

VENEZ VIVRE UN  
**WEEK-END À  
LA CAMPAGNE**  
LE DÉFI DES HARAS  
**GRAND STEEPLE-CHASE DE PARIS**  
SAM 16 ET  
DIM 17 MAI  
2026  
HIPPODROME D'AUTEUIL

ENTRÉE DÈS 5 €  
GRATUITE POUR  
LES -12 ANS\*



FRANCE  
GALOP

Press release

Sunday, 17 May 2026

Sunday 17 May, Auteuil Racecourse

## **RECORD NUMBER OF CHANTILLY TRAINERS RUNNING IN THE DÉFI DES HARAS – GRAND STEEPLE-CHASE DE PARIS 2026**

### **Introduction to the Chantilly Training Centre and quotes from the trainers**



On Tuesday, 12 May, in Chantilly, France Galop held a press conference dedicated to the 2026 edition of the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris, the absolute pinnacle of Jump racing. The flagship race will be run on 17 May at Auteuil Racecourse. The elite of Jump horses and jockeys will compete over an exceptional course: 6,000 metres featuring 23 obstacles, including the Rivière des Tribunes and the impressive Rail-Ditch-and-Fence.

The conference brought together five Jump trainers based at the Chantilly training centre, which is managed by France Galop. Three of them are expected to have runners this Sunday in the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris, a record.

This is indeed one of the distinctive features of this year's edition: an unprecedented number of Jump trainers based in Chantilly (Oise) will have runners in the race. Why is this noteworthy? Because the Chantilly training centre has historically been associated with Flat racing. Yet it is also establishing itself as a key player in Jump racing.

## **The Chantilly training centre: a unique centre of excellence in Europe, now a major force in Jump racing**



A European benchmark for training racehorses, the Chantilly training centre is today confirming its central role across the entire racing sector, including Jump racing — a development that is still relatively recent. This singular achievement illustrates the strength of the site: at the end of the 2025 season, Chantilly was home to both the leading Flat trainer, Francis-Henri Graffard, and the leading Jump trainer, Mickaël Seror!

With 2,000 hectares of facilities at the heart of the Chantilly forest, 108 trainers based on site representing more than 20 nationalities, and over 2,800 horses in training, the site has established itself as Europe's leading training centre.

Known for preparing champions for the major Flat races, Chantilly is now seeing Jump racing develop in a structured and significant way, with 29 trainers and 551 horses spread across the sites of Avilly, Coye-la-Forêt and Lamorlaye. Comprehensive facilities, on both sand and turf, allow training to be adapted to all disciplines: hurdles, steeplechase and cross-country.

*"This rise in strength illustrates Chantilly's ability to broaden its model and consolidate its position as a centre of excellence in preparing the champions of Galop racing, both on the Flat and over Jumps",* said Marin Le Cour Grandmaison, head of the Chantilly training centre and Chantilly Racecourse.

## Key figures for the Chantilly Training Centre

### Overall:

· 2,000 hectares of facilities, at the heart of the 7,000 hectares of the Chantilly forest · 108 trainers · 2,830 horses in training

### Focus on Jump trainers:

· 29 trainers · 551 horses · 3 main sites · Avilly · Coye-la-Forêt · Lamorlaye

## Statements from the trainers at the press conference

### Mickaël Seror (based in Chantilly since 2010)

Career statistics: 5,960 races contested, 590 victories

Training under his own name since 2010, Mickaël Seror has established himself among France's leading trainers, winning the title of leading Jump trainer in 2025 with 116 victories. He currently leads the 2026 standings, with €1,919,030 in prize-money — the ranking is based on earnings — and 47 wins.

Having trained under Jean-Paul Delaporte, Guillaume Macaire and Ronald Caget, he has built his success on a method based in particular on a high number of runners and considerable versatility between Jump and Flat racing. He will not have a runner in the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris 2026 itself, but he will have several runners during the major Jump racing weekend.

