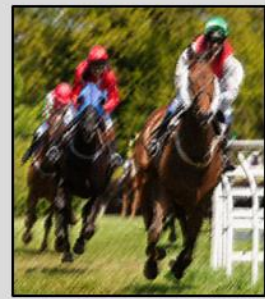




South Midlands Area **POINT-TO-POINT**



PREVIEW

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE CLUB POINT-TO-POINT

KINGSTON BLOUNT

Sunday 13th June 2021

The South Oxfordshire Club point-to-point, which takes place at Kingston Blount on Sunday 13th June, is not only the last fixture in the South Midlands Area, but brings the curtain down on the 2020/2021 national point-to-point season. This is an additional meeting, not being part of the original post-lockdown fixture list, and organisers have been rewarded for their hard work with a bumper entry of 133 (16 from local trainer Alan Hill, who may run as many as 13 different horses!) The meeting is being promoted as Champions Day and will celebrate the end of a curtailed – but absorbing – season, which has seen high quality and competitive racing. Mens and Ladies champion jockeys James King and Gina Andrews will be given their prizes by former title winners and the South Midlands Area Awards will be presented after racing. The seven races commence at 2.00pm.

Clerk of the Course Stewart Nash reported this morning that the going is currently Good to Firm, Good in places following 5mm of rain on Friday. The forecast is for a fine week, so watering will take place throughout the week to maintain the going, with the aim of achieving good ground on race day.

Gina and James have long sewn up their respective titles – the latter after an amazing 32 winners since April, having not got off the mark for the season until then – and some others, including Jason Warner (James' uncle and leading owner), Tom Ellis (Gina's husband and champion trainer for a third consecutive season) and Luke Price (leading trainer – seven horses or fewer) look assured of winning their own respective categories. However, the prizes for top Mens and Ladies Novice Rider and leading horse are likely to be decided on Sunday. Conor Houlihan is one ahead of Ben Sutton as male novice rider, the female version of that title is being disputed by Rosie Howarth (who has no likely rides on Sunday), Natalya Irvine and Georgie Benson, while Ben's father Nick's Sir Mangan is in pole position as leading horse. I spoke to some of the key protagonists in the various title races.

"I've always worked towards winning the title," said James, "And thought I'd have a good year – it's the first time I've been associated with a big yard in the shape of Fran Nimmo and Charlie Poste, and I knew Jason had a lot of horses to run – but I never expected it to end this way. Although I had a slow start, I knew I had some nice horses to ride and normally

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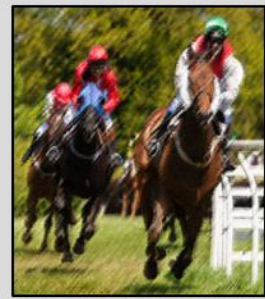
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have a strong end to the season.” Asked about highlights, James nominated Thumb Stone Blues – “He was my first winner as a trainer and, not only do I train him myself but do everything with him, including hunting and team chasing” – and winning his second Aintree Foxhunters on Cousin Pascal. “I’m not saying I’ll be champion again next year,” continued James, “But I’ll start out with that intention. However, the likes of Jack Andrews, Will Biddick and Bradley Gibbs are all great riders and hard to beat, so it will be competitive.”

“It’s been a difficult year,” admitted Gina, winning her joint-record eighth championship, and seventh in a row. “But it’s been the same for everyone and hopefully we’ve come through the other side now and I’ve had a good year – riding 20 winners – considering how stop/start it’s been. I’d have loved to have got to 300 winners (she is currently on 298) and beaten Polly Gundry’s record of 303, but those are my ambitions for next year, as well as retaining my title.” This year, Gina’s highlights have included her second on Latenightpass in the Aintree Foxhunters – “A great spin” – winning three races, including at Stratford on Deans Road – “It’s been quite a job to get him back on track and the way he’s come back from a serious operation is remarkable” and riding out her claim under rules, the first ever female jump jockey to do so.

“Pointing-wise, my two highlights have both been with youngsters,” confirmed Tom. “Winning the first four-year-olds only race with Harpers Brook was a special performance, as was Scotch On Da Rocks when he won at Mollington. We’d always held him in high regard and he did the job as he should – I think he’ll turn out useful.” As for next year, Tom would like, “The horses to come back in the same form and to go one better round Aintree with Latenightpass” (who his mother Pippa bred and owns) and – asked about rivals – said, “It’s a numbers game. Alan Hill is always competitive, and Fran and Charlie could be dark horses. They’re not too far behind despite a slow start to the season and they’re starting to have more older horses. It’s good to see them doing well.”

As far as the novice riders are concerned, 21-year-old Ben Sutton admitted, “The season’s gone a lot better than I thought it would – I was hoping to ride three or four winners, so eight is unbelievable. I’d love to win the title and will give it my best shot, but even if I don’t, it’s been a great season. I do this for fun, and will stay as an amateur – my aim is to ride as many winners as possible and I’d love a go at one of the Foxhunters.”

