



*Crown Leah returns to the second spot at Navan in April, in a race that has thrown up several winners.*

**W**e were out in the paddocks with Crown Leah recently and she's in great form and moving brilliantly. She has gotten bigger and stronger and her knees, to touch, feel fine. My thinking is, why get her in now, before Christmas, if I'm not going to run her at Dundalk?

All-weather tracks are not great for horses with 'iffy' knees, so my plan is to bring her in after Christmas, with the intention of having her spot-on for the beginning of the 2018 flat season. This will be her 'Derby' time as there will be an ease in the ground, which will suit her, and she'll be fresh and well, with her issues, hopefully, well behind her.

As my updates have mentioned, Quinn's Red Rose did a very hard piece of work a few weeks ago which took a good bit out of her. I gave her some time off, and when I brought her back to do some half-speed work I just felt that she wasn't setting the world on fire. To be fair, she's a big filly who has been growing all year and like so many

*This will be her 'Derby' time.*

horses who don't thrive at this time of the year, she has just gone a bit weak.

When they go weak you can't keep putting the gun to their heads – you have to back off, or they won't come back. I might even get her out to the paddocks for a couple of weeks. At this time of the year, especially if it's dry, it can really stand to them. The fact is that Quinn's has been in a long time at this stage, even allowing for the stop-starts, and she does deserve a little break out in the fields. A break over Christmas would allow her to strengthen up again, and to come back ready to be eased into the new flat season, and, alongside Crown Leah, give us a season to look forward to in 2018.

**Michael  
O'Callaghan**

## Dave's deliberations:

*Sapphire racing manager David Donohue discusses Crown Leah, looking back with a changed perspective, and raising a glass during the season of hope.*

It's easy to become disillusioned in the racing game. From a winter full of expectations, twelve months ago, our Sapphire Bravo Syndicate members have arrived slap-bang into a winter of accepting that 2017 ultimately consisted of but two racecourse memories, that of Crown Leah finishing second at Navan on the first run of her career, and finishing unplaced at Tipperary, a run which suggested that her earlier leg issues were not fully behind her. It was a scintillating debut, full of promise, followed by a run that took the wind out of the sails.

One of the many gifts that moving to the Burren in Co. Clare has brought me was the chance to meet Felim Mac Eoin, a racehorse vet who worked for the Hong Kong Jockey Club for several years, before returning home to Kinvara. We were having a chat recently, when the issue of keeping two-year-olds sound came up. What he said was so concise I actually memorised it. 'Unfortunately,' he said, 'some two-year-olds take longer for their bone structure to adapt to the rigours of training.'

In our September newsletter, Crotanstown's regular vet, Pat O'Sullivan, went into detail regarding the obstacles Crown Leah has encountered on her path to adapting to those rigours, and the demands of training. He told us, 'A spur, which Crown Leah has, is



*Crown Leah cantering during the summer.*

an abnormal growth of bone which can occur as a result of what is called re-modelling. Re-modelling is almost exactly as it sounds – you get a change in the bone in response to a disease, which is more than often arthritis. An insult, or injury, to the diseased bone then causes the bone to change, and this very often manifests itself as a sharp point at the edge of the bone, which is called a spur.'

Pat went on to say that 'once a spur forms, they are usually there for good, but having said that, just because a spur is present it doesn't necessarily mean that the horse will not be able to perform athletically.'

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As I re-read Pat's analysis of the spur, which was almost certainly the cause of Crown Leah's below-par second run, I had a realisation that the prognosis and the 'futures market' for Crown Leah elaborated upon by him, was, on second reading, a lot more hopeful than we may have allowed ourselves to believe at the time. Basically, Pat, like Felim, was suggesting that adapting to the rigours of training is part of the training process itself, and that a condition as common as a spur should in no way put a lid on the owners' dreams.

In fact, I want to suggest that rather than lifting the lid on the old dreams, we might consider dreaming anew. Go back and watch the race at Navan – it's still as thrilling as it was when we watched it in real-time last May. Then go look at the stats. The race threw up five future-wins and thirteen places. The race-time, up Navan's famously stiff hill, was 1.21 secs faster than the course average on similar going, and in being beaten half-a-length by Too Familiar, Crown Leah was just .09 secs behind the winner.

Too Familiar won an Auction Race at The Curragh next time out, before being placed in a G3. Gasta, whom Too Familiar beat in that Auction Race, subsequently competed in two G3's and one G1 and earned a rating of 93, while the third-placed Verhoyen also hit 93, after being beaten by the classy Crotanstown-trained I Am Power at Navan. The subsequent achievements of the fifth, sixth and

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seventh at Navan further confirm Leah's own achievement in dominating the Navan race over the last two furlongs, before getting edged out near the line. Damselfly (5th) won twice and was placed six times, while Amenette (6th) recorded a win and a second placing.

Himmah, trained by Kevin Prendergast, ridden by Chris Hayes, and well fancied on the day, finished seventh at Navan, and was subsequently second four times and third once. One of those second placings was behind the A.P O'Brien-trained September, who went on to win the Listed Chesham Stakes at Royal Ascot, finish fourth in the G2 Debutante Stakes at The Curragh, third in The G1 Moyglare, and second in the Breeders' Cup Fillies Mile at Del Mar.

It's all in the book. Basically, Crown Leah's run was exactly what we thought it was on the day – a run brimming with potential. The issue that temporarily arrested hope at Tipperary, can, I would argue, be seen differently than it was seen on the day. It can be seen as more of a signal than a setback – a signal that has been well heeded as Crown Leah has been given the treatment and the rest she needs, and then some. It's still three months to the beginning of the flat season, but it's no time at all to the highlight of the season of hope. Let's raise a glass!



**David Donohoe**



*A winter's morning at Crotanstown.*