

Handicapping Appeals Panel

Hill Sixteen (GB)

20 March 2022

This is the outcome of an appeal by Mr Sandy Thomson, trainer of Hill Sixteen, against the handicap rating of 147 allotted to the gelding following the Bet365 Premier Chase (Class 1), run at Kelso on 5 March 2022, over 2m7½f.

The Panel has considered in detail the representations of Mr Thomson and of the BHA handicapper, and has studied the video recordings of Hill Sixteen's last four races.

Hill Sixteen is a nine-year-old gelding and has run fifteen times over fences, winning twice. He has been campaigned on the last four occasions in Class 1 races, and has been in the frame in three of them; a successful strategy, as he has earned in excess of £40,000 for connections over the current season so far. The first three of those races were handicaps, in which he ran off 136, and 140 twice. He entered his most recent race with a mark of 138.

However, that last race was not a handicap, and Hill Sixteen had the lowest handicap rating in the race, therefore effectively at a disadvantage as against every other runner, a factor presumably taken into account by his connections. He was 7lbs "wrong" with the eventual winner (who beat him by 1 length), and at a disadvantage of 22lbs with the eventual third (the favourite) and 7lbs with the fourth, whom he beat by 3 and 11 lengths respectively. It was inevitable that (on the face of it) this result would give rise to a significant increase in his rating. That is the chance you take by running such a horse in such a race.

It is accepted that sometimes non-handicap races with small fields are ridden tactically rather than flat out, and can produce unexpected results. Mr Thomson suggests that this has been the case on previous runnings of this race and that, by implication, the race is endemic in that respect. However, every race is different, and the handicapper can only rate what he sees. It cannot simply be assumed that a surprisingly good performance by a lowly rated horse is the result of every other horse in the race running below form.

Mr Thomson's submission seems to suggest that, because all but two horses might be regarded as running below their ratings, the handicapper should take the view that the winner's performance was not much more than should be

expected off his current rating and that consequently the second should go up by only enough to reflect the difference between their respective ratings. The panel cannot accept that argument. The race appeared to be truly run.

Mathematically, the winner has gone up by an average amount for a winner, and the second might have followed him, but the handicapper has already discounted the substandard performance of some of the others, as well as Hill Sixteen's historic inconsistency, by allowing him 3lbs off that calculation, resulting in a net rise of 9lbs. The panel cannot find a reason for challenging the handicapper's conclusions in this case.

Accordingly, the APPEAL FAILS. However, this was in part a matter of the handicapper's judgment, which the trainer is entitled to question, and accordingly Mr Thomson's deposit is to be returned.

The members of the Panel were: Adrian Grazebrook, Vanessa Ryle and Tim Steele.