

Punchestown brace for Mullins and McManus



Goresbridge handler Tom Mullins sent out two winners for JP McManus at Punchestown's fixture on Wednesday of last week, Oscar Knight completing the duo's brace by gamely justifying 6/5 favouritism with Mark Walsh in the INH Stallion Owners EBF Maiden Hurdle.

Oscar Knight seemed set for a comfortable success when easing into a commanding advantage from two out. Runner-up Undressed however closed under pressure on the flat and he got to within a half-length of Oscar Knight at the line. The likelihood is that Oscar Knight will now run at the Fairyhouse festival over Easter.

The Mullins/McManus duo were earlier on the mark when Some Article sprung a 20/1 upset in the Festival Party Pack From 21 Maiden Hurdle. Some Article moved ever closer with Niall 'Slippers' Madden before two out and the victorious seven-year-old took up the running inside the final 100 yards to defeat favourite Investmentsuccess by one and three quarter lengths.

Queens Wild carried the colours of Fethard-based owner/breeder Bobby Guiry to victory in the Festival Any Day Flexi Ticket Mares Maiden Hurdle over two miles six furlongs.

The Eddie Harty-trained favourite Queens Wild stylishly made her way to the front approaching the final flight for Ruby Walsh to beat main market-rival Why Not Thistle by four and three quarter lengths. The probability is that Queens Wild will now be upped in trip to three miles.

At Clonmel on Thursday, leading lady rider Liz Lalor sent out her first winner as a licensed trainer when steering De Name Escapes Me to a resounding success in the closing Powerstown Flat Race.

De Name Escapes Me, who had just one previous run in a point-to-point, stormed to the front with Miss Lalor at the two-furlong marker and he eased clear thereafter to slam Roman Gold by eight and a half lengths. De Name Escapes Me, owned by Tom Keating from Grange outside Clonmel, is now likely to be sold.

The Willie Mullins-trained Vedettariat, who started his career in point-to-points when in the ownership of Dungarvan based veterinary surgeon Walter Connors, stepped up from his most recent second-placed effort at Thurles by landing the Demesne Maiden Hurdle in the hands of Ruby Walsh.

Vedettariat went to the head of affairs before the final flight and he then had little difficulty in accounting for fellow joint-favourite Venitien De Mai by three lengths. The likelihood is that Vedettariat will be campaigned over fences next season.

Top Co Wexford-based amateur Barry O'Neill joined forces with Eoghan O'Grady to collect the Kilmolash Handicap Hurdle with Clara More, the veteran valiantly coming a second time to lead from two out en-route to dismissing Lake Field by five lengths.

At Naas on Sunday, local Kill-based handler Vincent Halley sent out his father Lar's Arctic Skipper to record an emphatic success in the Paddy Power Shops 10.30am Sunday Service Maiden Hurdle.

Arctic Skipper, a hugely impressive maiden point-to-point winner at Glenbane in November 2013, went one better than he did on his return to action at Thurles last month by picking up the running with Andrew Lynch inside the final 100 yards to defeat A Hardy Nailer by a half-length. The six-year-old Arctic Skipper will now be targeted at a novice hurdle, but he's likely to really come into his own when campaigned over fences next season.

Mallowney, the undoubted stable star of handler Tim Doyle's Moyne operation outside Thurles, hardly broke sweat with Davy Russell in the featured Grade 2 Paddy Power Your Local Betting Shop Chase. Mallowney led from half-way and he was clearly containing the chasing Moscow Mannon when Henry de Bromhead's charge sadly sustained a fatal final fence fall. The 160-rated Mallowney, representing the Glebeland Farm Partnership that includes politician Michael Lowry, will now be targeted at the Fairyhouse and Punchestown festivals.

Colm Murphy, also on the mark with Dylanseoghan in a maiden race at the Kildorrery point-to-point meeting on Sunday, struck with Empire Of Dirt in the Woodlands Park 100 Club Nas Na Riogh Novice Handicap Chase.

Sporting the familiar Gigginstown House Stud silks, Empire Of Dirt led from the sixth fence with talented five lb claimer Luke Dempsey and he held on grimly in the closing stages to deny Champagne James by a length. It's possible that Empire Of Dirt, a €325,000 acquisition unbroken as a three-year-old at the 2010 Derby sale, will now be primed for a tilt at the Irish Grand National in Fairyhouse over Easter.

Neil O'Donnell