

## Horse Racing

Racing fans all over the globe were tuned into the Crabbie's Grand National at Aintree on Saturday and Co Kildare-born jockey Leighton Aspell recorded the biggest success of his career by landing the four and a half mile contest on the Dr Richard Newland-trained Pineau De Re. An 11-year-old, the French-bred Pineau De Re always took the eye in running and he effortlessly made his way into the lead at the penultimate of the 30 obstacles en-route to defeating Balthazar King by five lengths.

Double Seven, trained by Numbersixvalverde's Aintree Grand National winning handler Martin Brassil, fared best of the ten Irish challengers by coming home a further one and a quarter lengths adrift in third spot.

Buckers Bridge, an initial National runner for Knockeen handler Henry de Bromhead, more than acquitted himself by returning a respectable eleventh of the 18 finishers.

There was a local connection with the winner for Pineau De Re was previously trained by Philip Fenton outside Grangemockler for leading Irish owner Barry Connell. Having won last year's Ulster National at Downpatrick, Pineau De Re was later sold privately by Connell to Dr Newland.

Domestically, there was racing at Clonmel last Thursday evening and Henry de Bromhead, already in Aintree, missed the facile success of Aupcharlie in the featured Suir Valley Chase over two and a half miles.

Aupcharlie, sporting the familiar Sizing Europe silks of Ann and Alan Potts Partnership, always travelled with purpose for Andrew Lynch and the 147-rated chaser moved through to lead with five fences remaining. Aupcharlie readily asserted before the last to defeat main market-rival Miley Shah by four and a quarter lengths. It's possible that Aupcharlie may be kept on the go over the summer for he has a liking for good ground.

Cappagh amateur Richie Kiely also figured on the scoresheet for he combined with Johnstown (Co Kilkenny)-based handler Michelle Gannon to collect the closing Comeragh Mares' Flat Race with Missypet. In a pulsating finish, the Westerner-sired six-year-old Missypet led in the very last stride to beat long-time leader Onewforlill by a nose with a five length break to David O'Brien's eyecatching newcomer Oscar'swan in third spot.

There was an all-flat card at Gowran Park on Saturday, clashing with the Grand National, and Jim Bolger certainly dominated proceedings for he sent out a sparkling four-timer.

All four were partnered by Bolger's son-in-law Kevin Manning with the pair signing off courtesy of the four-year-old newcomer Cosmic Cannonball in the Societies Welcome At Gowran Park Golf Club Maiden and this daughter of Holy Roman Emperor represents Michael D Ryan from Dungarvan.

Also a Ryan homebred, Cosmic Cannonball always travelled with plenty of purpose and she stormed into the lead some one and a half furlongs to beat John Kiely's Toe The Line by one and a half lengths.

Daliyan, trained by Rodger Sweeney outside Castlelyons, brought off a nice touch in the Racings Best Offer 19 Silver Package Handicap. Daliyan, supported from 5/2 into 15/8 favourite, went to the head of affairs at the two-furlong marker and Joseph O'Brien's mount duly defeated Dragon Khan by one and a quarter lengths.

Willie Mullins dominated proceedings at Fairyhouse's all-national hunt card on Sunday by sending out three winners and he got the ball rolling courtesy of Avrika Ligeonniere in the Grade 2 Normans Grove Chase. Sent off odds-on favourite, Avrika Ligeonniere made all the running to contain stable companion Twinlight by three and a quarter lengths.

Avrika Ligeonniere's rider Paul Townend partnered Mullins' Adriana Des Mottes to success in the Grade 1 Irish Stallion Farms European Breeders Fund Mares Novice Hurdle Championship Final over two and a half miles. Davy Russell meanwhile was on board the Closutton maestro's remaining winner Valseur Lido who carried the familiar Gigginstown House Stud silks to a comprehensive success over Real Steel in the Grade 2 Rathbarry & Glenview Studs Novice Hurdle.

Robbie McNamara is experiencing a stellar run at present and last month's Cheltenham festival winning rider joined forces with Mag Mullins to collect the concluding Fairyhouse Vets Promoting Equine Health INH Flat Race with Martello Tower. Representing Barry Connell, Martello Tower took up the running well over a furlong out and he dug deep in the closing stages to thwart Measureofmydreams by a half-length.

There was also a flat meeting at Cork on Sunday and An Saighdiur cemented his reputation as one of this country's top sprinters by destroying the opposition in the Cork Stakes, a listed race over six furlongs. An Saighdiur, trained by Andy Slattery for the two-member Men Of Forty Eight Syndicate from south Co Tipperary, sprung a 12/1 surprise with Billy Lee by making all the running to slam Scream Blue Murder by five lengths. It's probable that the seven-year-old An Saighdiur will now travel to Royal Ascot in June.

Neil O'Donnell