

PUNDITS' PICKS OF THE DAY

XMAS RACING CHEAT SHEET



RUBY WALSH



MATT CHAPMAN



MICK FITZGERALD



PAUL JACOBS



PADDY POWER

Kempton, Novices' Chase, 26th 1.55 PM

MC: **Danny Whizzbang** is stamina laden and the 3 mile trip will hold no fears. He just keeps on winning and while this is his toughest test, I'm hoping he'll be too good for Slate House and Black Op.

MF: **Black Op** ran a nice race at Newbury behind Champ when getting done for pace. The step up to 3 miles will make him tough to pass.

PP: **Slate House** proved his stamina for this trip when winning at Huntingdon and he can put his experience to good use here and hopefully get us off to a flyer.

Kempton, Xmas Hurdle, 26th 2.30 PM

RW: Always a good race. Nicky Henderson has three entered and **Fusil Raffles** seems to be his favourite.

MC: This track suits **Verdana Blue**. Stable mate Fusil Raffles is sure to be a danger but I'm hopeful she'll at least hit the frame.

MF: In the absence of a recent run for Verdana Blue I feel that I have to go for **Fusil Raffles**.

PJ: The mares' allowance could bring **Epatante** into the picture and I'm keen on her chances.

PP: **Fusil Raffles** wasn't especially impressive on reappearance at Wincanton but should come on markedly from that outing.

Leopardstown, PP Chase, 27th 2.55PM

RW: **Tower Bridge** is worth a look given owner JP McManus' record in this race. Redhotfillypeppers could be the best of whatever Willie Mullins runs.

PJ: A regular in these big field staying chases and a cracking second to Cabaret Queen in the Munster National when last seen in October, **Spider Web** is my each-way play.

PP: **Fitzhenry** ran a solid race when third in the Chase named after me last year. Another year older and wiser – Fitzhenry that is, not me – looks a good bet to hit the places at least again.

Leopardstown, Novice Chase, 26th 2.20 PM

RW: There's no doubt that **Fakir D'oudairies'** jumping had been outstanding until Samcro exited and the fences down the back stretch at Leopardstown will suit him on Thursday. However, there's a long five-furlong run from the third last to the winning post at the Foxrock venue, with just two fences to jump. That could play into the hands of a strong stayer like **Laurina** but Fakir D'oudairies could be hard to beat.

PP: **Laurina** looked back to her best when winning her beginners chase at Gowran Park last time. I'm a big fan so I'm on her.

Kempton, King George, 26th 3.05 PM

RW: **Cyrname** has loads of pace, is a great jumper and loves going right-handed. He'd be my pick.

MC: I have long backed **Clan Des Obeaux** each way for this and I'm sticking to him. He jumps, he stays, he's improving all the time and he'll come on tons from his first appearance at Down Royal.

MF: With only five rivals, Harry Cobden can dictate from the front on **Cyrname** and let the others try to pass him – they won't.

PJ: **Cyrname** looks the one to beat if he gets the fractions right.

PP: **Cyrname** earned a rating of 176, which makes him Timeform's joint highest-rated jumps horse with Kemboy, and he has plenty in hand on that form.

Chepstow, Welsh GN, 27th 2.50 PM

RW: I'm going for **Yala Enki**. He ran alright for Paul Nicholls in the Ladbrokes Trophy at Newbury and the Welsh National has been the target for him in my view.

PJ: If you're looking for something to upset the likely favourite Elegant Escape, then **Big River** each-way could give you a good run for your money.

PP: This is usually a slog in a bog but the ground may be ok this year. Paul Nicholls has won this race twice before and **Truckers Lodge** has been nicely backed by punters in the last few days.



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