The card opens with a **Conditions Race (Level 3)**, limited to horses owned and trained by immediate family members in yards of five horses or fewer and this popular initiative has been rewarded with 18 entries. Thomas Junior won at the last meeting here, coming back to form in beating the useful but irresolute Waterloo Warrior in a similar contest to this. Robin Why Not was second in the Intermediate on the same card, while Monbeg Legend improved when third at

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Chaddesley Corbett last time and Frelia – while consistent this year – does not look as good as she once was. My idea of the likely winner in this contest is Drumlynn, a close second (looked to at least dead heat) at Edgcote last time after an absence. His irrepressible owner-trainer Luke Harvey has targeted this race since then.

James King said of likely mount Waterloo Warrior, “He’s a rogue, but a very consistent one! He always runs his race and you can’t rule him out.”

The **Restricted Race** has 20 entries and champion-elect James King looks to hold the key with Kaproyale, a hugely impressive winner at Garthorpe on his pointing debut. Martin Wanless’ Ettington yard is invariable in good form in late season and he has two entries – Raleagh Flora, who won his Maiden comfortably here last time and the improving Flete Park winner Lucky Lucarno. Local trainer Alan Hill also has two entries, but Festival Dawn and Mythical Prince have only shown their placed form in Maidens, while Eole D’Un Regard and Cave Queen’s placings have been at a higher level – the latter would be a deserved first winner for Luke Humphrey. The Kitchenmechanic and The Rosary Flyer both won Maidens last month – at Cothelstone and Flete Park respectively, but will need to step up on their first efforts in Restricted company.

“Kaproyale will take a lot of beating,” confirmed James. “He’ll be a fun horse for next year.”

The Mens Open has attracted 18 entries, with Alan Hill having entered both Diplomate Sivola and Sir Mangan, one of which Ben Sutton will ride. Both are vying for the national leading horse title, as well as the chance to crown Ben as Mens Novice Champion. Sir Mangan has won four out of five this season in Novice Riders company, while Diplomate Sivola was three from three in that grade before being beaten when stepping up to Open class at Garthorpe. Title rival Conor Houlihan looks to have chances with Upcott Cross winner Definite Dilemma for his boss – all-time leading rider Will Biddick – while Ballykan was yet another to score here last time out, taking the Mixed Open. Jason Warner’s Blairs Cove – trained by Luke Price – got off the mark between the flags at Bratton Down and, finally, Hannah Lewis’ Cheltenham De Vaige is an interesting runner, having won three times over fences (albeit off low handicap marks) for Fergal O’Brien since a successful 2018/19 pointing campaign for Hannah.

“Blairs Cove has come out of his Bratton Down run well,” rider James King told me. “He always seems to keep something back and I quite fancy him on Sunday.” Alan confirmed that Sir Mangan is the more likely runner of his two entries – both in Ben’s championship challenge and to go for leading horse – his jockey described the 13-year-old as, “Probably my best chance of the day.”

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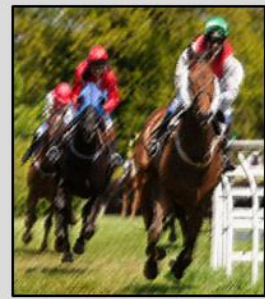
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20 have been entered for the **Ladies Open**. Lady Novice candidates Natalya Irvine and Georgie Benson go head-to-head here, with Natalya bidding to make it four out of four this season on Blazing Tom, who seems to go from strength to strength and was particularly eye-catching at Chaddesley Corbett last time out, and Georgie hoping to atone for a Stratford unseat on Edgcote winner Barney Dwan. Georgie works for Alan Hill, who will attempt to throw a spanner in the works of her title challenge with either the high-class Back Bar – who appears to be running below his best this year – or the enigmatic (to put it mildly) Hawkhurst, yet another Hill inmate who could end up leading horse, and whose Garthorpe success under Izzie Marshall was a candidate for ride of the season. Another worthy of consideration on his best form is Flete Park four-mile winner Board Of Trade.

“Blazing Tom definitely runs,” stated Tom Ellis. “He’s done nothing wrong this season and seems to have improved since his first run at Mollington, when he was undercooked... but impressive. I think he’ll take a lot of beating.” Alan expressed reservations over the likely quick ground for Back Bar and advised that a decision would be made on Hawkhurst’s participation later in the week, saying, “He’s come out of his Garthorpe race (where he was third on Saturday) well so we’ll see how he is. He’s never run in a Ladies Open but Izzie’s got the hang of him.”

