



The 2016 Princess of Wales Arqana Racing Club Stakes Sectional Timing Analysis

It was a case of “different jockey but same result” in the 2016 Princess of Wales Arqana Racing Club Stakes at Newmarket on Thursday, as Big Orange repeated his victory from 12 months earlier under crack Kiwi rider James McDonald in the place of Jamie Spencer.

The performance was uncannily similar in that Big Orange made all both times to beat more fancied rivals – he was 8/1 on this occasion having been 25/1 in 2015 – with his chief victim this time being The Grey Gatsby, ridden by Spencer no less.

Spencer had been excellent on the Michael Bell-trained gelding a year ago, but McDonald was even better if anything this time round, and TurfTrax sectionals help us to understand how.

There are many different ways to win a race, but going steadily in front and then turning the screw at the right moment is one of the more difficult riding tricks to pull off.

Big Orange certainly went steadily on the whole early, with his sectionals averaging at 13.10s for the first seven furlongs, despite one quick one of just 11.61s in the third furlong.

That meant he got to the five-furlong pole in 91.71s compared to just 89.94s a year before: a difference of over 10 lengths despite the fact that his 2015 win had also seen him dictating soft fractions.

Crucially, Big Orange not only had plenty of energy still to call upon but was also comfortably in the lead. His rivals were going to have to quicken past him to prevail and Big Orange had already shown that he was capable of running pretty quick sectionals himself.

From five furlongs out to one furlong out he turned in four successive sectionals of 11.66s or faster, with the fastest of all a 11.26s (40.0 mph) penultimate one.

At the same time, Spencer on The Grey Gatsby was riding a much more patient race on a horse who was stepping up in trip. TurfTrax sectionals show he got to that five-furlong marker, after which the race suddenly came to life, 1.42s – or the best part of 10 lengths – in arrears of Big Orange.

The Grey Gatsby posted consecutive furlongs of 10.89s (41.3 mph), 11.09s and 11.10s from four furlongs out to one furlong out to close to just a couple of lengths down but was making no further headway in the uphill final furlong.

Big Orange crossed the line two and a half lengths to the good, with The Grey Gatsby holding Exosphere by half a length for second, and such a clear-cut margin may tempt onlookers to think that the horse would have won regardless.

But sectional analysis suggests otherwise. Big Orange's last-three-furlong finishing speed was 107.1% of his average race speed, while The Grey Gatsby's was 109.2% and the par for the course and distance is only 100.3%.

The further a horse strays from par, the more inefficiently it will have run, and the detrimental effect on its performance will increase exponentially in line with the laws of physics.

Sectional upgrading points to The Grey Gatsby being the superior horse, if not by much. If he had used a bit more energy earlier to sit closer he would not have needed to use so much energy late on to close down a horse who had got loose on the lead.

The Grey Gatsby has now not won since the Irish Champion Stakes in 2014, but this effort suggests all the old ability is still there. He is certainly worth another try at this distance of a mile and a half in a race in which things go more his way.

But Thursday was the day of Big Orange – a very smart gelding in his own right – and of James McDonald. TurfTrax sectionals show the latter rode one of the races of the summer so far to land this big prize aboard his willing partner.

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