

Ascot Racecourse Media Release

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Crystal Ocean, Poet's Word and Cracksman among 14 chasing King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Sponsored by QIPCO) glory at Ascot on Saturday

Ascot stages Europe's midsummer highlight on Saturday, July 28, the £1.25 million G1 King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Sponsored by QIPCO) (3.40pm) over a mile and a half.

First run in 1951, the very prestigious contest has a tremendous history with legendary performers including Ribot, Nijinsky, Mill Reef, Brigadier Gerard, Dahlia, The Minstrel, Troy, Shergar, Dancing Brave, Lammtarra, Montjeu, Galileo and Enable all starring on the roll of honour.

Prize money has been boosted again this year, up by £100,000 to £1.25 million, making the race the third most valuable of the year in Britain.

Sir Michael Stoute shares the honour of being the most successful trainer of all time in the King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Sponsored by QIPCO) alongside Godolphin's Saeed bin Suroor and the late Dick Hern with five victories. Stoute's five previous winners are Shergar (1981), Opera House (1993), Golan (2002), Conduit (2009) and Harbinger (2010).

The Newmarket handler holds a strong hand as he attempts a record sixth success in 2018 with **Crystal Ocean** and **Poet's Word**, the first and second favourites, both going forward.

They were both successful last time out at Royal Ascot, with Crystal Ocean, owned and bred by Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, taking the 12-furlong G2 Hardwicke Stakes by two and a half lengths and the Saeed Suhail-owned Poet's Word getting the better of **Cracksman** (John Gosden) by two and a quarter lengths in the G1 Prince Of Wales's Stakes over 10 furlongs.

Cracksman ended 2017 as the leading European-trained horse in the LONGINES World's Best Racehorse Rankings with a rating of 130, following his spectacular seven-length victory over Poet's Word in the 10-furlong G1 QIPCO Champion Stakes on QIPCO British Champions Day at Ascot in October.

The Anthony Oppenheimer-owned and bred four-year-old began 2018 by landing two further G1 contests, the Prix Ganay at Longchamp and the Investec Coronation Cup at Epsom Downs, when he had to work hard to overcome **Salouen** (Sylvester Kirk) by a head.

The King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Sponsored by QIPCO) has gone to France on 10 occasions, most recently with Hurricane Run (2006). Hurricane Run was saddled to success by Andre Fabre, who could be represented this year by **Waldgeist**.

The four-year-old was a G1 winner as a two-year-old and after a slightly disappointing three-year-old season has thrived so far in 2018, most recently defeating **Coronet** (John Gosden) by a nose in the G1 Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud over 12 furlongs on July 1, with Salouen a further length and a quarter back in third.

Salouen is set to start at Ascot on Saturday. The four-year-old son of Canford Cliffs finished third on his seasonal debut over Saturday's course and distance in the Listed Carey Group Buckhounds Stakes in May.

Kirk, based at Cedar Lodge Stables in Upper Lambourn, said today: "Salouen is in great form at home and we are looking forward to running him at Ascot on Saturday.

"He has run some excellent races in defeat this term and I was pleased with his run at Saint-Cloud the last day. We were slightly disappointed as he was in front that day and was only beaten in the closing stages.

"Regarding the going, you would have to say that his best form has been when there has been some cut in the ground.

"However, he has run plenty of times on good to firm going. The ground is being watered and we're hopeful of a good run on Saturday."

Aidan O'Brien, the reigning champion trainer in Britain and Ireland, has landed the King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Sponsored by QIPCO) four times, most recently with Highland Reel in 2016.

He has five contenders going forward in 2018 including four-year-old **Hydrangea**, a course and distance winner in the G1 QIPCO British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes on Champions Day in October and fellow four-year-old **Cliffs Of Moher**, who ran twice at Royal Ascot, finishing fourth to Poet's Word in the Prince Of Wales's Stakes and third to Crystal Ocean in the Hardwicke Stakes.

O'Brien's other remaining entries, all three-year-olds, are headed by **Kew Gardens**, successful in the 14-furlong G2 Queen's Vase at Royal Ascot before recording a first G1 success in the mile and a half Grand Prix de Paris at Longchamp on July 14.

Queen's Vase third **Nelson** and **Rostropovich**, last seen when the half-length runner-up in the G1 Irish Derby, complete the O'Brien-trained quintet.

The second possible French-trained challenger on Saturday is the six-year-old mare **Bateel** (Francis-Henri Graffard). Bateel was runner-up to Hydrangea in the G1 QIPCO British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes at Ascot in October and has won her only start so far this season, recording a cosy victory in the G2 Prix Corrida at Saint-Cloud in May.

Completing the 14 confirmations are Investec Derby runner-up **Dee Ex Bee** (Mark Johnston), last seen when third to Kew Gardens in the Grand Prix de Paris at Longchamp, and six-year-old **Desert Encounter** (David Simcock), fifth to Cracksman in the QIPCO Champion Stakes last year and runner-up in a Listed contest at Newbury on Saturday.

The King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Sponsored by QIPCO) is part of the QIPCO British Champions Series.

The fabulous seven-race programme at Ascot on July 28 also features the £150,000 Gigaset International Heritage Handicap (3.00pm) over seven furlongs, for which there are 47 confirmations.

Ascot also races on Friday, July 27, with a seven-race programme running from 1.50pm through to 5.15pm.

The going at Ascot is currently **Good to Firm**

There was five millimetres of rain on Friday night.

The forecast is for generally dry and warm conditions through to the weekend. There is a small chance of a thundery shower on Friday. Watering is in progress to maintain conditions.

For further information, please contact:

Nick Smith - Director of Racing and Communications, Ascot Racecourse

Nick.Smith@ascot.co.uk / 07771 791449

Chris Stickels - Clerk of the Course, Ascot Racecourse

Chris.Stickels@ascot.co.uk / 07970 621440

Ashley Morton-Hunte - Corporate and Racing Communications Manager, Ascot Racecourse

Ashley.Morton-Hunte@ascot.co.uk / 07803 007997

About QIPCO British Champions Series

QIPCO British Champions Series shines the spotlight on Britain's most prestigious Flat races between May and October, culminating in the grand finale on Saturday 20th October 2018 at Ascot Racecourse with the richest race day in British history - QIPCO British Champions Day.

The Series features 35 Flat races including four of the world's top ten rated races, bringing together the finest horses, jockeys and trainers to compete for the sport's most prestigious prizes.

Hosted across ten of the UK's leading racecourses it encompasses the top British racing festivals, including the QIPCO Guineas Festival at Newmarket, the Investec Derby Festival at Epsom, Royal Ascot, the Moët & Chandon Newmarket July Festival, The Qatar Goodwood Festival, the Welcome to Yorkshire Ebor Festival at York and the William Hill St Leger Festival at Doncaster.

QIPCO British Champions Series comprises five easy-to-follow race categories - Sprint, Mile, Middle Distance, Long Distance and Fillies & Mares.

For tickets to QIPCO British Champions Day on Saturday 20th October go to britishchampionsday.co.uk

For further information please contact:

Naomi Lawson, Head of PR, QIPCO British Champions Series, on 07881 266359 or nlawson@greatbritishracing.com