

U ACCESS (IRL) GCA CREDIT LONG/SHORT UCITS

Quarterly Comment

For Professional Investors in Switzerland or Professional Investors as defined by the relevant laws.

The classification of the fund(s) as per the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR) is available on ubp.com or in the latest prospectus

Market Comment

- The first quarter of 2023 saw a continuation of the rally in risk assets that started in Q4 2022, as markets were pricing that peak interest rates are behind us. Markets continued to be volatile over the period however; The quarter started with very strong rally in January, followed by a strong correction in February and was punctuated by the crisis of confidence in US regional banks and the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS. Government guarantees on deposits and central banks increased dovishness managed to calm down markets, which ended march in positive territory. In terms of regions, Developed Markets outperformed Emerging Markets, with Europe continuing its strong run since the second half of 2022. Fixed Income markets rallied across the board, driven by High Yield, Investment Grade, but also Government bonds and EM debt. Commodity prices ended the quarter in negative territory.
- On the economic front, some positive surprises on global growth, along with the reopening of China had a positive effect on business sentiment, which helped push equity markets higher. Headline inflation continued to ease on the back of low energy prices but core inflation remained stickier, prompting the fed to hike rates further in March, despite the instability within the banking system. Markets continue to be macro driven, focusing on the Fed and economic data. A growing consensus points out to a upcoming recession, which could lead markets to focus on company fundamentals once again and dispersion could return as a result.
- This market environment should provide an interesting set of opportunities for our U Access (IRL) GCA Credit Long/Short UCITS fund, a Long/Short corporate credit strategy focusing primarily on high yield, distressed and investment grade opportunities, largely in the US. This strategy enables investors to expand the opportunity set offered by traditional credit, by taking advantage of current dispersion in the market, offering opportunities both the long and short side

Sources: UBP, Bloomberg Finance LP, BofA Merrill Lynch

Performance Review

- For the first quarter of 2023, U Access (IRL) GCA Credit Long/Short UCITS returned +1.54% (Class B USD, net of fees). During the period, the long strategy contributed +0.67%, the short strategy contributed +0.35%, and net interest carry contributed +0.52%, all expressed on a net of fees basis.

The portfolio's largest contributing issuer for the quarter was a long position in the bonds of a cruise line operator as investor sentiment turned positive on the cruise line industry during the period. This positive sentiment was fuelled in part by reports of a stronger than expected start to their promotional season with increased booking volumes and pricing due to better traction amongst consumers to promotional packages. The investment team believes that there is additional upside for the company's near-dated, discounted bonds given the positive trajectory of the company's profitability and has kept this long position intact through the date of this letter.

- The second-largest contributing issuer for the period was a long position in a U.S. based broadcasting/media company that focuses on urban markets. The portfolio's long position in the bonds and equity of the company benefitted from improved sentiment for media companies to start 2023 and market expectations for continued debt repurchases by the company using its free cash flow. The investment team believes that the company will continue to report better than industry performance and will continue to de-lever, which should help the value of both the bonds and the equity. As a result, the team has kept this long position intact through the date of this letter.
- The third-largest contributing issuer for the period was a long position in the bonds of an owner of hotels and retail service-focused net lease properties in the U.S. This long position appreciated during the period as the company reported Q4 2022 earnings that exceeded market expectations as consumers continue to spend more money on experiences (such as hotel stays) while the meeting/convention business has similarly continued to improve. Also, during the quarter, the company benefitted from the acquisition of its biggest tenant by a large energy company, as well as its successful placement of an asset-backed securitization to refinance near-term maturities. The investment team continues to hold the long position through the date of this letter as it expects the improving fundamentals for the businesses to continue.
- On the negative side, the portfolio's largest detracting issuer for the quarter was a short position in the bonds of a contract manufacturer for pharmaceuticals and consumer health products. During the quarter, it was reported that a deep-pocketed acquirer was considering a takeover of the company which would likely result in a vastly improved credit profile for the company. As a result of this rumoured deal, the investment team covered the short position at a loss during the period.
- The second-largest detracting issuer for the period was a short position in the low-coupon secured bonds of an owner/operator of casino and restaurant properties throughout the U.S. The team believed that the bonds were trading too rich given their low coupon and long duration and held the short in part as a hedge against long positions in the gaming/leisure sector. During the period, the portfolio suffered a loss from price appreciation on this short bond position partly due to the rally in long duration bonds, and also due to the relative strength of the gaming/leisure sector. The investment team covered part of the short position in the secured bonds during the period and added a long position in the unsecured bonds, and these positions remain intact through the date of this letter.
- The third-largest detracting issuer for the period was a short position in the bonds of a global communications infrastructure service provider that offers fibre and bandwidth connectivity, colocation, and cloud infrastructure. The portfolio suffered a loss from price appreciation on this short position because of the market rally, particularly within the CCC-credit space, notwithstanding lower-than-expected earnings and overall weaker cash flows reported during the period. The investment team believes that there is downside for the company's bonds given the negative trajectory of the company's profitability and has kept this short position intact through the date of this letter.

