



The Qatar Goodwood Cup Sectional Timing Analysis

Tactical versatility is an under-rated virtue in racing. Too often it is assumed that a race must be ridden in a certain way, and the evidence is that some jockeys tend to be one-dimensional regardless of circumstance.

Jamie Spencer has become renowned for his hold-up rides, and as much for those which have failed as for those that have succeeded magnificently.

He came in for plenty of stick after finishing second on The Grey Gatsby to Big Orange in the Princess of Wales's Stakes, in which the latter set soft fractions and the former was too far back early. But he showed he can do it the other way round with a fine front-running ride, on Big Orange no less, in today's Qatar Goodwood Cup.

Big Orange had been here before, of course, always up with the pace when winning under Spencer 12 months earlier. But he was asked to serve it up from a much earlier stage this time round.

This year's TurfTrax sectionals make for interesting comparisons and contrasts with those in recent Goodwood Cups, not least that one won by Big Orange in 2015.

Big Orange's overall time for the two-mile contest this year was 3m 24.93s, which was 0.08s slower than the year before, with rain deadening the surface somewhat on this occasion. But those two, very similar, times were achieved in dissimilar ways.

TurfTrax sectionals show that Big Orange ran the first half-mile in 49.09s this time, compared to 51.51s in 2015, a difference in the region of 15 lengths. What's more, he ran that opening half-mile nearly a second quicker than had Brown Panther in 2013 in a well-run race that resulted in a faster overall time.

By halfway, those differences were much the same, before TurfTrax sectionals show that Spencer dabbled on the brakes at the 8f to 5f juncture.

Having been averaging furlongs in around 12.7s, Big Orange slowed to an average of around 14.1s, a throttling back from over 35 mph to under 32 mph that was almost imperceptible to the eye but which enabled Big Orange to conserve vital energy for the business end. Despite the slowing in pace, none of Big Orange's rivals changed their position or their margin behind the leader by much.

By this stage, the Brown Panther of 2013 was bang level, while the Big Orange of 2015 was only just behind. Spencer had ensured his mount forced those behind to work quite hard early on but got an all-important breather into his mount before the closing stages.

Big Orange cranked it up again, and his rivals went after him. The challenges came thick and fast between the 3f and 2f poles, notably from Pallasator and Sword Fighter, but TurfTrax times show that those opponents had had to run close to an 11-second lung-bursting furlong to get there.

Big Orange went on again and had enough in reserve to hold off the persistent Pallasator and the never-nearer Sheikhzayedroad readily. His final two furlongs were both 12.0s or over, as stamina really came to the fore in this marathon test.

Despite sometimes getting things his own way in races, Big Orange is a very smart horse, and he needed to be close to his best to prevail here. The old racing cliché is that he “did it the hard way” from the front. Those TurfTrax sectionals show that to be true to an extent, but that the breather he got after halfway was “doing it the easy way”, if only for a short while.

Once again, the true facts of the matter only become fully apparent by looking at the data. Jockeyship, speed, stamina, and, not least, tactical versatility from both horse and jockey, can all be found in those sectionals.

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