On his career path: *"I have been based here since 2010, first at Avilly-Saint-Léonard and then at Lamorlaye from 2012. I always wanted to be a Jump trainer. I did not have the means to compete in Flat racing at a high level. Jump racing allows you, when you do not have clients and do not have significant financial resources, to make your way and show that, with hard work, you are capable of achieving great things. So it was logical for me to go into Jump racing. And it is also a passion. When I was young and riding horses, I was a bit of a daredevil, and I preferred jumping horses to doing canters!*

*But I never thought I would make it to the top of the list. Now that we are here, we have to try to show that we can stay in the top five or top ten for a long time. I see competition as a good thing. So the more young Jump trainers in Chantilly who succeed, the better it is for the future.*

*Every morning, it is the same work. Depending on temperature and weather issues, France Galop's teams need to be in place and listening to the trainers so that we can receive the best possible service. And every trainer has a different perspective. France Galop's staff have to adapt to everyone. I think they do a very good job, and we can certainly thank and congratulate them.*

*When you look elsewhere in France, abroad, or at private training centres, you realise that people have far more significant problems than ours. You always have to keep things in perspective and look at the positive side, not only the negative."*

Mickaël Seror has no runners in the Grand Steeple, but several in other races:

*"In the Ferdinand Dufaure, we will have Victrix du Mesnil, who has just won very well. She was not necessarily intended to go straight into the top steeplechase races. But she left me slightly wanting more over hurdles; I really expected to see her put in a strong performance, and that was not the case. So I started her over fences, and she won so well that there was no longer any question: we are going for the big race with her. She has remained in very good form and has even improved a great deal physically.*

*The filly will be discovering the 4,400-metre distance. Obviously, she is not a favourite, but I think we can go there with genuine ambitions and hope to run a very good race.*

*In the same race, I have Good Girl de Faust. She goes through the Arqana sales ring the day before. Depending on what happens in the ring, she may or may not line up.*

*I am nevertheless very confident about her chances. The other day, she ran when there was a small issue in the yard, with a few horses unwell and a few "coughers" the week before, as well as blood tests that were not perfect.*

*I decided to run her anyway because I did not want to arrive at the Group 1 with her too fresh. So I preferred to run her, and we had to go on in front through force of circumstance. There are therefore quite a few excuses for her.*

*So we hope to see a slightly different performance and for her to do better than last time.*

*I may have Maharaja in the Prix Alain du Breil. It is not yet certain. On his latest performances, you could not say that he comes in with a leading chance. That said, the field has opened up. He is quite a delicate horse who needs plenty of pace, which he has not had recently. The other day, he finished fourth while doing something really good. If we go to the Group 1 with him, it will be more with a view to completing the combination and picking up a place."*

*We will run four three-year-old fillies in the Prix Sagan (Group 3), including Nacre du Seuil, who finished fourth the other day without having the right race. I hope there is not too much rain for her, because she is not a filly for very heavy ground.*

*We will also have Quaint, who won at Lyon after a good sixth place on debut at Auteuil. That day, I was not very happy. My young jockey had respected the filly, and that is important, but he had not paid enough attention to the race. The next time, however, he made up for it and she won easily at Lyon. She is the filly who works best in the morning among my four runners, even though, based on performances, that is not necessarily what we have seen so far. I am looking forward to seeing her at Auteuil.*

*Niri is a filly I like a lot, more for the end of the year and genuinely heavy ground. She also ran very well the other day on good ground, which is why we are coming back. We will have a track that, in my view, will be soft and less dry than last time. Otherwise, she would have gone back to the field and we would have waited until the end of the year. So we are taking advantage of suitable weather to run her again.*

*Finally, Dedel is a filly who, physically and in her morning work, does not stand out from the crowd. Few people would have backed her at the start of the season. In addition, she is very keen, takes hold of the bit and never lets go. With horses like that, you have to go racing to see whether they really have fuel in the tank or whether it is false energy. And*

*the filly has proved that she is tough. Even when pulling, she managed to rally again in the straight.*

*She is very, very tough mentally and physically. She is the one with the most experience, and she will go forward. Even if she may not be the classiest filly in the field, her tractability could make life difficult for quite a few other horses.*

*Among the colts, we will have Winday, who made a very good debut. He was beaten by Huron Bleu, who made a strong impression that day. But I thought my horse ran very well. He finished second, moving beautifully, with plenty left. As the field has opened up, we have naturally entered him in this fine race.*