Portfolio Activity

- The high yield market, as measured by the ICE BofA US Cash Pay High Yield Index (the “BofA HY Index”), had a positive quarterly return of +3.68% gross as the yield on the ten-year U.S. Treasury decreased by 41 basis points and the yield on the five-year U.S. Treasury decreased by 43 basis points during the period, while the option-adjusted spread on the BofA HY Index tightened by 24 basis points. Given elevated inflation levels and expectations for continued tightening by central banks, the investment team remained concerned with the downside risk for near-term growth prospects for high yield issuers during the period. Gross exposure at the end of January, February, and March measured +94%, +96%, and +78%; and, on a net basis, +32%, +31%, and +31%, respectively. The average month-end exposure during the quarter was approximately 31% net long, up from approximately 17% net long during the fourth quarter of 2022, which reflects an increase in long exposure and a decrease in short exposure.
- At a more granular level, the long portfolio activity included adding more relative value positions in the Gaming/Leisure and Aerospace sectors among others as well as higher coupon, shorter-duration bonds that are likely candidates for refinancing at a premium to their call prices, while reducing certain long positions in the Energy and Forest Products/Containers sectors among others. The short portfolio activity included reducing positions in Energy and Chemicals among others and adding short positions in bonds in the Gaming/Leisure and Aerospace sectors among others.
- At the overall portfolio level, the exposures at the end of March 2023 were +78% gross and +31% net (as mentioned above), with 54% gross long exposure and 24% gross short exposure.
- The largest long sector exposures at the end of the quarter were (in order) Gaming/Leisure, Aerospace, Food and Drug, Energy, and Utility.
- The largest short sector exposures at the end of the quarter were (in order) Other (risk mitigants), Gaming/Leisure, Healthcare, Consumer Products, and Information Technology.

Outlook

- Many of the same near-term market challenges continue into Q2 2023 with central banks continuing to maintain hawkish stances, interest rate volatility, weakening global economic data, and high (though moderating) inflation. With expectations for continued volatility, uncertain credit market conditions, and likely tightening lending standards due to the recent banking system issues, the investment team has many reasons to remain cautious on fixed-rate corporate bonds. That said, with still low default rates, low unemployment, and steady consumer spending, there are some fundamental justifications for the current level of credit spreads (especially if a recession can be avoided), and higher absolute yields (compared to the last few years) appear to be more attractive to certain investors.
- In this environment, the investment team still sees opportunity on both the long and short sides of the portfolio due to the dispersion which often occurs within corporate credit markets in volatile environments. On the long side, the investment team continues to find select opportunities in short-dated relative value longs, especially in secured bonds which have maturities of three years and less and which might be subject to early redemption due to free cash flow generation or company-specific corporate finance activities. On the short side, in addition to macro shorts, the investment team continues to seek opportunities in deteriorating companies which are over-levered and have weak credit ratings at a time of uncertain economic growth. With costs still elevated in certain areas and lending conditions tightening, some highly leveraged companies will likely struggle to meet their financial obligations, setting the stage for the potential for additional positive attribution from the short side of the portfolio.

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