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ROYAL MARINE TESTING NEW WATERS



Already expected to be an exceptionally evening, thanks to a salty renewal of the Al Maktoum Challenge Round 1 (G2), the second night of the Dubai World Cup Carnival got another serious boost this week when trainer Saeed bin Suroor entered Group 1 winner **Royal Marine** in the \$100,000 UAE 2000 Guineas Trial. Highly regarded would be an understatement for the son of Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) winner Raven's Pass and his connections hope he can carry on the positive momentum of his career thus far.

After disappointing as second choice on debut in a Newmarket maiden—a race won by subsequent Middle Park (G1) runner-up **Jash**—the Godolphin homebred came back to smartly defeat a pair of well-intended John Gosden trainees, **Turgenev** (twice a winner since) and **Buffalo River**, at Doncaster. Said effort gave his conditioner the confidence to try Group 1 company three weeks later in France's top 2-year-old race, the 1600m Prix Jean-Luc Lagardere (G1), where he scrubbed past Group 2- and 3-placed **Broome** in the final furlong to win by a well-earned neck. Others in the field included very highly regarded Freddie Head-trained favourite **Anodor** and Richard Hannon's previously unbeaten Listed winner **Boitron**.

"He's a very good horse who showed he is Group 1 horse in France last time," Bin Suroor said. "He came back well and has had a nice rest. He has done very well since he came to Dubai and has been training well at Al Quoz. He handled the Tapeta track (at Godolphin's training centre) really good."

Synthetics, or all-weather surfaces like the Tapeta at Al Quoz, are often used to transition horses accustomed to turf courses to the looser and deeper dirt surfaces, as seen last year when Aidan O'Brien-trained Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (G1) winner **Mendelssohn** used a victory over Dundalk's all-weather

Polytrack en route to a tour de force in the UAE Derby (G2). Luckily for the blaze-faced Royal Marine, such a surface makes up the main training track on Bin Suroor's aforementioned training grounds.

"It's going to be his first run this year and we will try to see how he handles the dirt," Bin Suroor continued. "Whether he is a Guineas or (Kentucky and UAE) Derby horse, we don't know. We'll see how he does, but he's a very good horse, like I said, and the race will tell us what we need to know."

One fact that may provide his connections a bit of confidence is that half-brother **Secret Ambition**, who trains across town at Satish Seemar's Zabeel Stables, placed in last season's Burj Nahaar (G3) over the same trip Royal Marine will try on Thursday. The son of Exceed and Excel also has four Meydan surface wins over the past two Meydan seasons. Dam Inner Secret, a daughter of Dubai World Cup winner Singspiel, is a half-sister to multiple G1 performers, including Listed Al Bastakiya (Polytrack) winner Secret Number.

Bin Suroor also took the time to provide an update on the other Group 1-winning 2-year-old of 2018 in his yard, **Royal Meeting**. The Criterium International (G1)-winning son of Invincible Spirit, who is actually rated a couple pounds higher than Royal Marine, was entered for Thursday, but did not declare.

"There are races for him in the future," he said. "There's no plan for him, yet. I want to see a final (serious) work before he runs."

NORTH AMERICA OFF THE SHELF



The highs were like the Rocky Mountains and the lows the Grand Canyon for **North America** in 2018. Such was never more true than in the span of 21 days between Mar. 10 and 31. The former, *Super Saturday*, saw the son of Dubawi squarely conquer his top rival, **Thunder Snow**, in the Al Maktoum Challenge Round 3, earning his first Group 1 in impressively decisive fashion. On a high going into the biggest race of his life, the \$10 million Dubai World Cup (worth \$12 million in 2019), North America's luck turned south when the Satish Seemar-trained gelding was left at the gate, ruining the one-dimensional front-runner's chances and gifting an easy lead to his aforementioned and ultimately victorious adversary.

"That's a memory I would like to wipe out of my mind," Seemar said. "This happens to everybody in racing, so I'm no different. These things happen. Hopefully we sorted everything out and whatever flaws we had or anything we missed, we have hopefully learned from. You never stop learning in this business."

North America fans will find out quickly what has been learned in the last 9½ months. The five-time winner from 15 starts and gingerly campaigned 7-year-old has made seven starts in the previous 24 months and

enters Thursday's \$350,000 Al Maktoum Challenge Round 1 (G2) at Meydan as fresh as a horse of his age can.

