails to recognise what was a run full of potential. Making good headway from the rear entering the straight, Kandari was challenging for the lead jumping the last and in what turned out to be a sprint finish was outpaced close home but only beaten less than one length behind See U Bob who was receiving 9lb.

After such a promising run connections decided a trip to Cheltenham for the Vincent O'Brien County Hurdle was next on the agenda. Quietly fancied at 14/1 in the 27 runner 2m 1f handicap, Kandari didn't disappoint despite finishing out of the frame. The gelding was held up until making strong headway from three out to chase the leaders. In a vain attempt to catch easy winner Americal Trilogy from the last Kandari weakened close home after looking the second best horse in the race.

With only four hurdle runs to his name Kandari looks an outstanding prospect to win a decent prize this season. Overall form suggests very soft ground is not ideal and there is a suspicion that a flat track is preferred. With a good handicap mark to start, Cheltenham's Greatwood Handicap Hurdle in November could be a good early season target, but the one race that may provide ideal is Newbury's Grade 3 Totesport Trophy Handicap Hurdle in February.

## **Issaquah**

7yo

M.Jefferson

OR 134

17121/114092-

Issaquah produced several performances during the 2008/2009 season to suggest that the mare could develop into one of the best hurdlers in the north. Trainer Malcolm Jefferson does well with his hurdlers and in Issaquah he has one of his most promising since Dato Star. The mare may never reach the heights achieved by "Dato" but one thing is certain and that is we have yet to see the best from the 7yo.

Winner of her first race in a Hexham bumper in November 2006, a slightly disappointing effort followed in a more competitive affair at Wetherby three weeks later. Looked to be travelling well but once the pace quickened three furlongs out the mare weakened out of contention to finish seventh. Given time to mature Issaquah wasn't seen out for another five months but returned with a comfortable success conceding weight all round in a Market Rasen bumper. Returning to Market Rasen two weeks later the mare was just outpointed by the Alan King trained Georgian King who was receiving 6lb.

After another five month break Issaquah was deemed ready to embark on a hurdling career. Starting point was an average novice hurdle at Hexham when she outclassed hot favourite Holiday Cocktail to win comfortably. Six weeks later a seemingly competitive Kelso handicap was chosen and off a mark of 102 Issaquah proceeded to beat Tartan Snow like a horse well in front of the handicapper. A month later a 15lb rise didn't stop her recording an equally emphatic victory at Haydock. The 2/1 favourite never came off the bit and was heavily eased to beat Rich Lord by four lengths.

First run in 2009 was an ambitious step up in class when asked to contest the Grade 2 Blue Square Champion Hurdle Trial at Haydock. Not disgraced in fourth place, beaten just under 20l, behind Songe and the high class pair

Afsoun and Snap Tie. A valuable handicap hurdle at Ascot followed and produced the mare's most disappointing performance, finishing tailed off after being prominent for a long way. It was therefore no surprise that she went off at odds of 66/1 in the Grade 2 David Nicholson Mares' Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival. Although only ninth behind easy winner Quevega the mare travelled well until weakening from two out finishing about eleven lengths behind runner up United.

Issaquah's last run of the season was in the John Smith's Handicap Hurdle on Grand National day at Aintree and was desperately unlucky not to record a final win. After leading three from home the mare edged slightly left on the run in and was caught on the post by the 66/1 outsider Culcabok.

Distances from 2m to 2m 4f should be within the mare's range and with the exception of very heavy most ground is suitable. There will be many options for Issaquah this season starting off with a reasonable handicap mark. Once a decent prize is in the bag I am sure connections will be keen to go up into Graded class. This talented mare might just surprise a few people and end next season a good deal better than a fair handicapper.

## Fairyland

6yo

N.Henderson

OR 123

2/222110-8

A look at the ante-post betting for the 2010 Champion Hurdle will show just how strong a hand Nicky Henderson has in this division. Binocular, Punjabi and Zaynar are all leading fancies for championship honours. With a rating some three stones below that required to land hurdling's biggest prize, Fairyland will never achieve anywhere near the ability needed but nevertheless the six year old mare is sure to pay her way during the season.

Unraced at two the mare ran thirteen times in her first two seasons under the care of S Wegner in Germany. She showed progressive form culminating in creditable efforts in three Listed races between 1m and 1m 4f. With a hurdling campaign in mind the mare was sent to her present trainer and an April Ludlow novice hurdle chosen for her debut. Sent off the 2/1 favourite Andrew Tinkler's mount could never get to grips with market rival Atomic Winner and was beaten just over two lengths into second place.

