

Short, sharp display from Hong Kong challengers

It lasted only 15 minutes, but Hong Kong trainer Tony Cruz was satisfied with what he saw from stable mates Silent Witness and Bullish Luck at Tokyo Racecourse on Thursday morning.

The pair of six-year-old bay geldings emerged from the international stable area at 7.45am to be greeted by a battery of photographers and TV camera crews, but by 8.00am it was all over and they were heading back to their boxes.

Preferring explosive bursts rather than aerobic endurance, they were timed at 35.77 seconds over 600 metres, 22.6 seconds for the last 400 and 11.2 for the last 200.

This was the typical Cruz training style, and he even had his horses gallop on the dirt rather than the turf that will be used for Sunday's 1,600-metre Yasuda Kinen G1 international race.

"They always work on the dirt and I don't want to change to the grass," said Cruz.

"I didn't want to change the format of training."

Cruz added that it may have looked like only a 400-metre gallop, but in fact was a lot more: nearer 1,200 for the workout by the time they had pulled up.

Cruz then announced that the high-speed preparation was over, and it would be only light work from now on in the lead up to the race.

Bullish Luck and Silent Witness finished 1-2 in the Hong Kong Champions Mile at Sha Tin on May 14 in the first leg of the inaugural Asian Mile Challenge.

The Yasuda Kinen completes the two-leg series, and Bullish Luck would collect a bonus of US\$1 million for winning both races.

Although Silent Witness is the more famous of the two, having set a world record with 17 straight wins until being beaten by a short head by Bullish Luck, the latter has the better chance of success at Tokyo Racecourse, according to Cruz.

"I believe Bullish Luck is a real champion miler. I was also happy about Bullish Luck winning, and I reckon Bullish Luck is the horse who could really come for this Yasuda

Kinen. This is his course really, and as far as I can see he is in top condition."

Cruz revealed that Silent Witness had lost 18 kilograms since leaving Hong Kong on May 26, and said it was impossible for him to regain his weight in time for the race.

"For Silent Witness he has never been out of Hong Kong, and the travel took something out of him and took weight off him.

"But he is eating well and he is a very calm horse. That is his character."

It's a character Cruz knows well, having identified the star quality on video tape before Silent Witness left Australia to race in Hong Kong.

"From day one I believed he is a class one category, and from day one he has impressed me.

"He is getting better each time he runs, personality-wise, performance, mentality and physically, and winning very easily every time.

"We all know he is a champion world sprinter and we stretching him with the mile, so any mistake will be on us, not the horse."

The Hong Kong Champions Mile was the first race over 1,600 metres for Silent Witness, who proved unbeatable in Hong Kong between 1,000 and 1,400 metres.

With this in mind, Cruz offered a word of caution about Silent Witness's chances of winning on Sunday.

"With the distance I dare not say I can win, but if we don't we will come back for a shorter distance and I promise to win."

Regarding race tactics, Cruz said Bullish Luck would be more likely to surge from the back with an explosive finish, while Silent Witness would be more comfortable just off the pace "waiting in a handy position, not pulling and waiting for the jockey to ask him to go."

Sounding a warning to all rivals, Cruz concluded: "I think the best miler in Hong Kong is Bullish Luck, and these two are the best rated.

"We have the intention to win the race and we have come with confidence."