

Danny Mullins pulls a Christmas cracker for Ireland

Multiple King George winners, and the reigning Gold Cup king Minella Indo lined up for the 2021 renewal in front of a raucous crowd, but it proved to be the Willie Mullins trained Tornado Flyer, relegated to the bottom of the betting, who came out on top, thanks to a scintillating ride by nephew Danny Mullins.

Blackmore and Frost certainly took no prisoners early, taking each of the first 4 furlongs under 15 seconds, and opening a healthy lead on the bulk of the field. Frodon began to establish his classic racing rhythm, firing into fences, but was once again joined by Minella Indo around the start of the second circuit. The Gold Cup hero inexplicably looked devoid of zest, much like at Down Royal, as Blackmore administered a few reminders in the back straight, but he proceeded to down colours, and folded tamely out the back. Few got truly involved in the race, and the opening fractions began to tell on Frodon, as the pace proceeded to collapse. Gavin Sheehan, and Danny Mullins, allowed Saint Calvados to breeze into the lead at the 4th last, but the 8 year old had very little to give after that. So it came, as many Grade 1s at the Cheltenham Festival do, down to the Mullins pair. The striking grey Asterion Forlonge had jumped far more assuredly than at Punchestown, and Brian Cooper had nursed him around the inside rail throughout to abate any fears of violent jinks to the right over his fences. The Mullins pair now stalked Sheehan and Cobden on a fresh running Clan Des Obeaux. The dual King George winner in the hands of Harry Cobden briefly poked his nose in front, but the gauntlet was being thrown on the wide outside as the ever frustrating yet supremely talented Tornado Flyer motored past Saint Calvados. The Mullins second string steadied into the last, and allowed Cooper to close. Unfortunately, Closutton would not celebrate a famous 1-2 in the Boxing Day as Cooper's mount landed very steeply, and Tornado Flyer was able to fly home unbothered. The result proved a fitting reward for a highly tried horse (and for his supporter authoring this article!) who was finally able to produce a performance befitting his name.

News story – Minella Indo's troubles

Following another sub-par performance from the Gold Cup winner, I'd want to pose a few questions to Rachael Blackmore about what the horse currently feels like.

- Was it wise to take on Frodon early and race each of the first 4 furlongs under 15 seconds?
- He stood off a few fences today, is he better going left handed?
- Does he feel lazy under you? Needed multiple reminders throughout both races this year
- Will you look to get another run into him before Cheltenham? (ideally posed to Henry De Bromhead)