*Jardin Paturle won on debut, producing a good performance on very soft ground. On good ground, he finished well and a close third on his latest outing."*

## **Three Chantilly trainers with runners in the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris 2026: a record!**

### **Florian Bellemère (since 2023): the newcomer!**

Career statistics: 636 races contested; 45 victories

Florian Bellemère is 32 years old. A former Jump jockey who trained with Yannick Fouin, he had to stop competing because of weight issues. He then decided to turn to training. Before setting up on his own in 2023, he first gained solid international experience with major trainers: first in Newmarket, the largest training centre in England, with Luca Cumani and Sir Michael Stoute, then in Australia with Gai Waterhouse. On Sunday, Florian Bellemère will have his first runner in the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris: Le Petit Cheval.

*"Le Petit Cheval is my first runner in the Grand Steeple. I hope there will be others (laughs)! Some trainers spend their whole lives without ever having the chance to be at the start of this great race. I am lucky enough to have that opportunity this year. My CV is initially more Flat-oriented than Jump-oriented. But the context and the clients mean that I work in both disciplines.*

*My runner is called Le Petit Cheval, but he does not live up to his name! That is also one of the reasons the wider public likes him so much. Initially, the plan was not the Grand Steeple. I wanted to follow the five-year-old circuit with the autumn and heavy ground in mind. But he was doing everything asked of him so well that I made the entry, more than anything so as not to have any regrets.*

*After he won the prep race, I wanted to go for it. I do not know whether I will ever have another horse to run in the Grand Steeple. We might as well make the most of it!*

*The team is really enthusiastic. They are doing a great job. They work very hard. Everyone has been asking me the question for the past two weeks... But in fact, I am sleeping very well! I am not stressed; I am preparing my horse as I would for any other race. I am happy with his preparation and with the fact that it is raining. I had always been a little concerned about stepping him up in trip. Over fences, he is much more settled. He does it well."*

## **Hugo Merienne (since 2018): racing runs in the family**

Career statistics: 1,308 races contested; 158 victories

Hugo Merienne comes from within the racing world. He grew up in Brittany and trained from a very young age with his uncle, the Jump trainer Julien Merienne. A former amateur jockey, he later worked for Yannick Fouin, Guillaume Macaire and Willie Mullins in Ireland. He also worked as a bloodstock agent, buying and selling horses, developing expertise in the selection of racehorses. He recorded his first victory as a trainer in 2018, a few months after setting up on his own. On Sunday, he will saddle In Love in the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris.

*"I started in Ireland with Arthur Moore, with the point-to-pointers, before moving on to Guillaume Macaire. I was lucky enough to win over the Auteuil fences for him with Soldatino. I was always the tallest at school, and throughout my youth I was told I would never have the chance to ride in races. From a very young age, my goal was to become a trainer, hence the idea of seeing as many things as possible and travelling abroad.*

*In Love is starting to have plenty of experience, and he has already run several times in the Grand Steeple. He may have a little less class than some of his opponents, but he is a warrior. He always shows up for these major occasions. Fourth two years ago, he finished seventh last year, but after having had an issue in his preparation. He knows the course, and the distance will not be a problem for him."*

## **David Cottin (based in Chantilly since 2017): ambition renewed time and again**

Career statistics as a trainer: 3,192 races contested; 502 victories Career statistics as a jockey: 4,893 races contested; 786 victories

Born into a major Jump racing family, David Cottin very quickly established himself as one of the leading jockeys of his generation. A three-time Cravache d'Or winner and the author of nearly 800 victories, he made his mark in the saddle with champions such as Long Run and Gémix. He successfully moved into training in 2017. In 2021, he finished fourth and fifth in the Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris with Général en Chef and Le Berry. David Cottin, who has not yet won the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris, will have three runners in Sunday's race: Kivala du Berlais, Karré d'As and Juntos Ganamos.

