

The
RACING POST

Guide to
Betting

TOTAL STAKE £ :

AND WE'RE OFF!

Everything you need in your battle against the bookies



Bruce Millington, Racing Post editor

Welcome to the Racing Post betting guide, designed to help you make the right choices more often so you can maximise your chances of backing the right horse as often as possible.

There's a unique magic to the feeling of backing a winner. You've made your choice, placed your bet and been rewarded with hard cash for your good judgement.

Racing is a complex challenge for a punter. When any two Premier League teams do battle it is likely most of us will be able to quickly take a view on what is likely to happen, but working out which one of a collection of horses will cross the line in front is a different puzzle.

From assessing the state of the ground to the implications of a gelding operation, the process of picking the right horse can be confusing and complicated.

That's where the Racing Post betting guide is here to help. In plain English, without jargon, we will separate the red herrings from the key clues and build your knowledge base so you are as well equipped as possible to win the war with the bookies. We will also show you how using Racing Post products can keep you close to the action and increase your chances of success. We hope the following chapters will offer insight and shed light on the many mysteries of trying to crack the code every time you study the form.

With a little extra knowledge, you can responsibly enjoy a happy betting interest.

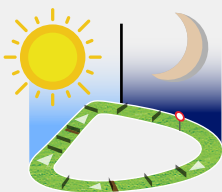
Good luck!

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When do they race?

Racing takes place in the afternoons and evenings



How many fixtures in 2017?

There will be 1,496 meetings in total



What's the breakdown?

There will be 1,115 afternoon fixtures, 333 evening fixtures and 48 twilight fixtures

1123
121
332
121
1123

How regular?

Racing takes place all week, Monday to Sunday



How many races?

Six to eight races at each daily meeting



Owners

Each horse has an owner – these can be sole owners, co-owners or syndicates



RACING IN BRITAIN IN 2017

How often?

363 days (no racing on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day)



Trainers

Each horse has a trainer, who must have an official licence granted by the British Horseracing Authority (BHA)

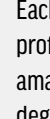
How many tracks?

At 60 racecourses – Flat, jumps and all-weather



What about surfaces?

Flat races take place on turf and artificial surfaces (also known as all-weather); jump races take place on turf



Jockeys

Each horse has a rider – professional, apprentice or amateur – and with varying degrees of experience

AN EXPERT'S GUIDE: THE CARDS

Senior innovator James Pyman takes you through one of the most important tools in your quest to find winners

START AT THE TOP... THEN WORK YOUR WAY DOWN

Avoid the temptation to dive head-first into the colourful runners' list section in which horses are always presented on a racecard in order of the amount of weight they are carrying, hence the term topweight. A racecard has a deliberate hierarchy – there is some crucial information within the race details and race conditions at the top and spending a few minutes familiarising yourself with this will actually save you time as you'll then know which bits of content to prioritise.

RACE DETAILS AND CONDITIONS

Consider the type of race first, establishing the code (Flat race, chase, hurdle or bumper) and then whether the race is a handicap. Then address course and race distance, before moving to going and field size – although the racecard itself offers no indication of whether a runner will be suited by the ground or is more effective in big or small fields.

HANDICAP RACES KEY ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

In a handicap, the runners are essentially presented in ability order – highest at the top – and it makes a lot of sense to analyse the horses in saddlecloth number order.

The horses' weights reflect their official ratings and to create a theoretical level playing field the handicapper believes have shown the best form carry more weight, so are higher up in the list (have lower saddlecloth numbers). The challenge is to find horses who are well in (have more ability than their ratings suggest) and the racecard features a number of elements that can steer you in the right direction. You can find out more details about the handicap system on page 21.

RACING POST RATINGS

Make these the first port of call. Listed against each runner in the right-most column of the card is their Racing Post Rating which, crucially, has been adjusted to the day's weight terms. Take note of the horses with the highest RPRs as these are more likely to be well handicapped according to the Racing Post's expert handicappers.

