DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 9/2/2017
Race 9: $200K John C. Mabee (G2) contested at 9-furlongs on turf.
Post: 5:54 pm PDT

OVERVIEW

What a doozy of a race this year's renewal of the Mabee (G2) is: thirteen talented fillies and mares going 9-panels on the Del Mar turf. The rails are at zero-feet, so we should get an honestly run race (though there aren't any confirmed front-runners in here)—and with the morning-line favorite marooned out in the thirteen-hole, perhaps this race can produce a solid price as today's contest race. Interestingly enough, Baltas has three ladies entered here, including the morning-line favorite. And who the heck is going to be on the lead? Hmmm…

#1 HILLHOUSE HIGH (12/1), the first Baltas entrant, has two wins since relocating to Southern California, and both of them came going a mile. She ran respectably in the Yellow Ribbon (G2) going 8.5-furlongs off a May layoff, but she was outkicked by several of these ladies (though she did have a bit of a tough trip). C-Nak sticks with the Baltas favorite, but at least you get Raffi to take the call. Still, I'm not sure this gal's best work will come at this longer distance, but she should be in the vanguard early while saving all of the ground if you're a believer. GRADE: X.

#2 KISS ME NOW (BRZ) (30/1), the first Lobo trainee, was off the pace in a longer 11-furlong overnight stakes when making her first start in the U.S. after winning a few Grade Ones in Brazil. If you think she can move forward off that effort, you can expect her on the scene late, since she's capable of running on through the lane—but she'll obviously need to take a big step forward against much tougher ladies here, and it's not like Lobo is exactly lighting the world on fire with his 1-for-42 year-to-date record (2%). GRADE: X.

#3 DECKED OUT (6/1) was excellent against 3-year-old fillies last year, showing off a devastating stretch run to win the American Oaks (G1) and just missing by a nose in the Del Mar Oaks (G1), both at today's distance. She's been off since December, and she's had a few setbacks along the way since she was entered earlier in the meet but was a vet scratch. Has this now 4-year-old trained on? I guess we'll find out today—but she'll have to have grown up a little (since her one try last year against elders was no good) and she'll have to be ready to run big off a long layoff against some very tough ladies. I've always liked her, and I'll tip my cap if she wins, but this seems like a tough spot to make her 4-year-old debut without having a prep race. GRADE: C.

#4 CAMBODIA (9/2) looked good beating several of these in the Yellow Ribbon (G2) earlier in the meet, so I see no reason why she won't run another good race today against several of the same ladies. She's never been 9-panels, but she finished up nicely at 8.5-furlongs, so the added distance shouldn't be an issue, and she has enough tactical speed to work out the right trip in this big full field. She probably won't be any value off that Yellow Ribbon (G2) win, but she's an obvious contender for a trainer/owner combo that is having an excellent meet. GRADE: A.

#5 MADAME STRIPES (ARG) (8/1) ran second in the Wilshire (G3) going a mile before stretching out a bit and capturing the restricted Osunitas here at 8.5-furlongs earlier in the meet. She came flying from off the pace in what looked like a very sharp effort. I can't fault anyone for backing her here even though she's getting a class raise, because it seems she rarely runs a bad race, but note that Kent sticks with his brother's horse, Decked Out. At least Talamo has been riding very well, so you don't lose much in that regard—and this gal is versatile enough that Talamo can have her in a good spot early. GRADE: C.

#6 MRS MCDOUGAL (5/1) lost as the 4/5 favorite in the restricted Osunitas, losing to her inside rival, but I'm willing to forgive that race since it's quite possible she was only prepping for this spot while coming off a September layoff. I think she can take a step forward while getting a good forwardly placed trip in here under Prat. She's proven against some good East Coast turf ladies, but there is some concern about whether she can get the distance, since her best races have come shorter than today's 9-panels. Then again, if King Richard thinks she can get the distance, who am I to argue? GRADE: A.

#7 LADY VALEUR (IRE) (20/1) is a very honest gal who has run well against some very nice ladies, but she seems to be a cut below the best, since her best work has come against lesser in overnight stakes races. Gonzalez might try to be aggressive here in a race that doesn't have a clear pacesetter—and note that this gal just missed to Decked Out last year in the American Oaks (G1), so she has some classy 3-year-old form to run back to. Still, this is a whole different ballgame, and her run against several of these in the Osunitas wasn't very good. GRADE: X.

#8 BARLEYSUGAR (IRE) (15/1) has run two very nice races here at Del Mar, so you know she likes this course—but both of those races came against much lesser foes while several of these have her on form. Also note that her last two wins both came off layoffs, so we'll see if she backs up today after beating five other gals in an N2X here just a few weeks ago. I've always liked her, since she tries hard, but she'll need a step forward today. GRADE: X.

#9 PRETTY GIRL (ARG) (8/1), the second Lobo runner, has been beaten by several of these gals already, but she's always in the hunt, thanks to her very strong closing kick. She was moving in the Yellow Ribbon (G2) while coming up a little bit short, so we'll see if she can step forward off that nice race. The barn has been so cold for a few years that it's tough to bet them with any confidence, but this gal has ability and is only a length or two off the morning-line favorite, so don't discount her chances. GRADE: B.

#10 INSTA ERMA (20/1) looks both class- and distance-compromised based on her East Coast form—but that's just it: we all know that East Coast turf racing is so much tougher than out here, so it's possible this gal can be a completely new animal while making her first start for Baltas, who saddles two others in here. I like that the blinkers are coming off a horse who has tactical speed, and I know Stevens can get any horse to settle nicely. In a race where the main contenders—while all very capable ladies—have some questions, why not take a shot with an East Coast invader? GRADE: A.

#11 AMBOSELLI (12/1), the first Cassidy charge, was right there in the Yellow Ribbon (G2), finishing third by 3/4s of a length. She's always right there, but several of these gals have already gotten the best of her. That said, the Cassidy barn has heated up after a cold start, and this gal could easily move forward while making the second start of her form cycle. She's not impossible here on ability, but I don't really trust Espinoza from the 11-post. GRADE: X.

#12 FRENZIFIED (GB) (20/1), the second Cassidy runner, is also making the second start of her form cycle after failing to kick on in the Yellow Ribbon (G2). I can forgive that effort since this gal has always been better as the distances got longer. She won here last summer at 11-panels, and overseas, she was winning at 12-furlongs. So that means today's 9-panels is still probably too short for her, especially since several of these have her squarely on form. GRADE: X.

#13 GOODYEARFORROSES (IRE) (7/2) is your deserving favorite, since she was only a half-length to Lady Eli earlier this year in the Gamely (G1). She's also beaten several of these already, so there's no one in here she is afraid of. There are three concerns, however: she's been off since May, so she'll have to be at her best off the layoff; secondly, she's curiously adding blinkers despite running well without them, so I'm not sure what to make of that; thirdly, she has a very tough post to overcome. Thankfully, she gets C-Nak, who is a rail magnet, so he'll do his best to give her every chance, but those are three tough hurdles to overcome for the favorite to win in this really good betting race. In the end, she might just prove once again that she's better than these. GRADE: A.

CONCLUSION
What an awesome race—and I'm just going to have to let the board decide how I bet it since there are so many who can win. #10 INSTA ERMA is certainly worth a look at a huge price, so I'll use her in some capacity. I'm also interested in perhaps keying #6 MRS MCDOUGAL, especially since I have to think that this was Mandella's goal all along. #13 GOODYEARFORROSES (IRE) is legit and #4 CAMBODIA is hard to ignore off her last race.