A frustrating time followed when finding one to good on the next three occasions. A disappointing 10l second behind Golan Way at Huntingdon was improved upon at Aintree when only Henry Daly's My Moment prevented a first success. With decent novice Honest John over 20l back in third it was a run full of promise. A fourteen runner Kempton novice event came next and another second place in a race with several promising types. The winner Micheal Flips' next run resulted in a good effort behind Go Native in the Grade 1 Williamhill.com Supreme Novice hurdle at the Festival. Third-placed Hot Diamond went on to be an unlucky third in

Haydock's Swinton Hurdle, while fourth home Font finished an excellent fourth behind Andytown in the Martin Pipe Conditional Jockeys Handicap Hurdle at the Festival.

Fairyland's first win over hurdles came in her next race at Doncaster. Ridden by Felix De Giles for the first time and carrying top weight of 11.9 in a handicap, the mare ran on strongly to beat I'm Delilah and Moonlight Music conceding a stone to both rivals. A month later Fairyland had little trouble landing odds of 1/4 in a Huntington mares' event. The horse's final two races of the season took place in competitive handicaps at Aintree and Haydock. A disappointing eleventh behind Culcabok in the John Smith's Handicap Hurdle was followed by a much better effort when eighth, beaten 9l by Joe Jo Star in the Toteswinger Swinton Handicap Hurdle.

This ex German mare may be one of the stable's lesser lights but there is no doubt she will improve on what she has achieved to date. Her handicap mark could turn out to be on the lenient side and she appeals as the type to make her mark when not tried to highly. As all her racing has taken place on good ground on flat tracks it will be interesting when she encounters a stiffer test for the first time, as this may well bring about an improvement in her form to date.

## Razor Royale

7yo

N.Twiston-Davies

OR 130

112144476/F313-

There is no doubt that Razor Royale's chasing exploits to date have been disappointing to say the least. A good level of form in national hunt flat races was followed by several noteworthy efforts in Grade 1 and Grade 2 novice hurdles. For a horse whose future always looked destined for the bigger obstacles, four runs resulting in one minor victory can not be classed as a great success. On the plus side though Razor Royale is likely to start his 2009/2010 campaign on a very favourable handicap mark.

First two runs for Nigel Twiston-Davies were in bumpers at Perth and Cheltenham. An easy eight length victory at Perth was followed up with an excellent second behind the Paul Nicholls trained Oberon Moon. After quickening clear three out the gelding was caught close home and beaten a length in the sixteen runner affair. A month later in November 2007 saw the horse's debut over hurdles in a 2m 5f novice event at Cheltenham. Always travelling well Razor Royale was never in danger of defeat after quickening clear two out. In second place was the Alan King trained Nenuphar Collonges, with Elusive Dream, from the powerful Paul Nicholls stable, back in fourth. When one considers that the runner up went on to win a Grade 1 at the Cheltenham Festival while the fourth won a Grade 2 at Aintree, it puts into perspective just what the winner achieved on his hurdling debut.

The gelding's next five outings over hurdles were all in Grade 1 or Grade 2 events and although several good performances were recorded, the potential of that first success was never fulfilled. Beaten less than three lengths when fourth behind previous victim Nenuphar Collonges, conceding

7lb, in a Cheltenham Grade 3 3m hurdle was followed by a disappointing performance in Newbury's Grade 1 Challow Hurdle. Not disgraced in two more Cheltenham Graded events, the horse's final outing over the smaller obstacles could only produce a 27l sixth behind Elusive Dream at Aintree.

Razor Royale's overall hurdles form was that of a horse who looked an exciting prospect when sent on a chasing career. First outing was in a 2m4f novice chase at Cheltenham in October. Things were going according to plan until crashing out at the second last when going well, leaving market rival Ring The Boss to come home alone. Another trip to Cheltenham ended in a poor third behind Shining Gale after a bad mistake two out proved one mistake too many in a disappointing round of jumping.

The gelding was given a three month break before returning with an easy victory in a moderate Bangor novice chase. Connections were tempted to run Razor Royale in Cheltenham's Grade 1 RSA Chase at the festival but decided to give the horse more time to gain confidence. Final race of season produced a respectable run when third to the promising Chief Dan George at Kelso.