3:10 Lingfield
29 NOV 2016

2m4f Happy 3rd Birthday Jenson Roe Veterans' Handicap Chase (Class 3) (9yo+)

NO. FORM	HORSE	AGE	WGT OR	JOCKEY	TRAINER	TS	RPR	ODDS
3 PPB-U	Si C'Etais Vrai tp	10	11-9 122	J. Noel Fahly T. Neil Mulholland ¹⁰		38	129	5/2
2 B-4672	Wings Of Smoke t	11	11-11 124	J. Alan Johns ¹¹ T. Tim Vaughan ¹⁰		96	136	4/1
4 51-644	Cody Wyoming tp	10	11-7 120	J. Daryl Jacob T. Charlie Mann ¹⁰		90	136	5/1
1 11524-	As De Fer 1	10	11-12 125	J. David Noonan ¹¹ T. Anthony Honeyball ¹⁴		94	135	11/2
6 41PS-P	Rocky Bender	11	11-4 117	J. Robert Durina T. Vanessa Williams ¹⁰		77	131	6/1
5 B-PE05	Cafe De Paris tp	11	11-7 120	J. Michael Heard ⁵ T. David Pipe ¹¹		-	118	8/1
7 BPU-4	Carloswayback	11	11-2 115	J. James Banks T. Chris Gordon ¹⁰		-	-	33/1

BETTING FORECAST 9/4 Si C'Etais Vrai, 3/1 Wings Of Smoke, 4/1 As De Fer, 11/2 Cafe De Paris, 13/2 Cody Wyoming, 12/1 Rocky Bender, 25/1 Carloswayback.



FORM FIGURES

You should read form figures from right (most recent run) to left – the last six are shown. There is usually a strong relationship between the attractiveness of the form figures and the prices available, with horses with better recent form figures shorter in the betting. Form figures can also be a quick route to establishing how likely it is a horse will leave their previous form behind. To be eligible for handicaps, most horses are required to have three runs so handicap debutants running for the fourth time merit close inspection as they have the potential to improve. Generally speaking, the horses showing fewer than the maximum of six recent form figures are less exposed so more open to improvement.

ODDS

The market can be a good guide to the prospects of horses in handicaps. Two groups of runners with poor recent form figures who always merit further investigation are those popular in the betting, and those with winning course form – denoted by symbol C. With such horses, you should dig into their form and find out whether they have winning form off handicap ratings that are the same or lower than their current marks.

PENALTIES

Winners who are turned out quickly before their revised handicap mark has come into effect carry a weight penalty. They are easy to spot with the extra weight bracketed by their names. When the size of the penalty plus their handicap mark totals less than their revised future rating, a horse is theoretically well in at the weights. In this example, Sunny Boy is 4lb well in. Sunny Boy carries a 6lb penalty and runs off a rating of 80, so effectively runs off a mark of 86. The handicapper has raised him 10lb for winning, so in future handicaps his mark is 90.

CLAIMING JOCKEYS

A trainer can reduce the amount of weight their horse is required to carry by booking a jockey with a weight allowance – the amount is shown in parenthesis. These are usually apprentice/conditional or jockeys at the start of their careers, whose claims are reduced as they ride more winners. As a general rule, a claiming jockey riding a horse with good recent form figures should be viewed as a positive booking, but when the runner has poor recent form such a booking may indicate that the trainer considers their horse to be badly handicapped.

NON-HANDICAP RACES KEY ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

When the race isn't a handicap – think maidens, novice events or championship races – the weights carried are not determined by official ratings, they are controlled by other factors. Therefore, the listing of the runners does not always reflect their abilities and it's not essential to analyse the horses in racecard order. The main challenge is to find the horse who is likely to run to the highest level.

RACING POST RATINGS

The ability differences between runners can be wide-ranging in non-handicaps. Racing Post Ratings provide a quick and simple way of separating the wheat from the chaff.

