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Ashkiyr "spot on" for Sunday's HKG1 BMW Hong Kong Derby

An enthralling Four-Year-Old Series will reach an exciting climax at Sha Tin Racecourse on Sunday, March 17 when one horse will be crowned the **2013 HKG1 BMW Hong Kong Derby** champion.

Richard Gibson has a strong hand in the HK\$16 million race with a talented trio from his stable consisting of **Mizani**, unbeaten in two Hong Kong starts, HKG1 Hong Kong Classic Mile winner **Gold-Fun** and likely race favourite **Akeed Mofeed**, the mount of **Douglas Whyte**. HKG1 Hong Kong Classic Cup hero **It Has to Be You** will be aiming to give trainer **John Size** back-to-back wins in the race.

John Moore is seeking a fourth victory in the 2000m contest and the handler has high hopes for **Ashkiyr**, one of three contenders from his stable. The **Rock Of Gibraltar** colt has progressed through three Hong Kong starts, finishing fourth in January's Classic Mile and third in the series' second leg, the Classic Cup (1800m), last month.

"Ashkiyr has had the perfect prep into the Derby, there have been no hiccups and he's improved in all of his three runs, and he's improved again in his work going into Sunday," said the trainer of the French import, whose record at the distance in Europe reads two minor wins and a placed effort in G2 company.

"The possible lack of pace in the race is a worry and the barrier draw will be so important given the even nature of the field. He had a nice mile trial and got home nicely on the stands' side and he's one of the Derby horses that I think his prep is spot on."

Moore's trio is completed by further European imports **Poetic Justice** and **Albiceleste**. The latter, a seven-time winner in Italy at up to a mile, disappointed when down the field in a Class 2 at Sha Tin on Sunday.

"Albiceleste had good form in Italy, he's a front-runner, he's honest he's tough and he's sound," said Moore. *"He disappointed on Sunday when he was bumped at a crucial stage. He wasn't really knocked around the last 400m and I have faith that he will end up in Group races. If he draws a gate he can be running into some prize money."*

"Poetic Justice didn't trial as well as Ashkiyr last week but he's a horse with class and he was bought for the Derby – if he draws a good gate he'll be picking up a cheque too. His preparation has been similar to Ashkiyr with the difference being that he arrived a bit later."

Caspar Fownes won the 2010 Hong Kong Derby with **Super Satin** and the trainer has two strings to his bow this time. **Zac Purton's** mount **Best Show** has shown solid form in three starts while **Rainbow Chic**, fourth in the G1 Prix Jean Prat in France last summer, ran a fair race in the Classic Mile and hinted at more to come when a running-on third behind the smart **Aomen** over 1650m in a Class 1 at Happy Valley two weeks ago.

"It was nice to see that," said Fownes. *"We've always known he's had ability, he's just found the firm tracks in Hong Kong a little bit tough to adapt to but at the Valley he reeled off a good last quarter there of 21.57 seconds, and we had a new bit on him that night which was good for him. We just need to draw a decent gate and hopefully he'll be hitting the line strong."*

"Best Show is really well, his gallop Tuesday morning was good – it was a nice piece of work. It's taken a bit of racing to get him racing fit and that trial last week topped him off. He has an in-form jockey on top and I'm pretty confident he'll run a respectable race. Obviously Richard (Gibson) holds the cards with his three entries, but apart from that it's an open race."

The fascinating 14-runner contest also features the well-regarded **Autumn Gold**, the mount of **Ryan Moore**, as well as Classic Cup runner-up **President Lincoln**, **Wah May Star**, **Jun Gong** and **Endowing**.

Sunday's Derby Day card also features a stunning clash between heavyweights **Ambitious Dragon**, **Glorious Days** and **Lucky Nine** in the HKG1 Queen's Silver Jubilee Cup over 1400m.