Following Razor Royale on what he has achieved over fences to date would require a great deal of faith. There is no doubt the Twiston-Davies charge has a lot of ability but the big question is will he fulfill that untapped potential? As he starts the 2009/2010 season on a very attractive mark it is worth taking that chance. Early target could be one of the valuable Cheltenham handicaps with the Grand National a possible for later in the season.

## **Peter Pole**

6yo

Tim Vaughan

OR 130

43/111P-

Of the four championship races run at this year's Cheltenham Festival only Punjabi's victory in the Champion Hurdle prevented a clean sweep for horses that began their careers on the other side of the English Channel. The current ante-post markets for next year's renewals suggests the possibility of that fact being improved upon, such is the dominance of French bred horses in today's National Hunt scene.

One French-bred that is still relatively unknown to most followers of the winter game is the Tim Vaughan trained Peter Pole. Although unlikely to reach the heights achieved by the likes of Master Minded and Kauto Star this six year old has the potential to make an impact in the season ahead.

Only one run on the flat as a green three year old, the gelding wasn't seen out again until March 2008 when a promising fourth of eleven in a maiden chase at Argentan. A week later Peter Pole went one better when third, beaten just over five lengths in a 2m 1f race at Orleans. The following month saw a return visit to the course which produced a comfortable success on the horse's final outing in his native country.

First outing for new connections took place the following March in the Canadatracetrack.co.uk Novices Handicap Chase at Exeter over 3m. Burdened with top weight of 11.12 Peter Pole totally outclassed the moderate opposition and cantered home alone. Starting 15/8 favourite the result was obviously not exactly unexpected. Brought out quickly the following week with Tony McCoy replacing Richard Johnson, the gelding treated his five rivals with contempt to justify odds of 2/9 in a 2m 4f

handicap at Southwell.

With a substantial hike in the horses rating from 115 to 132 it was decided a major step-up in class was required after just the two appearances. The race chosen was the John Smith's Handicap Chase which preceded the Aintree Grand National. The Class 2 event run over 3m 1f on good to soft ground looked ultra competitive with seventeen decent handicappers taking part. Nevertheless Peter Pole started the 5/1 favourite off an attractive looking 10.0. Reunited once again with Richard Johnson the gelding travelled well in second place behind rank outsider Oakfield Legend until joining the leader and making his first mistake at the 15th. Still going well in second approaching the next the gelding made a serious error and was brought to a virtual standstill. With the future in mind Richard Johnson soon eased down and eventually pulled the horse up.

The impression created in that Aintree race was that but for those two mistakes Peter Pole would have gone very close to beating eventual winner Don't Push It. Starting the new season off a mark of 130 it will be a major surprise if that rating is not upped to the mid to high 140s at some stage. With so little evidence to go by it is difficult to predict Peter Pole's ideal trip or ground. The horse does seem very versatile but gives the impression a flat rather than stiff course would be best. His current lenient handicap mark is sure to be exploited in the first part of the season but in the longer term the race that stands out as ticking the right boxes is Kempton's Racing Post Chase in February.

## Like Minded

5yo

P.Nicholls

OR ?

1/14-

There can be no doubt that the National Hunt Bumper scene in recent years has been dominated by Irish trained horses but so comprehensive was their superiority in the 2008/2009 season that British trainers of potential novice hurdlers must feel like they are banging their heads against a brick wall. The one saving grace being that is most are likely to stay on home soil until the annual raid on the Cheltenham Festival.

Last season's major race for bumper horses, the Grade 1 Weatherbys Champion Bumper run at the Festival, produced a field of 24, 17 of which were trained in Ireland. They filled the first eight places with Philip Fenton's Dinguib proving an outstanding winner. After leading two out the winner quickened clear for a comfortable success and followed up with another impressive victory at Punchestown. Dinguib stands head and shoulders above anything else in this division.

Although not in the same class as Dinguib one home-trained horse who showed a lot of promise in just two outings last season was the Paul Nicholls-trained Like Minded. Originally trained by Derek Cantillon, the gelding had its first outing on the Lingfield AW surface when getting up in the final strides to beat the odds-on Nicky Henderson-trained favourite Eighteenfifty. Sent to be trained by Paul Nicholls after that success, Like Minded was thrown in at the deep end when asked to contest the Grade 2 John Smith's Champion Standard Open National Hunt Flat Race at Aintree on Grand National day. Held up in the rear the gelding made good headway two out and although never able to get into a challenging position stayed on well in fourth place behind shock 66/1 winner Sitting Tennant,

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without being knocked about.