JOCKEY BOOKINGS

Similarly, the quality of the jockeys riding in a race can be informative with regards to which horses are most likely to win, particularly in maiden races and contests restricted to novices. A race featuring fewer big-name jockeys, particularly one in which these riders are riding the more fancied runners, can be a sign that the race lacks strength in depth and you should be focusing on the mounts of the top jockeys.

WEIGHTS CARRIED

There are often marginal weight differences between runners. However, horses can be penalised for previous wins, requiring them to carry substantially more weight than some of their rivals, and these penalties can often prove barriers to success.

WINNING FORM (COURSE AND DISTANCE)

Any basic racecard shows which horses have winning form at the course, and over the distance, denoted by respective symbols C and D. Upgrade the importance of a course win when the race is at an unusual course. This could be a venue with a unique surface, like Southwell's all-weather circuit which is the only course in Britain/Ireland with a Fibresand surface, an uncommon configuration such as Chester, which has tight bends, or downhill elevation profile like Epsom's sprint course. Upgrade the importance of a distance win when the race is run over a specialist distance – for example, 7f on the Flat – or an extreme trip, such as 5f, the minimum Flat distance, or a marathon distance over jumps.

SPOTLIGHT COMMENTS

Within these comments are nuggets of valuable information that aren't covered elsewhere on a racecard. Our Spotlight writers highlight runners' strengths and weaknesses – such as whether horses are likely to act on the going – and add context to their bare form.

FINALLY, THE DEVIL IS OFTEN IN THE DETAIL

Always check the smallprint, the smaller type on a racecard that is easily missed can be indicative of a horse who is about to show significant improvement. Two key ones are superscript 1 at the end of a trainer's name (denoting the horse has changed stables and is running for that trainer for the first time), and headgear symbol with superscript 1 (denoting the horse is running for the first time in the headgear).



WIN

The bread and butter. A straight win bet, placed on a single event, yields a return only if the selection wins

EACH-WAY

Comprising win and place wagers, an each-way bet costs double that of a traditional win bet – it's effectively a two-part bet – and will yield a return if the selection wins or is placed. For example, you place a fiver each-way (£10 in total) on a horse priced at 8-1 with a bookmaker offering $\frac{1}{4}$ odds a place. If the horse wins, you will pick up £60 (£45 for the win and £15 for the place). If your horse places (in this instance, finishes in the first four in a race with 16 runners or more), you will receive £15 (place part only).

PLACE ONLY

A bet that yields a return only if your selection finishes in the placings – usually the first three, four or five, depending on the number of runners in the race. Place odds are a proportion of the win price of the selection.

BOOKMAKER PLACE TERMS

(industry standard)

All races of less than five runners – win only

All races of 5-7 runners – $\frac{1}{4}$ odds a place, 1,2

All other races of more than eight runners – $\frac{1}{5}$, 1,2,3

Handicaps of 12-15 runners – $\frac{1}{4}$, 1,2,3

Handicaps of more than 15 runners – $\frac{1}{5}$, 1,2,3,4

KNOWING YOUR ODDS

FRACTIONS	DECIMAL	WIN RETURNS FROM A FIVER (inc. stake)
1-2	1.5	£7.50
4-7	1.57	£7.86
8-13	1.62	£8.08
4-6	1.67	£8.33
8-11	1.73	£8.64
4-5	1.80	£9.00
5-6	1.83	£9.16
10-11	1.91	£9.55
1-1	2.00	£10.00
11-10	2.10	£10.50
6-5	2.20	£11.00
5-4	2.25	£11.25
11-8	2.38	£11.87
6-4	2.50	£12.50
13-8	2.63	£13.13
7-4	2.75	£13.75
15-8	2.88	£14.38
2-1	3.00	£15.00
9-4	3.25	£16.25
5-2	3.50	£17.50
11-4	3.75	£18.75
3-1	4.00	£20.00
100-30	4.33	£21.66
7-2	4.50	£22.50
4-1	5.00	£25.00
9-2	5.50	£27.50
5-1	6.00	£30.00
11-2	6.50	£32.50
6-1	7.00	£35.00
13-2	7.50	£37.50
7-1	8.00	£40.00
15-2	8.50	£42.50
8-1	9.00	£45.00
17-2	9.50	£47.50
9-1	10.00	£50.00
10-1	11.00	£55.00
25-1	26.00	£130.00
33-1	34.00	£170.00
50-1	51.00	£255.00