The highest entry of the day – 26 – is in the **Novice Riders Race** (Level 2), where the two leading male novices go head-to-head. Conor Houlihan has a choice of four mounts, with his best chance looking like the dual entered Definite Dilemma, while Ben Sutton will be on board Holnicote winner Rolling Dylan. Meanwhile, Georgie Benson will bid to win the female novice title on Alan Hill’s Cothelstone winner Knight Bachelor, a definite runner according to his trainer, who will appreciate the return to three miles after finishing third here over a shorter trip last time. The first, second and fourth in that race renew rivalry today – Gabriel the Great won impressively but does not look at his best over three miles, Tangoed stayed on well for second while Grageelagh Girl has scored twice, at Edgcote and Chaddesley Corbett, on either side of her fourth.

Ben explained how he came by the mount on Rolling Dylan. “Dad’s great mates with Philip Hobbs and has had horses with him for years and Mr Hobbs kindly agreed to help out by giving me the ride today. I think Definite Dilemma and Knight Bachelor will be tough opponents though.”

The **Open Maiden** has received 23 entries. Alan Hill has three of them, with Le Grand Fromage looking the pick on his second here last month. However, no fewer than six of his rivals were also runner-up last time out – Alan’s Festival Dawn and Mythical Prince (also in the Restricted), Tom

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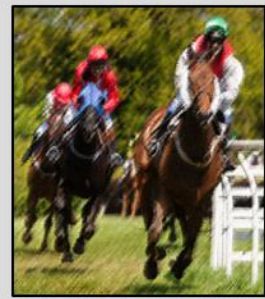
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Ellis' Misstree Song at the last meeting here, Sarah Case's Levasseur on the same card as Le Grand Fromage (but in a slower time), Peter Mason's Barley Hill and Annabelle Bacon's Oscara. The stable is in fine form following a Chaddesley Corbett double on Bank Holiday Monday. Others of interest are dual second Jasmin Des Bordes – who disappointed last time but whose trainer Teresa Clark is another in-form yard – Dingley third Robin Is Ready and the David Brace trained and Bradley Gibbs ridden River Llynfi and Watching Brief, who was third behind Misstree Song last time.

Misstree Song is likely to be Gina Andrews' only ride of the day, and Gina told me, "She was in training with Dan Skelton and fell when about to win a hurdle at Newton Abbot. She's from a good family and her owner hopes to win a couple of points before breeding from her." Alan confirmed Le Grand Fromage as his most likely runner, saying about Festival Dawn that, "She's a winner in waiting" and of Mythical Prince, "He'd have a real chance on his Chaddesley Corbett second. I want to run all three on the day, so may run one of the latter pair in the Restricted." Rider Ben Sutton said, "I'm not sure which race Festival Dawn will go for. She's consistent and I may use hold-up tactics on Sunday."

Eight have been entered for the meeting and 2020/2021 season closing race, a **Conditions Race** (Level 2) for horses holding a South Midlands Area qualification certificate and to be run over the shorter distance of two miles and about five furlongs. Local trainer Alan Hill is responsible for three of them and will be keen to end a season that has seen him again finish runner-up in the national trainer title with a bang. His course winner Normofthenorth is clear top-rated and won unchallenged here on his last outing and the consistent Captiva Island is second highest in the rankings. On this season's form, the only danger to the Hill-trained pair looks likely to be Fran Nimmo's Beau Sancy, who certainly won't lack for assistance with James King in the saddle.

"Although we give Normofthenorth 3lbs, I think we'll be competitive," said James of Beau Sancy. "He was a class performer in his day." "Normofthenorth definitely runs – it's been the plan since his last run here," confirmed Alan, "And I may well run all three."

Organisers are delighted to announce that they are able to welcome the public back to Kingston Blount again. Tickets for spectators may be bought – subject to availability – via the Point-to-Point Racing Company website's booking system [here](#)

Spectators may purchase up to six tickets at a cost of £15pp and contact details must be provided for each individual ticket for track and trace purchases. Bookings close at 6pm on Saturday 12th June.

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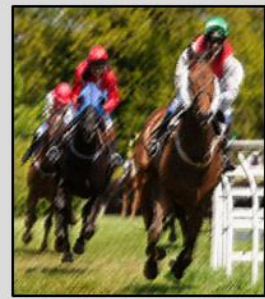
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Officials and participants can obtain tickets from the PPRC website [here](#)

Live streaming will be taking place, hosted by Kingston Blount's answer to Paul Daniels and Debbie McGee, in the form of Martin Harris and Lawney Hill – full details of how to access the live streaming and donate via Just Giving to follow. Organisers are intending to make a digital racecard available in advance.

The course is approximately two miles from Junction 6 of the M40 in the direction of Chinnor. There will be black and gold signs to the course from the M40 and in Kingston Blount village. For SatNav, use postcode **OX39 4SG**. We do not recommend you leave the motorway at Junction 5, as the route down Kingston Hill is both narrow and steep.

The entrance for horseboxes and officials/participants will be the first as you approach from Kingston Blount village. The entrance for spectators will be the normal entrance to the car park. The usual horsebox park on the other side of the road will not be used.

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