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APQEII Cup track notes – Thursday

De Kock team pleased with duo ahead of G1 APQEII Cup

South African trainer Mike de Kock hits the money far more often than not with his Hong Kong runners and although the man responsible for previous AudemarsPiguet Queen Elizabeth II Cup winners Archipenko and Irridescence will remain at home this year, he has an able deputy in travelling head lad Steven Jell, a veteran of 10 previous visits to Sha Tin.

Jell is overseeing the preparations of de Kock's pair Igugu and Treasure Beach and that duo took a couple of turns around the Sha Tin parade ring this morning in company with Japanese raider Eishin Flash, in preparation for the main event on Sunday.

"They're both straightforward – they do get a little sparked up when the saddle goes on their back and they're both inclined to sweat up but that's normal, that's them so we don't worry about it," said Jell.

"Both horses travelled here well, they've both done so much travelling that that's not an issue for them. They just walked on Monday and on Tuesday they gently cantered on the all-weather. Yesterday they had what was a leg-stretch really on the turf, not a hard work. Today they're taking it very easy and we'll give them a leg-stretch tomorrow. They've done most of their work before they got on the plane."

"Igugu had a couple of problems in the quarantine heading into Dubai so she was a little bit behind, not majorly behind, but once you start behind there you're playing catch-up. I don't think we had her at her peak, so maybe those races will have brought her on going into this one.

"I thought she improved with every run in Dubai, not significantly better but she certainly wasn't going backwards. I think she's on the up, she's definitely not on the down. Her work was decent yesterday and she'll do something similar tomorrow."

South Africa's champion mare, a multiple G1 winner, progressed for each of her three most recent runs at the Dubai World Cup Carnival and Jell is hopeful the switch in racing direction after three left-handed runs at Meydan will be a plus.

"She's performed left-handed but her very best has been going the other way, with seven wins. I hope that's a little bonus for her. I think the surface will be fine, she doesn't need it soft but some rain wouldn't bother me because I think a little fire out of the ground would be ideal."

Treasure Beach joined the de Kock stable late last year from the Aidan O'Brien yard, for whom he was ninth in the 2012 APQEII Cup, and the two-time G1 victor was eighth last start in the G1 Dubai World Cup on Tapeta.

"Treasure Beach came to us pretty sharp after the Breeders' Cup and we gave him a break, then he only had two runs. He definitely has the ability but he wants things to go his way," Jell commented.

Eishin Flash was unperturbed by his leisurely walk around the parade ring in company with the two South African contenders.

"He galloped yesterday, and he was a little stiff in the beginning of his warm-up exercise this morning, so we gave him a walk and trot longer than usual to make him flexible. As I saw him walk in the paddock, he had a good temperament and good gait," said the travelling lad, Toshiya Kubo.

Meanwhile, work rider Kazuo Fujiwara commented that Eishin Flash seems comfortable on the Sha Tin turf.

"I felt the track was softish and the horse needed to exert more power with every stride when I galloped him on turf yesterday but Eishin Flash is very happy with the track. In the race, the first turn comes soon after the horses start from the gate and considering the track condition that I have mentioned, I would prefer to take an inside draw - much better than a wide gate. Tomorrow, he will be schooling with a stall handler in the gate."

Sajjhaa worked on the all-weather track under the watch of trainer Saeed bin Suroor, covering 1200m in 1m 30s and the final 400m in 26.3s.