If you're the dreamer who hopes to win big by staking small, then multiple betting is probably the avenue for you. Multiples, involving bets on more than one selection in different events, are popular among daily bettors and ante-post punters alike, and can be placed in store, online or on mobile.

With straight multiples, such as doubles and trebles, your initial outlay accumulates as you go through each leg. Take this scenario: you back two horses priced at 3-1 and 4-1 in a £5 double. Both horses win, resulting in a return of £100 (£5 at 3-1 returns £20 x 4-1 = £100). If one of your selections had lost then your bet would have been down, but be aware you can also place each-way multiples. However, be prepared for your stake to double if you choose to add this extra insurance.

With an array of multiple bets from which to choose, things can get a little confusing, so take a look at our list of popular bet types, including old favourites such as the Yankee and Lucky 15, to see what takes your fancy.

DOUBLE

A single bet on two outcomes in different events. Both selections must win to guarantee a return.

TREBLE

A single bet on three outcomes in different events. All three selections must win to guarantee a return.

FOUR-FOLD AND ABOVE

The traditional accumulator comes in the form of four-folds and above. As with doubles and trebles, this is a group of selections and all of them must win to guarantee you a return.

TRIXIE

A wager comprising three selections and four bets – three doubles and a treble. A minimum of two selections must win to guarantee you a return. For example, a £2.50 trixie costs £10.

PATENT

A bet involving three selections and seven bets – three singles, three doubles and one treble. It is equivalent to a Trixie but with three singles. For example, a £2.50 Patent costs £17.50

YANKEE

A bet consisting of four selections and 11 bets – six doubles, four trebles and a four-fold. A minimum of two selections must win to guarantee you a return. For example, a £1 Yankee costs £11.

LUCKY 15

Arguably the most popular bet of its kind, it consists of four selections and 15 bets (hence the name) – four singles, six doubles, four trebles and a four-fold. Equivalent to the Yankee but with four singles, only one selection must win to guarantee you a return. The name of the bet refers to its link to bonuses, such as double the odds for just one winner (some bookies pay treble the odds). For example, a £1 Lucky 15 costs £15, and a 50p each-way Lucky 15 costs £15.

LUCKY 31

A wager consisting of five selections and 31 bets – five singles, ten doubles, ten trebles, five four-folds and one five-fold. Only one selection must win to guarantee you a return. For example, a £1 Lucky 31 costs £31.

LUCKY 63

A bet featuring six selections and 63 bets – six singles, 15 doubles, 20 trebles, 15 four-folds, six five-folds and one six-fold. For example, a £1 Lucky 63 will cost you £63.



PUNTERS HAVE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD

Gone are the days of betting tax, smoke-filled shops and broken radio commentaries. The mobile-thirsty world in which we live – aided by advances in technology – has brought betting to our fingertips, and we are reaping the benefits. Here's a rundown of the platforms on which you can bet



THE MONEY'S DOWN

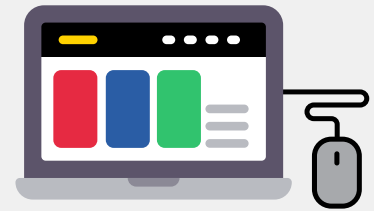
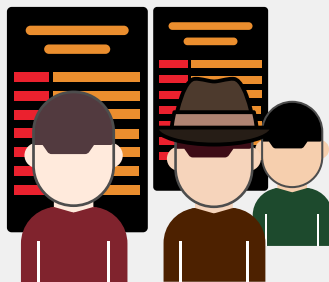


