

TOP 10 HORSES TO HAVE APPEARED AT CHEPSTOW'S OCTOBER MEETING

Cue Card	2011	<p>The most popular jumper of recent years, Colin Tizzard's stable veteran has been a top class performer for seven and a half years, winning 16 and being placed in 11 of his 37 races. His first win over fences was in a novice chase at Chepstow in 2011.</p> <p>Cue Card had already enjoyed a successful career before improving to win the 2015 King George at Kempton in tremendously game style. He was travelling well in the Cheltenham Gold Cup when coming down three out, drawing an anguished cry from his many supporters in the stands. Happily, he soon bounced back by winning at Aintree.</p> <p>The 2016/17 season was decidedly mixed, with a lacklustre first outing followed by a 15 length demolition of the former Gold Cup winner Coneygree at Ascot and a close second to Thistlecrack in the King George. He demolished inferior opposition at Ascot before going for the Gold Cup again, but he wasn't going well when capsizing at the third last fence again and three weeks later was surprisingly beaten by Tea For Two at Aintree.</p> <p>Nearly twelve years old now, Cue Card's best years are behind him but he remains a great favourite and it's to be hoped that there's another win or two in him.</p>
Fingal Bay	2011, 2012	<p>This Philip Hobbs gelding looked destined for the top when he won his only bumper start by 22 lengths and began his jumping career in 2011 by being pitched into Chepstow's Grade 2 Persian War Hurdle and winning it impressively.</p> <p>Fingal Bay built up a sequence of five victories including Newbury's Challow Hurdle, but had to miss Cheltenham due to injury prior to finishing second at Aintree. He went novice chasing in 2012 and once again he began with a win at Chepstow's October meeting in the Robert Mottram Memorial. He jumped well and the narrowness of his victory over Tiger O'Toole, put down to idling in front, failed to dent his good reputation.</p> <p>At that stage the sky was still the limit for him, but his season ended dramatically at Exeter when he jumped badly left during the race and eventually crashed through the wing of a fence. The tendon injury he picked up there meant a year on the sidelines. Nevertheless Hobbs skilfully produced him to win his comeback race and then the 2014 Cheltenham Pertemps Final, his finest hour. He contested high class races over hurdles and fences without winning again.</p>
Balder Succes	2013	<p>A high class chaser at up to two and a half miles who set a course record at Chepstow. He earned over £350,000 by winning 12 out of his 30 races despite disliking Cheltenham and big fields.</p>

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		<p>Balder Succes came over from France at the end of 2011 to be trained by Alan King. Before long he was the comfortable winner of a 12-runner novice hurdle at Plumpton, but he never won a race with more than six opponents after that. Despite five successes over timber he wasn't top class and the transition to chasing duly came in October 2013. He clocked a new course record in Chepstow's Robert Mottram Memorial, going clear halfway up the straight and then just doing enough to keep three quarters of a length in front of The Romford Pele.</p> <p>Four more wins in his novice chase season – helped by the fact that the better grade races usually had fewer runners – proved fencing was really his forte. In 2014/15 he was competitive at the highest level, winning again at Kempton and Ascot but failing again at Cheltenham, where his record was FUF7. A bad fall at Aintree sadly brought a premature end to his career.</p>
Sire De Grugy	2013	<p>A popular chestnut with a big white blaze who has won 17 races, including all the top two mile chases and a couple of Chepstow handicaps.</p> <p>Business man Steve Preston had always hankered to own a racehorse and on his 50th birthday his friends and family gave him £2,000 to start pursuing the dream. He put rather more of his own funds into the kitty and approached a number of trainers to see if they would buy him one and take a part-share for themselves. Gary Moore was the only one to go along with the idea, and he bought Sire De Grugy in France for 50,000 euros. In two seasons the horse won four hurdles and showed he was more than useful.</p> <p>Chasing was really his game and 2013/14 turned out to be his annus mirabilis. He won the two mile chase at Chepstow's 2013 October meeting impressively before confounding everyone's expectations by taking the Tingle Creek, Desert Orchid, Clarence House, Champion Chase and Celebration Chases. Sprinter Sacre may have been absent that season, but Sire De Grugy could hardly have done more. He's found life tougher since then, but wins at Chepstow, Ascot and another Tingle Creek at Sandown were greeted with delight by his many fans.</p>
Shelford	2014	<p>A game winner of two hurdles at Chepstow and eight races in all, including twice in France, who shows his best form on soft going.</p> <p>The two Chepstow races he won in October 2014 marked Shelford down as a horse with Cheltenham potential and he finished fifth in a big field at the next Festival. Unfortunately he was sidelined for a year but Dan Skelton chose to send him to Enghien, in the suburbs of Paris, for his comeback run. He trotted up by 20 lengths and the few British punters on course cleaned up as the French Tote paid 14/1. He was odds on when he won at the same venue the following</p>