*"I have between 50 and 70 horses in training, and I will have three runners in the Grand Steeple. Juntos Ganamos is, in my view, the class horse, even though he is not always very serious with his jumping. But he is a horse with stamina, and if he remains focused, he has the ability to go a very long way. He has already run in the Grand Steeple, in 2024, but things did not go as planned.*

*Kivala du Berlais made a good start over fences in the Prix Murat. He did something impressive. So we are going to try the Grand Steeple. He is experienced, tough and reaching maturity. We hope he will run well, avoid traffic problems, jump well and come home in good health. Everyone is there to win. You need a bit of luck because there are many runners at the start.*

*Karré d'As is in good form. She can be emotional and did too much last time. If we wait a little longer with her, she is capable of taking a good place.*

*In this type of race, jockeys must not leave their brains in the weighing room. It is a special meeting. There are a lot of people and a lot of pressure. The races are not run in the same way as the prep races. You need to have a good jockey with you, good preparation, a good team, try to do things properly... It is important that everyone remains focused, does their job well, and does not change plans at the last minute.*

*Kivala du Berlais will be ridden by Félix de Giles, Thomas Journiac will ride Karré d'As and Quentin Samaria will ride Juntos Ganamos."*

David Cottin will also run Léopard du Berlais in the Prix Alain du Breil: *"Léopard du Berlais is in good form. Fortunately, he came back very well from his last race [fall at Auteuil, editor's note]. He was in good condition in his latest pieces of work. We hope to run a good race. He is in the Prix Alain du Breil (Group 1)."*

And Jet Blue in the Grande Course de Haies d'Auteuil: *"He is in good form. We have kept him fresh for this race. I hope to see him run well. Obviously, there are some good horses in this race.*

*In the Ferdinand Dufaure, there is Duke Senam, who won well last time. He is a horse with a great deal of stamina. Initially, the plan was to keep him over hurdles in the spring, but he fell in a Quinté. He comes into a field that, in my view, is fairly open and in good form."*

*And also in the Prix Ferdinand Dufaure: "Quonstantine has been allowed to freshen up a little after the meeting. Both horses have good chances. So we have the right to take part and aim for victory. But they are not running on their own, and they do not have a huge margin. However, they have every right to run very well. In my view, the horse to beat is Métronomique."*

### **Also:**

### **Noel George & Amanda Zetterholm (since 2023): a highly complementary Anglo-Swedish team**

Career statistics (since 2023): 1,125 races contested; 211 victories

Englishman Noel George and Swede Amanda Zetterholm have been training together since 2023. The pair share responsibilities: Noel oversees the horses' morning work, while Amanda manages administration, communications and owner relations. And it works wonderfully. From their first year, they entered the top ten Jump trainers in France. Currently ranked second in the trainers' standings, with 40 wins, the Noel George & Amanda Zetterholm team will not have any runners in this edition of the Défi des Haras – Grand Steeple-Chase de Paris itself, but will have several runners during the major Jump racing weekend.

[Noel George] *"Initially, my plan was not necessarily to settle here. But during Covid, racing resumed earlier in France than in England. I had come to work here and I loved the training centre, which is magnificent. I also think the system for Jump horses is excellent, as is the prize-money. I enjoy working with young horses and, in France, we start much earlier than in England. I now have around one hundred horses over the course of the year."*

*"Ahead of the Ferdinand Dufaure, Métronomique has obviously not had the ideal preparation, because he has not yet had a steeplechase run at Auteuil, but he has an*

*enormous amount of class and is an outstanding jumper. I hope we will not have too much rain for his first time over the distance. But I think he is the class horse in the race.*

*We have two horses in the Grande Course de Haies. Illusion Machine has matured enormously since his four-year-old season. I am trying to bring him into the race fresh. He produced a demonstration on his comeback. His preparation has gone very well. I am quite enthusiastic about seeing him run.*

*It's Win O'Clock was not necessarily the plan. He loves heavy ground. Since his last run, over fences, he has freshened up and looks magnificent. We will ride him as usual, to come and finish well.*

*There may not necessarily be a large number of runners, but it will be a high-quality edition, notably with Losange Bleu, who should set the pace in the race. Thélème is a champion, and Arnaud Chaillé-Chaillé knows how to prepare them for the big races."*



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