IN THE BETTING SHOP

We'll start old school. If you've never been in a betting shop, you really are missing out. One of the great institutions of the British high street, your local betting shop can often be home to more than a few characters – young, old and older. They can be the source of magical moments, experiences you will never forget, and they deal in the best currency of all – cold, hard cash. Parting with one's hard-earned makes the event of placing a bet somewhat more real, and the fun only starts when the cashier gratefully receives your stake. Placing your bet is easy. Simply write down your selection(s) on a slip, usually housed on one of the counters in the shop, and hand it across to the cashier when complete. Whether you take the price or settle for SP (starting price at the off) is your choice, but be sure to keep your slip safe – you never know, it might prove lucky.

AT THE RACECOURSE

The joys of on-course betting will be explained in greater detail on pages 18 and 19, but it's worth re-emphasising just how you bet at the track. On the busiest of days – think day one at Cheltenham – the betting ring is alive, the flow of cash resembling a river at bursting point. At each racecourse, you'll likely have two options – bet on the Tote or its equivalent (there will be plenty of Tote counters and/or terminals throughout the racecourse) or bet with the bookmakers in the ring and on the rails. These brave souls stand next to bright machines displaying ever-changing prices in all weathers imaginable in the hope of taking your cash. Take your time to scan all the odds on offer before taking the plunge and, if betting each-way, read the all-important each-way terms – you don't want to be taking $\frac{1}{2}$ odds on only the first three home in a big-field handicap.



BOOKMAKER WEBSITES

Every bookmaker in the land now has a website and an app, chock-full of prices, markets and offers. And placing a bet online couldn't be simpler. Before making a bet, ensure you've got enough money in your account (quick-deposit facilities resolve this problem in seconds) and head to the race in which you want to invest. The process is straightforward – find your selection, click on the price and head to the betslip (often as a pop-up) before inputting your stake and placing your bet. Many bookmakers now allow you to watch the race live too, so if you have time on your side make the most of this luxury. Be savvy – open accounts with as many bookmakers as possible and make the most of the free bet offers. Having multiple accounts ensures you will have access to the best prices on offer and means you'll never miss a trick, especially the night before a race when the markets are still taking shape.



RACING POST

HOW TO PLACE YOUR BETS

BETTING EXCHANGES

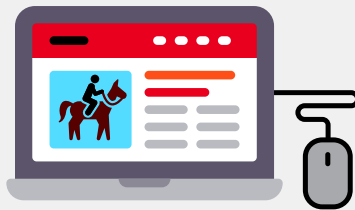
A medium that can prove the source of cheers, jeers and tears. But how do exchanges differ from ordinary bookmakers? On the betting exchanges, users have the ability to back and lay, meaning bettors can also offer their own odds on a selection to lose, effectively acting as the bookie. Known as peer-to-peer betting, exchanges offer decimal odds ranging from 1.01 (1-1000) to 1,000 (999-1). Users can choose whether they wish to back or lay, set the odds they wish to take or offer and input how much they wish to stake. The bet is then matched in the same market by somebody who has taken the opposite stance. You are able to get involved in-play, watching the markets in real time and investing as the event unfolds. Be quick, though – the odds change in the blink of an eye. The main player in the market is Betfair, with other companies such as Betdaq, Smarkets and Matchbook making up the remainder of the sector. Net winnings are subject to commission charge – 5% is fairly standard – but more details will be available on the relevant FAQ pages of each site.



RACING POST WEBSITE

The new and enhanced Racing Post website ensures you have everything in one place – slick cards, Spotlight comments and the ability to place bets with the click of a button. With prices available from the biggest bookmakers – Coral, William Hill, Ladbrokes, bet365, Paddy Power, BetVictor, Sportingbet, Sky Bet, BoyleSports and Racebets – you really do have a stable packed full of talent and the winners are just a second away.