"He's a proper Dubai product," Seemar said. "He won his maiden race here at Meydan and not just won—he won very impressively. He worked his way up from handicaps, to Listed, to winning Group stakes. He's just a very impressive horse. Of course, a horse like him is always a challenge and a lot of the spectators want to know what goes on behind the scenes, as he's honestly not an easy horse to train—but when he's right, he's right."

If he is indeed right, North America will get a second weigh-in against **Heavy Metal**, who bested him in last year's Round 1, when it was worth \$250,000, and North America once again lost his race at the start; this time after being bumped. UAE 2000 Guineas (G3) winner **Gold Town**, Godolphin Mile runner-up **Muntazah**, Burj Nahaar (G3) winner **Kimbear** and highly regarded Simon Crisford trainee **African Ride** appear the main dangers in the best renewal of the 1600m race in recent memory.

"This year, looking at the possible runners, it's nearly a Group 1," Seemar concluded. "That race is very serious and has a lot of speed. Every year, they're improving (the races) and it's a great credit to Dubai racing and to our standards going higher and higher."

GUINEAS THE GOAL FOR GIANT HERO



The UAE 2000 Guineas Trial has drawn a rather fascinating field for Thursday evening's Dubai World Cup Carnival card; one that is—much to the racing fan's delight and handicapper's dismay—filled with more questions than answers. Luckily, many of those queries will be quelled by the end of the global showcase's second evening of racing this season. One of the biggest question marks looking to evolve into an exclamation point of view is that of American import **Giant Hero**, who makes his UAE bow for the master of Jebel Ali training, Nicholas Bachalard.

A winner in his lone start, an impressive drubbing of subsequent Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) 4th-place finisher **Mr. Money** in both of their unveilings at Ellis Park (Kentucky), the emblazoned son of Giant's Causeway will step up considerably in trip from 1000m to 1600m. Adding to the heap, the former Steve Asmussen trainee will break from post 12 of 13 expected runners when he makes his first start in nearly six months.

"We were looking for a 2-year-old to buy and bring to Dubai and the market is very strong in the U.S. and competitive, but we were fortunate enough to come across him. He's a very good-looking horse," Bachalard

said. “We bought him after his maiden win and he arrived here in early October. We gave him time after he ran, plus he had the quarantine period, but he has trained well. He hasn’t shown too much in the mornings, as he’s a very laid-back horse and he is still getting accustomed to the training up the hill at Jebel Ali.

“We’re mostly using this start to get him ready for the (Group 3, \$250,000) UAE 2000 Guineas (on Feb. 7),” Bachalard continued. “The horse has only run once and we didn’t take him to Meydan to breeze, which would have benefited him, but I wanted to keep him (on a schedule). He drew outside, it’s only second career start, it’s a different track and distance, plus it’ll be under the lights. So, we have to use it as a stepping-stone to our goal. He broke fast in his only start and ran very well and he’s grown a bit and matured since then.”

Chris Hayes will ride the half-brother to winner **Proud Heroine**, whose granddam, multiple Grade 1 winner Hollywood Story, produced 2017 Saratoga Special (G2) runner-up Hollywood Star.

“We’ll be looking for a decent run,” Bachalard concluded. “If it were the Guineas, we’d be worried, but this run is about getting a good education, good run and good experience. It’s a learning curve.”

GOLD TOWN TRIES TO SHINE AGAIN



One year ago, Dubai saw the rising stardom of a Charlie Appleby-conditioned 3-year-old gelding who had all the tools fans look for in a luminary. He was fast, dominant and seemed to do everything with ease, while sporting the world’s most successful connections. Alas, the shine of Godolphin’s **Gold Town** was tarnished when he was defeated soundly by another rising equine celebrity, Ballydoyle’s **Mendelssohn**, in the 1900m UAE Derby (G2).

Unstarted since, the 4-year-old will have a chance to prove to his doubters that he deserves the lauding he so readily received one year ago when he takes part in a superbly classy renewal of the \$350,000 Al Maktoum Challenge Round 1 (G2) on Thursday. Over the same 1600m through which he laughed at his rivals in last year’s UAE 2000 Guineas (G3), he must take on the one-two finishers from last year’s Godolphin Mile (G2), **Heavy Metal** and **Muntazah**, as well as Group 1 winner **North America**.