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		<p>month. Two more decent performances across the Channel followed but he was a long way down the field in two races in England last winter.</p> <p>In March 2017 he was turned to novice chasing and won a little race at Towcester before going on to be placed twice in the summer in valuable handicaps at Uttoxeter and Market Rasen. In hindsight he faced a hopeless task in the latter race when only beaten five lengths by Alcala, who was halfway through his current winning sequence of five.</p>
Vieux Lion Rouge	2014	<p>Third to the useful Shelford at Chepstow en route to becoming a leading staying handicap chaser; he was strongly fancied for the 2017 Grand National.</p> <p>Since being bought for 42,000 euros in 2012 to be trained by David Pipe Vieux Lion Rouge has won 11 of his 22 races and earned his owners £205,000. Most unusually, he won three National Hunt flat races (favourite every time) before cutting little ice at Cheltenham bumper, run on much faster going.</p> <p>Next season he won three novice hurdles (again always the favourite) before trailing in at Cheltenham. His 2014/15 campaign began promisingly with a third place behind Shelford in Chepstow's Silver Trophy in suitably soft ground, only to end with another Cheltenham flop.</p> <p>He went chasing in 2015/16, culminating with a seventh place in the Grand National. He emerged from his summer break better than ever and won the Becher Chase at Aintree and the Haydock National Trial in fine style. He finished an honourable sixth in the 2017 Grand National, and is sure to be aimed at the race again next year, in the hope that the going will be soft enough for him to show his true ability.</p>
Blaklion	2014	<p>Showed a good attitude in his two Chepstow victories, which helped him on his way to becoming one of the best staying chasers. He was made favourite for the last Grand National, where he finished fourth.</p> <p>After being bought out of the Irish point-to-point arena Blaklion won four races in a row for Nigel Twiston-Davies, the last of them being Chepstow's 2014 running of the Persian War Novices Hurdle, beating the future dual Scottish National winner Vicente. He was recognised as a tough staying novice, but chasing was the main objective and he began his fencing career back at Chepstow in October 2015 in the Robert Mottram Memorial. There he finished a close fourth, a race in which Native River was third. Wins at Cheltenham and Wetherby preceded his victory in the RSA Chase at the 2016 Festival.</p>

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		<p>Since then Blaklion established himself as one of the leading staying handicappers by finishing fifth in the Hennessy behind Native River and second in the Haydock National Trial before being sent off the 8/1 favourite for the Grand National. Leading half a mile out, he looked like winning it, but faded to finish a respectable fourth. He is bound to be in the line-up again next year.</p>
Vicente	2014	<p>Dual winner of the Scottish Grand National, having put in his best performance of his hurdling career at Chepstow.</p> <p>His 2013/14 season didn't mark him as one of Paul Nicholls' outstanding novice hurdlers, but the following October he won at Cheltenham before coming to Chepstow and finishing a close second to Blaklion in the Persian War Novices Hurdle.</p> <p>Feeling that was as far as he could go in that discipline, he was switched to fences. Two wins on good to firm going in the spring of 2015 gave his trainer the first real hint of his preference for faster ground. Good efforts through the next winter in Cheltenham handicaps prepared him for his first tilt at the Scottish National at Ayr, a four mile test in which he beat all 27 rivals.</p> <p>He didn't trouble the judge for most of the 2016/17 season, and disconcertingly fell at the first in the Aintree National, but it all came right on Scottish National day. Back to the same handicap mark as a year before, he beat an even bigger field on suitably fast ground. Sam Twiston-Davies rode him to both National successes and who's to say he won't make it three next April?</p>
Altior	2015	<p>The 34 length winner of a novice hurdle at Chepstow has won all his ten races since, including the Arkle at Cheltenham. He is generally considered to be the top two mile chaser in Britain and Ireland.</p> <p>That spectacular Chepstow win in October 2015 was Altior's hurdling debut. Narrow victories at Ascot and Cheltenham followed before demolishing his rivals in the first race at Kempton on Boxing Day, one that his trainer Nicky Henderson invariably targets. He was then put away until the Supreme Novices Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival, when he beat the Willie Mullins-trained favourite Min and Buveur D'Air, who would go on to win the 2017 Champion Hurdle.</p> <p>Altior then went novice chasing and a combination of his speed, jumping and reputation brought three quick wins in small fields. He then tackled senior company in the Game Spirit at Newbury and won it, the Arkle, and the Celebration Chase at Sandown. There he comprehensively beat the Champion Chaser Special Tiara at odds of 30/100, his longest starting price that season.</p> <p>He is likely to reappear in the Tingle Creek, where he could take on</p>

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		Douvan, who had won 14 in a row until finishing lame in the Champion Chase.
Native River	2015	<p>A close third in his fencing debut, the October 2015 Robert Mottram Memorial at Chepstow over two and a half miles, was a really good run over a trip plenty short enough for the future Welsh National winner.</p> <p>Native River is one of the trio of top staying chasers to hail from Colin Tizzard's Dorset yard, along with Cue Card and Thistlecrack. Three wins in his novice hurdle season were a welcome taste of things to come in the chasing. After his Chepstow run, he won two little novice chases and finished third in what used to be the Feltham at Kempton, not an ideal track for him. In the spring of 2016 he came second in the four mile National Hunt Chase at Cheltenham and won the Mildmay at Aintree. He was ridden there by Richard Johnson, who has been his pilot on all but one occasion since.</p> <p>After a warmup at Wetherby in the autumn a return to hurdling wasn't ruled out, but it was enough to make him favourite for the Hennessy at Newbury, which he won. A month later he spreadeagled the Welsh National field carrying top weight through the mud at Chepstow. The drying ground went against him in the 2017 Gold Cup, but he was still only a three-length third behind the winner, Sizing John.</p>