

Handicapping Review Panel

Arthurs Secret (GB)

12 January 2019

This is the outcome of an appeal by Mr Sandy Thomson, trainer of Arthur's Secret, against the (unchanged) handicap rating of 120 retained for the gelding following the Frazer Coogans Handicap Hurdle Race (Class 3), run at Ayr on 2 January 2019, over 2m5f+ .

The Panel has considered in detail the representations of Mr Thomson and of the BHA handicapper, and has studied the video recordings of Arthurs Secret's last three races.

Arthurs Secret is a nine year old gelding and has run on the flat and over hurdles a total of 48 times. He has never won a handicap hurdle, in 19 attempts, but he has reached the first four on 13 occasions, five times second. (His only hurdling win came four years ago, in a maiden hurdle, at odds on, when only the first and second had ratings, and his was the higher.)

Over four seasons, his hurdle handicap rating has fluctuated within the narrow range of 115 to 124, which should make him a good yardstick. He is an exceptionally consistent type. However, on the eight occasions when he was rated more than 119, he managed to reach the first three only once.

After a couple of poor runs in the spring Arthurs Secret has run three more times this season: finishing second on the first of those occasions, at Ayr, following which his rating was raised from 115 to 118; and then at Musselburgh, where he was second again, after which his rating went up to 120. There has been no complaint about those ratings. Back at Ayr again, in the race which has led to this appeal, he finished fourth, beaten 4½ lengths. The handicapper allotted him a performance figure of 118, but decided to retain his rating at 120.

The sadness for Arthurs Secret is that, almost because of his consistency, he cannot quite win. If he gets close, he goes up a couple of pounds. He then runs well, but not quite well enough, so, down a little, runs close up again, goes up and so on. He was staying on willingly at the end of all these three races.

Looking at the wider picture, if handicapping is about attempting to give every horse a fair chance of winning, this does not seem to be quite working for Arthurs Secret. Historically, he has struggled to be competitive off 120, so, on balance, the Panel has resolved that Arthurs Secret's rating should be lowered to match his actual performance figure on the latest occasion, 118. The Panel has no difficulty with the handicapper's proposition that ratings should generally be based on the best recent form (particularly where there are wide fluctuations), but feels that in the circumstances of this case a more literal interpretation of the latest run should be adopted,

As an aside, the handicapper has expressed concern that a reduction in Arthurs Secret's rating would create difficulty over the treatment of the rating of Island Heights, close up behind Arthurs Secret at Musselburgh. However, the Panel does not suggest that Arthurs Secret's post-Musselburgh rating was incorrect, but it is the level of his subsequent performance that has led to a revision of his mark.

Thus, the Appeal is allowed, Arthur's Secret's rating is to be reduced to 118, and of course Mr Thomson's deposit is to be returned.

The members of the Panel were: Adrian Grazebrook, Justin Brandon and Tim Steele