

Excitement, and tension, mounts in Tokyo

When the Tony Cruz-trained pair of Silent Witness and Bullish Luck arrived at Tokyo Racecourse on Wednesday afternoon, the international stables area was almost deserted. Two days later it was a hive of activity as excitement -- and tension -- mounted ahead of the 55th Yasuda Kinen on Sunday.

Racing writers, photographers and TV crews from Hong Kong and Japan were mingling with owners, trainers and jockeys to seek every scrap of information ahead of the big race.

Some 80,000 fans are expected to flock to Tokyo Racecourse at Fuchu on Sunday, and live coverage of the race in Hong Kong will guarantee maximum interest back there, too.

Although Bullish Luck won the first leg of the Asian Mile Challenge at Sha Tin on May 14, Silent Witness remains the Hong Kong hero and will be aiming to record his 18th win in 19 starts.

One half of the husband-and-wife owner team of Archie and Betty da Silva has been in Japan for two days, and Betty will be joined by her husband on Saturday.

"He had already fixed some business appointments when the decision was made to send Silent Witness to Japan, and he could not change them because they were urgent," Betty said on Friday morning after watching Silent Witness have a light workout on the sand track.

"At first we weren't going to enter him after he was beaten by Bullish Luck because my husband was a little bit upset, but then he changed his mind.

"He'll be coming here on Saturday, and my group of Silent Witness supporters is around 36 to 40. Everyone wants to come, all my friends and family members.

"As far as I know there are three tour groups coming from Hong Kong and every group is 60 people."

This is Silent Witness's third season in Hong Kong since Archie da Silva bought him for 2 million Hong Kong dollars after watching him win two barrier trials in Australia on video tape.

The investment has proved a wise one, as Silent Witness has won 48 million HK dollars in his 18-race career.

Bullish Luck, too, will have a travelling cheer team as his connections seek the US\$1 million bonus for winning both legs of the inaugural Asian Mile Challenge. Bullish Luck's owner, Wong Wing-keung, is looking forward to seeing his champion miler compete at his best distance.

"It is very good racing in Japan and very high class," said Wong.

"I am excited about the race, not nervous at all, and so happy to be here."

The third Hong Kong entry is Bowman's Crossing, who was fourth at Sha Tin in the Hong Kong Champions Mile and is returning to form.

He had a half-gallop on the Tokyo Racecourse turf on Friday morning and will do the same again Saturday.

His exercise rider, Tsang Chiu-ki, said: "I like the track here. It's firmer than Hong Kong, the grass track.

"His form is good. He's coming up right now, and he's eating well."

Note: There are 7.8 Hong Kong dollars to one US dollar.