



**QATAR GOODWOOD FESTIVAL 2018
RACENEWS RACECOURSE SERVICE
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BRILLIANT BATAASH BLITZES RIVALS

The brilliant Battaash (8/11 favourite) produced one of the finest sprinting performances of recent times with a sensational blitzkrieg in the £312,000 G2 King George Qatar Stakes.

The Charlie Hills-trained four-year-old travelled with menace throughout the five-furlong event and displayed a potent turn of foot to put the race to bed in a matter of strides, winning readily by four lengths under Jim Crowley.

The son of Dark Angel was an easy two and a quarter-length winner of the race last year and became the eighth horse in history to win the G2 event on two occasions.

Lambourn handler Hills described the performance by Battaash, who had to carry a 3lb penalty for his G1 success in last year's Prix De L'Abbaye, as "a career best" as he toyed with his rivals. A return to G1 company now beckons for the speed machine with Paddy Power making Hills' charge the Evens favourite from 7/4 for the G1 Nunthorpe Stakes at York on August 24. Battaash won in a time of 56.50s - he was 0.49 seconds outside the Goodwood five-furlong record.

The delighted trainer said: "Battaash broke well and got a nice lead to the first furlong, but he just wanted to go faster and Jim just had to let him go. He is an exceptional horse and I think that could well be a career-best. It was also the best he has behaved in the preliminaries. He has had plenty more racing now and I think he is learning with every run. That was pretty special - he is some horse. Jim always looked in control. It was not ideal that the race split a bit but he just a class above really. Today was probably a career-best by Battaash. He had to carry a penalty there but won so impressively - I'm delighted with him.

"He has been training a lot better at home and we have a lot to look forward to. Ground doesn't matter to him. He has the most amazing action, is so light on his feet and is a real athlete. Battaash is the kindest horse to have at home and I just think things got to him at York in the Nunthorpe last year when he was fourth. Things didn't go to plan at York last year, but this time around, we might saddle him in the stables and then bring him over, but I don't think Battaash was right at York. I think something was on his mind and it all got on top of him."

Regarding future targets, Hills revealed: "Battaash will probably have three more races this year, the Nunthorpe at York, then the G1 Derrinstown Flying Five Stakes [September 16] at the Curragh and then back to France for the Prix De L'Abbaye again. There is good timing of three weeks between those three races, so the schedule will suit. I think if he went for the Everest it would stop him running in a lot of races here. America and the Breeders' Cup is potentially something we might think about - travelling won't be an issue."

Battaash is owned by Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum, who also owned the brilliant Dayjur. In his final race, the 1990 Breeders' Cup Sprint at Belmont Park, he famously jumped a dark shadow cast over the track, denying him victory by a neck. When asked about a potential tilt at the Breeders Cup on November 2 & 3 at Churchill Downs, Hills explained: "It's up to Sheikh Hamdan if he wants to run in America. We will just take every race as it comes at the moment. I don't think the Everest will be on the agenda. Hopefully, Battaash will stay in training as a five-year-old."

Hills also trained Muharrar, the 2015 European Champion Sprinter, with the trainer believing Battaash will also be a "champion." He continued: "I think Battaash is going to be another champion and it's difficult to compare two champions. I am just so pleased about the way he is behaving as well. He is more of a man, and the more racing he has had, the better. He is improving.

"I've never really been happy with Battaash at the start of the season as he even had a winter coat at Royal Ascot. His summer coat has just come through in the last few weeks. Racing does horses so much good. He has got confidence now with all the people that look after him. [His groom] Bob has done a fantastic job at home and they have a great relationship together. Michael Murphy, who rides him most mornings, and Louis have all done a great job."

3.35pm King George Qatar Stakes (Group 2)

1 Battaash (Hamdan Al Maktoum) Charlie Hills 4-9-05 Jim Crowley 8/11 fav

2 Take Cover (Norcroft Park Stud) David Griffiths 11-9-02 Andrea Atzeni 20/1

3 Muthmir (Hamdan Al Maktoum) William Haggas 8-9-02 Dane O'Neill 16/1

11 ran

Time: 56.5s

Distances: 4, ½

Tote Win: £1.50 Place: £1.10, £4.50, £3.60 Exacta: £20.90

Charlie Hills - 15 Goodwood winners (7 at Qatar Goodwood Festival)

Jim Crowley - 67 Goodwood winners (12 at Qatar Goodwood Festival)

BATTAASH BACK TO THE TOP WITH UNTROUBLED SPRINT WIN

After defeat at Royal Ascot last time out, leading sprinter Battaash got back to winning ways in the Group Two five-furlong King George Qatar Stakes, a second win in succession in the race. Owner Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoun was at Goodwood to see the impressive winning performance.