With a pedigree that screams out stamina (by Kayf Tara out of a Phardante mare) 2m 1f on a flat course was never going to play to the horse's strengths and when connections give him the opportunity to bring his stamina to the fore a good deal of improvement is anticipated. Paul Nicholls is sure to campaign the five year old at 2m 4f + Graded events with Cheltenham being the preferred venue. A possible for races like the Challow Hurdle but the long range target could be a crack at the Albert Bartlett at the festival.

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## On Raglan Road

6yo

J.H.Johnson

OR(h) 140

11/122F4F-

One of the few northern-based trainers with the firepower to take on the big southern stables is that of Howard Johnson. With Andrea and Graham Wylie as principle owners most of the stable's success to date has come via the cheque book. Three times World Hurdle winner Inglis Drever is without doubt their most lucrative purchase from the flat to date with earnings in excess of £700k.

On Raglan Road has a more conventional national hunt background and was purchased by present connections after winning a Punchestown NH Flat race in April 2008. Runner up on that occasion was non other than Dinguib receiving 5lb and beaten over three lengths. While the second has improved out of all recognition since that race, it was still an excellent debut by the winner.

First outing for the new owners was in a Hexham novice hurdle the following October when outclassing the moderate opposition to cruise home by 38l. Dropping down from 3m to 2m 4f for his next race On Raglan Road suffered defeat for the first time. After being headed two out the gelding was quickly outpaced by the Paul Nicholls trained Messasoit and beaten 8l. Considering the third horse Copper Bleu was 23l further back, the performance was subsequently strengthened when that horse went on to finish the season as a leading novice hurdler. Another second followed behind Junior in a Sandown Grade 2 but yet again it was the well beaten third Ogee who went on to boost the form when winning the Grade 1 Citroen Sefton Novices' Hurdle at Aintree, a race in which On Raglan Road was prominent when falling four from home. After the Sandown effort the

gelding was sent off a warm 11/10 favourite to win a Doncaster Grade 2 event and approaching three out the race had developed into a match, with eventual winner Cape Tribulation appearing to just have the edge before the market leader came to grief and Malcolm Jefferson's charge was allowed to come home alone.

Unperturbed with recent setbacks connections decided to have a crack at Cheltenham's Grade 1 Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle at the festival and although only fourth, On Raglan Road ran a race full of promise as well as gaining revenge on Doncaster conqueror Cape Tribulation, who finished one place behind in fifth. Looking the winner jumping the second last the horse stayed-on at one pace just over 7l adrift of Irish challenger Weapons Amnesty. On Raglan Road's final outing of the season was that unfortunate mishap at Aintree.

It is likely that On Raglan Road will be sent novice chasing during the 2009/2010 season and there is no more exciting prospect in the North of England. The stable's Killyglen finished last season as a leading staying novice when winning the Mildmay Novices' Chase at Aintree and it will be disappointing if On Raglan Road does emulate his stablemate and make his mark come the end of season championship races. There should be plenty of easy pickings in the early part of the season before connections decide to plunder more valuable southern targets. The gelding seems to handle most ground and possesses stamina in abundance.

## **Somersby**

5yo

Miss H.Knight

OR(h) 143

1/41333-

There are several qualities required for a horse to make a top class chaser. Good class form over hurdles is a major asset as it proves the animal already has a high level of ability. Coming from a stable with a track record of preparing a horse's campaign with the long term in mind is also essential with any young inexperienced horse, but most of all any potential festival winner must enjoy jumping obstacles with a natural enthusiasm. One horse which possesses all of these qualities is the Henrietta Knight trained Somersby.

Lightly-raced with only six runs to date, the 5yo started off in March 2008 with a comfortable success in a Huntingdon Intermediate Open N/H Flat Race. Starting 13/2 the gelding quickened clear of his twelve opponents inside the final furlong to record a promising debut. Seven months later connections chose a Huntingdon maiden hurdle as Somersby's next race where he finished fourth in a run full of potential behind two decent animals in Shoreacres and Carole's Legacy. Somersby was unlucky to encounter two talented rivals in such a minor event. On the back of that pleasing run Somersby was sent off the 5/2 favourite for a 17 runner Kempton 2m novice hurdle. Always cruising behind the leaders the gelding led at the last before quickening clear for a ready success. A better class affair followed at Ascot and although beaten 20l in third behind the classy Karabak the experience gained was invaluable.