[Visit Now >](#)



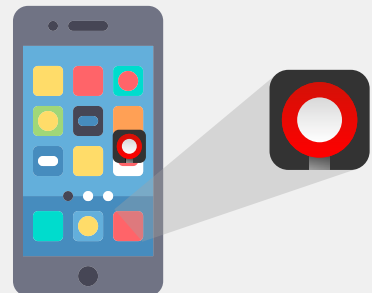
RACING POST MOBILE APP

We couldn't leave this beauty out. The award-winning Racing Post app, an invaluable resource for punters, is available via the App Store, on Android and on tablet. And best of all, it's free. As well as providing in-depth cards and fast results, the app allows you to bet directly with your bookie of choice, with prices available from Coral, Ladbrokes, Paddy Power and William Hill. Simply log in to your account with your chosen bookmaker and bet direct from the card. Job done.

[Download Now >](#)

BET AND VIEW

Also available via the Racing Post app, this facility allows you to stream every race live via your device with your preferred bookie – and for as little as a quid each time. Bear it in mind.



All the biggest free bets and special offers. All in one place.

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Bet With Your Head

Racing Post backs responsible gambling
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10

RACING POST
GUIDE TO BETTING

A DISCIPLINED APPROACH IS KEY. WITHOUT IT, LITTLE ELSE MATTERS



Paul Kealy, betting editor

Nothing makes me cringe more than being asked to come up with a list of 'golden rules of betting'.

It's not that I don't think they're worthy, it's just that I've spent most of my life ignoring the most important one and some of the others too! Still, I suppose knowing and doing are two different things, so you won't go far wrong by following this advice, as long as you stick to it. We'll start with the only true golden rule, one that has long been my downfall.

1. DISCIPLINE

All else is irrelevant. It doesn't matter how good a judge you are, you are not going to make money betting on every race, every day (note to self: read this 1,000 times over). Over the years my discipline score on a scale of 1-10 has ranged from 0 to 2. I won't say I'll never win, as I was comfortably ahead in 2016, but I'll never win as much as I should. A disciplined approach is key. Without it, little else matters.

2. DON'T CHASE LOSSES

I've actually lost count of the number of times I've managed to smash my way out of a losing day. However, I've never even tried to count the number of times I've failed – and I know which is considerably greater. When you've had a bad day, the temptation for many is to up stakes and keep ploughing on in search of the one that will get you out of it. It rarely works.

3. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Racing is a complex sport, there's no getting around that. Going, pace, jockeyship, handicap marks, speed figures. There are no shortcuts. I spend hours looking at form and watching videos. The more you put in the more you will get out, and if you don't have a lot of time then don't look at too many races. Managing time is difficult. Having no outside interests and no friends helps!

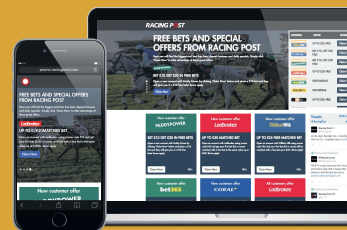
4. SWIM AGAINST THE TIDE

This is the easiest one for me to follow as I don't like betting at short prices. It would be ludicrous to suggest a favourite can't represent value on occasion, but in general the horse the market expects to win is the one bookmakers are happiest to lay.

5. IGNORE ALL GAMBLER ONCE THE BIG PRICES ARE GONE

Over time you can build up an idea of which trainers are best at pulling off coups, but if you miss the price you might as well miss the race or bet against them. You are an absolute certainty to lose in the long run if you go in at the tail end of a gamble at the worst price.

All the biggest free bets and special offers. All in one place.