“Being a Street Cry, he adapted very well to the dirt surface at Meydan last year, winning the (UAE 2000) Guineas Trial and (UAE 2000) Guineas very impressively,” Appleby said. “In the (UAE) Derby, we didn’t really have the draw and he was quite keen last year. He probably didn’t quite see the trip out. He’s older, stronger and training well and this is the right starting point for him. He’s taking on some battle-hardened

horses in North America and Heavy Metal, but he's a horse who deserves to be there. It's a starting point for us tomorrow. I'd be disappointed if he's not running a very nice race."

If he is successful, the swift Gold Town will have to prove he can win from off the pace against this class.

"There's no point in taking the lead," Appleby said. "We know what North America and Heavy Metal can do on the front and it won't be a very pretty race if there's all three of us all trying to take the lead. The race, itself, will be a better race if we have to just follow the pace. Frankly, being drawn out allows us to do that."

HEAVY METAL GETS THE LEAD OUT

Dubai Racing Club | Neville Hopwood



He might be nine years of age, but fan favourite **Heavy Metal** is loved like a new-born by local fans and has fully earned his title as the horse-to-beat in Thursday's \$350,000 Al Maktoum Challenge Round 1 (G2)—a race he won impressively last year for owner His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum. Trained by Sandeep Jadhav, the son of Exceed and Excel will once again be ridden by Mickael Barzalona when he makes his first start—and 60th lifetime—since winning the Godolphin Mile (G2) on Dubai World Cup day. Like the purse of the race, which has increased from \$250,000, the competition will also amplify in 2019, with rivals such as **Gold Town**, **Kimbeare**, **North America** and **Muntazah** to tackle.

"He's training really well and galloping well," Jadhav said. "He's just nice and fresh and there's really nothing to worry about with him. He's in good form.

"North America is there and he is a very good horse, but our horse is in good form and hopefully we can hit the front," he continued. "If he gets to the front, he should be okay."

Unlike last year, when the 15-time winner had a run over the 1600m course and distance—one over which he now owns seven local victories and four Group stakes wins—he had no such prep this year. Coming in fresh does not bother his connections.

"I don't think it's a problem for him," he said. "He loves the Meydan track and I don't think there are any doubts about him. He always runs big when he runs fresh. It's no problem. The plan is to maybe stay at this distance. He's a good miler, but we will see.

"He is fit, but should improve from the run," he continued. "He stayed here all summer, but he was doing little exercises like water treadmill and never lost his fitness. (Barzalona) is a good rider for him and is a big

international jockey with a lot of experience. He knows the horse and he comes every morning. I trust him a lot.”

Jadhav also expressed confidence in Sheikh Rashid Dalmook Al Maktoum’s UAE 2000 Guineas Trial runner **Power Link**, who makes his local bow after a quartet of races in England for James Tate, capped with a victory in September over Newcastle’s all-weather. The grey gelding is a three-quarter brother to the incredibly quick multiple dirt Grade 1 winner The Factor.

“He looks like he could be a nice horse,” Jadhav said. “He came from England, is a U.S.-bred and he loves the dirt. He’s galloping well. I’m excited about him.”

QUICK HITS: In Dubai World Cup night news, it appears that Godolphin’s Charlie Appleby-trained Melbourne Cup (G1) hero **Cross Counter** is being aimed toward the \$1.5 million Dubai Gold Cup sponsored by Al Tayer Motors (G2) as his first start of 2019, a year which will be aimed at a defence of his Down Under crown... Florida will host a slew of possible runners for Dubai World Cup night when it holds the Pegasus World Cup (G1) over 1800m on dirt and Pegasus World Cup Turf (G1) over 1900m at the end of January. The connections of **Yoshida**, **Gunnevera** and **Seeking the Soul** all have relayed seriousness about a possible trip to Dubai if all goes well with their Gulfstream Park engagements... Two-time Dubai Golden Shaheen sponsored by Gulf News (G1) runner-up **X Y Jet** is on schedule for a start in the Sunshine Millions Sprint at Gulfstream Park and subsequently a return to Dubai in hopes of becoming third-time lucky. He could once again be joined in the UAE by fellow Rockingham Ranch co-owned sprint star **Roy H**, the favourite to be crowned champion U.S. sprinter at the Eclipse Awards.

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