The Grade 1 Williamhill.com Supreme Novices' Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival was next step for Somersby who was sent off an unconsidered 40/1 outsider with Irish raider Cousin Vinny the 9/4 favourite in a field of 20.

Outpaced jumping the third last the 5yo rallied strongly turning for home and in snatching third place in the dying strides was beaten only 3l behind the Noel Meade-trained Go Native. Somersby ended the season with a trip to Aintree for a Grade 2 event and finished third once again, putting up yet another top-notch performance. Beaten just over a length behind El Dancer and County Hurdle winner American Trilogy, Somersby cemented his reputation as one of the season's leading novices.

In all probability Somersby will be sent straight over fences when next seen on the racecourse and there is no more exciting prospect. Tough, talented, a natural jumper and a very straightforward animal, the gelding should be effective at distances from 2m to 2m 4f and although yet to race on heavy ground all other surfaces come alike. A rock-solid performer who, all being well, must be a major contender for top novice events with Cheltenham's Arkle Trophy looking the obvious long range target.

## **Kalahari King**

8yo

Ferdy Murphy

OR(ch) 157/OR(h) 140

3142431/1121212-

If the ante-post betting for next year's Queen Mother Champion Chase is to be believed market leader Master Minded only has to stay in one piece come next March to achieve a third success in the race. Taking a very short price seven months before the event is a quick way to the poor house but with credible opposition to Master Minded thin on the ground it is understandable why the Paul Nicholls charge is currently best-priced even money. In a race where few can be considered serious challengers' at this stage the 16/1 (ew) about Kalahari King could be tremendous value on the day of the race.

A modest career in France with a total of 21 runs in average company, Kalahari King joined Ferdy Murphy as a 6yo in 2007. After four promising runs in the north the gelding was sent to Cheltenham to contest the Anglo Irish Bank Supreme Novices' Hurdle. An unconsidered 40/1 shot, Kalahari King was travelling as well as anything four out and although lacking the finishing pace of winner Captain Cee Bee and runner up Binocular he stayed-on well to be a respectable fourth beaten just over 11 lengths. Last two runs over hurdles produced a third in the Scottish Champion Hurdle and a game victory in the Aon Hurdle at the Punchestown Festival.

Kalahari King's chasing career started with two easy wins at Kelso and Leicester, the second of which saw the gelding give 20lb and a comfortable beating to the useful Nicky Henderson hurdler Shatabdi. Soft ground was the obvious excuse for a disappointing defeat by Doctor David at Haydock but back on his favoured surface Kalahari King got back on the winning trail by beating Astarador in a decent Musselburgh novice event. The horse's

prime target was next on the agenda with a visit to Cheltenham for the Grade 1 Irish Independent Arkle Challenge Trophy Chase. After making a mistake at the 9<sup>th</sup>, Graham Lee's mount made headway into second jumping the last but the gelding's strong run failed by a short head to catch the Irish trained Forpadydeplasterer.

Kalahari King gained some compensation three weeks later when comfortably beating Tatenan in the Aintree Grade 1 John Smith's Maghull Novices' Chase. Taking the lead two out, the 2m contest was soon put to bed with the minimum of fuss. Final race of the season was at Sandown in the Bet365 Celebration Chase. Making several mistakes the 8yo could never get competitive and, although staying on for second, was well beaten behind the Paul Nicholls-trained Twist Magic.

With a rating of 157 and the necessity for ground no easier than good-to-soft, Kalahari King will be difficult to place during the 2009/2010 season - but whenever he has conditions to suit there are few better 2m chasers around. With decent ground virtually guaranteed for the Cheltenham Festival nowadays, Master Minded may not have things all his own way come next March.

## Song Of Songs

7yo

J.Fanshawe

OR(ch) 144/OR(h) 129

For someone who trains very few NH horses it is remarkable that James Fanshawe boasts two Champion Hurdle victories on his CV, namely Royal Gait in 1992 and Hors La Loi in 2002. Remembered most as the trainer of five times Group 1 winner Soviet Song and smart stayers Invermark and Arctic Owl, the Newmarket-based handler boasts a 26% strike rate with his jumpers over the last five seasons. He registered just two wins last season but both came courtesy of talented novice chaser Song of Songs and it will be disappointing if a decent prize does not come the way of the 7yo during the 2009/2010 season.