Sent off the 8/11f, Battaash came home the four-length winner from Take Cover in a fast 56.50s, just 0.49s outside the track record.

Hamdan Al Maktoum said: "Battaash is a very fast horse. He was under shadow at Ascot. He was right today. I hope that he will keep sound and healthy."

Asked about a possible campaign aimed at the Breeders' Cup, Hamdan added: "In Europe, all the sprints are straight whereas in America, they have turns.

"Dayjur missed the break, then he came to the turn and pulled up. Then he came again to win his race and jumped the shadow."

Jockey Jim Crowley was understandably delighted with the victory.

"He was a lot more relaxed than last year. I was a bit conscious not to let him wing out of the stalls like last time, I wanted to get a lead," said the winning jockey. "Even Take Cover couldn't lead him and when I saw the race developing over on the left side, I switched across.

"It worked out fine, he is equally adept on soft ground and on fast ground. This year I've noticed he is a bigger horse, he has filled out - last year he was quite narrow."

Looking back at the defeat at Ascot, Crowley said: "Last time it didn't work out, but Ascot is Ascot and I don't think he was in the same form as today. He didn't quite finish it out at Ascot - today he galloped out past the line."

When asked of plans, Crowley reported: "The Nunthorpe would be perfect. Last year we got to the start too early and it blew his brain."

This impressive success will certainly help the Dark Angel colt, rated 123 on the Longines World Rankings last year, the highest for any horse who had raced over five furlongs, retain his crown.

Crowley said: "I have been lucky to ride some great sprinters in Dubai. I think he tops the lot."

TAKE COVER DELIGHTS CONNECTIONS

David Griffiths, who trains near Bawtry, South Yorkshire, was delighted with the four-length second place of 20/1 chance backed from 33/1 Take Cover to the 8/11 favourite Battaash in the five-furlong £312,000 G2 King George Qatar Stakes. This was 11-year-old Take Cover's fifth appearance in the race and his record now reads two wins, two seconds and a fourth.

Griffiths said: "I'm delighted, the winner is seriously good, one of the best sprinters in Europe I would think. We've run an absolute cracker.

"I said to a few people who'd backed us he's pretty much at his best. They wrote him off a little bit today which is fine by us.

"He was on his own a little bit, if he'd had a little bit more company... but the winner is seriously good. Four lengths he's won by, but we're best of the rest, so we're delighted, chuffed to bits.

"Take Cover has still got his own sparkle. I think the quicker ground and this track - he just love it here, his stats here are amazing. He's in the Nunthorpe and in the Flying Five on Champions weekend at the Curragh, so hopefully he's back to his best and we can keep going. You would think this would be his last season, 11 is quite old isn't it but we'll discuss that at the end of the year."

Andrew Hollis, Take Cover's owner, added: "Take Cover is unbelievable at 11, he doesn't owe me anything. He's won at Goodwood twice been placed and even last year on soft ground he performed to finish fourth. He always tries so hard and obviously David Griffiths knows what he's doing with him and he's got him right for today, he's run brilliant and he loves it here.

"He's a smashing horse (Battaash) isn't he. We're happy with the second to him."

Take Cover's jockey Andrea Atzeni said: "That was a good run, the horse that beat us is obviously a very good horse. Take Cover loves it here and he's run a blinder."

William Haggas, trainer of the third Muthmir (16/1), said: "He ran great. I thought he would run a good race.

"It was very messy, they went all over the place. He did very well - the winner is a good horse. I think where we were drawn it was a particularly good effort."

Dane O'Neil, the jockey, added: "Muthmir has run a solid race and we would have liked a bit more cover and something to take us into the race. Having said that, the winner is a machine and we never going to beat no matter what we did. He is an eight-year-old gelding and a credit to William and his team for having him in tip top form."