



THE DUBAI DEWHURST STAKES Sectional Timing Analysis

The Dubai-backed Dewhurst Stakes often helps to decide who the champion two-year-old is, and this year's race seemed to achieve just that, though there are a few other key races to be run in the remaining weeks of the season.

It had seven runners, including a Gimcrack Stakes winner in Blue Point, a Champagne Stakes winner in Rivet, and a couple of promising and unbeaten horses in Seven Heavens and South Seas. But, most of all, it had an odds-on colt with a big reputation – and four wins to back it up – from Aidan O'Brien's Irish stable in Churchill.

The human Churchill knew a thing or two about overcoming adversity, and his equine namesake briefly looked as if he would have a big fight on his hands in this. But he worked his way to the front with about a furlong to go and was soon in command, as the brief threat of Blue Point petered out over the seventh and final furlong.

There have been better performances on paper in the Dewhurst over the years, but Churchill has long looked the kind of individual who gets the job done while exerting himself little more than required. It was no surprise to see him shorten further as favourite for next year's 2000 Guineas on this course, though odds of 2/1 leave little margin for error in the months ahead.

Of course, we have electronic TurfTrax sectionals to refer to in order to weigh up exactly what Churchill achieved here, and what he may achieve in the future. And we also have past TurfTrax ones in this race with which to make comparisons.

The proximity of Churchill's longshot stable-companion Lancaster Bomber in second has to be a cause of some concern for anyone suggesting this year's Dewhurst is top-class form. Those TurfTrax sectionals show that Lancaster Bomber set solid, but by no means overly fast, fractions.

A comparison can be made with the 2012 Dewhurst, won by Dawn Approach in a time just 0.20s (less than a length and a half) slower than Churchill. The leader that day covered the first three furlongs in 36.58s, while Lancaster Bomber took 37.51s: slower by about six lengths.

The difference after another two furlongs was much the same, but this year's Dewhurst runners finished more quickly. In particular, Blue Point ran the fastest sectional by any runner in the race in the penultimate furlong (11.03s, 40.8 mph) and Churchill then responded with comfortably the fastest final, uphill, furlong (12.28s, 36.6 mph).

Interestingly, that was the only furlong in which Churchill was fastest in the race. All bar South Seas managed to run fastest at one stage or another, with last-placed Seven Heavens posting a swift 11.07s as he made headway from the rear between three furlongs out and two furlongs out, only to empty soon after.

But Churchill ran fastest when it was needed, and the conclusion from this, and his previous efforts, has to be that a mile will suit him very well next year. His final furlong was faster than Dawn Approach's 12.68s, and faster than all recent winners of the Dewhurst bar Air Force Blue's 12.18s last year.

The mention of Air Force Blue may sound a cautionary note to anyone reading. That colt, also trained by Aidan O'Brien, had a similar profile to Churchill's, and was, if anything, even more impressive in winning the Dewhurst. He started odds on for the 2000 Guineas in April but finished out the back, as he did in three races later this year.

Churchill looks to be made of sterner stuff, and those TurfTrax sectionals point towards stamina to go with his speed. All being well, it will surely take a good one to lower his colours.

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