The 2009 Grade 1 John Smith's Maghull Novices' Chase at Aintree could be regarded as "a bad day at the office" where Song of Songs is concerned. A fancied 6/1 shot behind two classy novices in Kalahari King and Tatenen, Tony McCoy's mount made mistakes at the 8th and 9th but was still travelling smoothly in the rear when stumbling badly on the bend approaching three out. Unsettled after that incident the gelding made a terrible error at the next and even though allowed to coast home when all chance had gone he still managed to take a heavy fall at the second last.

That one run is best forgotten as prior to that the son of Singspiel had looked a novice chaser with a bright future ahead of him. Sympathetically handled on his chase debut at Newbury behind the useful Planet of Sound, a lot more was expected a month later when Song of Songs had little more than an exercise canter when landing a four-runner 2m event at Leicester. Another four runner affair followed at Sandown, but this one was much more competitive with the very good novice Deep Purple in opposition. Never off the bit, Song of Songs toyed with his market rival for a cosy success. Final race of the season was the "Comedy of Errors" Maghull

Chase at Aintree's Grand National meeting.

The winner of two races from five starts on the flat Song of Songs was also a very decent hurdler and after winning novice events at Kempton and Wincanton was sent off 7/1 joint second favourite for the Coral Cup at the 2008 Cheltenham Festival. Disputing the lead at the last Song of Songs weakened in the last 50 yards to finish a respectable 7th behind the Ferdy Murphy-trained Naiad Du Misselot. The horse probably doesn't want the ground too soft and a trip of 2m to 2m 5f should be within his range. The Johnny Henderson Grand Annual (2m) or the Racing Post Plate (2m 5f) are likely long range targets at the festival but the Paddy Power Gold Cup at Cheltenham could be a good starting point. Also has the option of taking advantage of a much lower hurdle rating.

## **Middleton Dene**

7yo

Mrs R.Dobbin

OR 133

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The 2008 Grade 1 Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival saw a career best performance from Middleton Dene who, after challenging from the second last, stayed-on well to be beaten less than 7l by Nenuphar Collonges in the 3m contest. Paying the price for that excellent run Nicky Richard's gelding was raised to a mark of 141 with the result that regaining the winning thread was to prove a lot more difficult. Starting the 2009/2010 season on a more attractive 133 Middleton Dene can be expected to improve on what he achieved last season.

Showing plenty of promise in his first few starts over hurdles Middleton Dene's form really took off when stepping up to 2m 4f +, the first three wins coming at Perth (beating the useful Pigeon Island on two occasions) and the fourth at Cheltenham, where two future decent chasers (Battlecry and Officier De Reserve) were among the opposition. Given a four month break the horse was next seen out in the Sidney Banks' Memorial Novices' Hurdle at Huntingdon in February 2008 and starting a 12/1 shot ran a big race behind favourite Hold Em to be beaten less than 3l. Three weeks later Middleton Dene was to put up that career best performance at Cheltenham but the season ended with a disappointing ninth of thirteen behind Pettifour in the Grade 1 Citroen C5 Sefton Novices' Hurdle at Aintree.

Middleton Dene's 2008/2009 season never really got going and in his first two races the horse's poor handicap mark was apparant when taking on the likes of Duc De Regniere and United off virtual level weights. Soft ground accounted for the next poor performance and a first flight fall at Southwell was to follow. Best run of the season came next when a

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respectable ninth of 22 behind Kayf Aramis in the Pertemps Final at the Cheltenham Festival off a mark of 138.

A much more successful 2009/2010 campaign is expected from Middleton Dene. Back on an attractive rating of 133 the 7yo is capable of picking up a valuable staying handicap hurdle. The horse's future however lies over the bigger obstacles and connections may send the gelding over fences before too long. The horse prefers decent ground and is a thorough stayer with the potential to make a very good handicap chaser in years to come. The 2011 Scottish Grand National may be the perfect long range target for this genuine performer. In the meantime however Nicky Richard's charge is sure to pay his way and win his fair share of races.

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## Cappa Bleu

7yo

Mrs E.Crow

OR ?

F21/1111-

One of the best hunter chasers around in 1998 was the Caroline Bailey-trained Teeton Mill. After winning his first three races that season the grey gelding was sent to be trained by the experienced Venitia Williams and ended the season by winning the prestigious Horse and Hound Cup at Stratford. In the 1998/1999 season Teeton Mill went from being a decent hunter to the highest rated staying chaser in the country with four victories including the Pertemps King George VI Chase at Kempton. It is asking a lot of Cappa Bleu to emulate that achievement but one thing is certain and that is that the horse has unlimited potential and is sure to make an impact in the season ahead.

Four quick runs in Irish point-to-points early in 2008 revealed that this was a young horse with a lot of ability who was then sent to England and the care of Mrs Edward Crow. After winning two point-to-points impressively, word soon spread that this 7yo would take the world of beating if contesting the Christie's Foxhunters at the Cheltenham Festival, but that run was in some doubt due to the elimination procedure for the race. Fortunately common sense prevailed and Cappa Bleu was sent off the 11/2 second favourite in a field of 24. Ridden by top amateur Richard Burton, the gelding was always prominent and taking the lead approaching two out quickened well clear up the hill for a 12l success. The race was not the strongest renewal of the contest but it was difficult not to be impressed by the authority of the performance.

It has been reported that Cappa Bleu will start the 2009/2010 season in the [www.betcatalyst.com](http://www.betcatalyst.com)

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hands of Evan Williams with a view to a handicapping campaign. As with Teeton Mill the first major target for the horse must be Newbury's Hennessy Cognac Gold Cup and on the basis of what the animal has achieved he should get in with an attractive weight. How the horse performs will then govern plans for the rest of the season. Just how far this horse can go is impossible to speculate at this stage but it would be no great surprise to see the gelding among the Gold Cup field come the next Cheltenham Festival. Although by Pistolet Bleu the horse stays really well being out of a Strong Gale mare and should handle any ground from good to heavy.

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## Mirage Dore

6yo

Mrs R.Dobbin

OR 142

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As with most small trainers Miss Lucinda Russell is still looking for that elusive big race success to put the stable on the racing map. With a decent strike rate and a level stake profit over the last two seasons it seems only a matter of time before this talented handler makes the headlines. That first major win almost came last season via the ex French-bred gelding Mirage Dore in Cheltenham's Grade 3 Coral Cup. The 6yo, racing off a mark of 137, beat all bar Irish challenger Ninetieth Minute in the 27 runner strong field on the second day of the Festival. Ridden by Mrs Rose Dobbin, Mirage Dore was sent off a well fancied 14/1 shot after a course and distance win in a competitive handicap the previous October. Always prominent the gelding had every chance on the run to the line but Paddy Flood's well handicapped mount was just too good in the closing stages.

Mirage Dore ran in six races on the flat as a two-year-old with little success for his French handler E Lecoffier and seven runs over hurdles and fences at three and four still failed to produce a win of any kind. Early in 2007 however the gelding did start to show improved form and in the summer joined her present trainer and making his debut in a Hexham maiden hurdle ran a promising third behind the talented Malcolm Jefferson inmate Tot O'Whiskey. Four more placed efforts followed before the horse finally broke its duck at Newcastle in March 2008 when easily beating market rival My Arch without coming off the bit. Another easy success followed at Sedgefield before making his handicap debut at Kelso finishing a close third trying to concede weight to Tartan Snow and Bollin Ruth in the 2m 2f affair. A quick return visit to the course resulted in an easy win and after a five month break the gelding was sent to Cheltenham for a sixteen runner

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handicap off a mark of 127. After making smooth headway Mirage Dore led at the last and stayed on up the hill to beat the classy Fair Along, who was conceding the winner 9lb.

After another five month break the horse returned to Cheltenham for that career best performance in the Coral Cup followed by respectable runs at Aintree and Uttoxeter off a higher rating. A look at Mirage Dore's 26 career runs shows a consistent level of improvement and at the age of six it is highly likely that there is still improvement to come. The gelding is very versatile, acting on most going but with a preference for top of the ground and stays 2m 4f + very well. A decent staying handicap hurdle should come his way before long but connections may decide to pursue a career over fences and will have much to look forward to during the next couple of seasons. That elusive first big race success may not be far away after all and Mirage Dore may be the horse to achieve the stable's first headline victory.

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We will be working tirelessly to provide you with as many genuinely researched tips, market movers and eyecatchers in the horseracing world on a daily basis.

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