Visit Now >

Racing Post backs responsible gambling
18+ gambleaware.co.uk



6. ALWAYS TAKE A PRICE AND SHOP AROUND FOR VALUE

Fairly basic stuff this, but if you consistently back horses at prices bigger than they should be you will win in the long run. Bookmakers also offer all sorts of concessions, with the likes of best odds guaranteed and extra places the most damaging to them. Take advantage of them while you can, but bear in mind that if you become even remotely successful you will have your accounts severely limited. Bookies don't react well to consistent winners.

7. KEEP RECORDS OF YOUR BETS

Your basic profit/loss can be calculated very easily, but the more detailed your records the more chance you have of spotting any areas in which you are particularly good or bad.

8. DRINKING AND BETTING DON'T MIX

Palpable nonsense really as they mix remarkably well - it's just that the results tend to be dreadful! It's probably fair to say the more wrecked you get the more reckless you will become. If you're the sort to spend weeks regretting your actions, don't do it.

9. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN ACTIONS

Too many bad punters cast around for someone to blame after a losing bet, whether it be a tipster - and we've all had our share of hate mail - or, more likely, the jockey. Like everyone else, jockeys are human and the idea they should never make a mistake is nonsense. They spend their lives on a diet that would make most of us feel light-headed and weak and conduct their business on the back of wild animals at 30-plus miles an hour. They will occasionally get things wrong, but at least 90 per cent of moans are nonsense spouted by mugs talking through their pockets. The chances are you were just wrong and you've got a better chance of remaining balanced if you just deal with it.

10. PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

Over time you will get a good idea of what you are good at and this is where most, if not all, of your focus should be. It is impossible to become an expert on all things horseracing, let alone every different sport, and the more you bet on the more you are likely to lose. Football, which I know nothing about, has long been my weakness, while I know that the higher-class races, particularly big handicaps, are where I tend to shine. There were 10,062 races in Britain alone in 2015, with more than 88,000 runners. How are you supposed to keep up with all of it?



IF YOU STUDY AND SHOP AROUND, YOU WILL HAVE AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF COMING OUT ON TOP



James Knight, head of racing at Coral

SPECIALISE

Most bookmakers now price up every race the night before they are run. The advantage the punter has is they can pick and choose in which races to bet. Your best chance of winning is to get to know a certain pool of horses inside out. If you're aware of their subtleties – for example, maybe a horse failed to get cover, was poorly positioned or had no chance from its draw on previous starts – then you're giving yourself a real chance of beating the bookmakers.

FOCUS ON QUALITY

This might sound counter-intuitive as you would perhaps expect the best races to be the most accurately priced. That's true to an extent, but the edge the punter enjoys here is that the televised races are where the bookmakers fight each other for market share through their pricing. The result is that collectively the firms bet to close to zero overround (the mechanism that ultimately

Some will say you'd be wise not to take tips from a bookie – after all, they are only interested in taking your money, aren't they? Not so. James Knight, head of racing at Coral, shares his top tips for punters in their ongoing war with the bookmakers. It could prove wise to listen . . .

gives the bookmakers their profit) on many top races. If you do your study and shop around, you will have an excellent chance of coming out on top in these races.

PLAY ANTE-POST WHEN FIELDS MIGHT CUT UP

Bookmakers are betting on far more races ante-post these days and it's worth looking out for races that may cut up to fewer runners than the layers expect. For example, if you're betting on the Cambridgeshire, bear in mind that there will be 35 runners on the day (and extra places on offer), so maybe 14-1 each-way about your fancy ante-post might not look so clever come the off. But there will be races offered, particularly during the jumps season, where if you can find a definite runner ante-post (and you can look out for trainer quotes on running plans) then you have probably found yourself a bit of value.

IF A PRICE LOOKS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, TREAD CAREFULLY

If a price looks far bigger than you were expecting, consider when you're playing and who you're playing against. If you are

betting early with a bookmaker before a market has settled down, then there's a chance they have made a mistake and you're getting big value. However, if a horse is drifting violently to a seemingly huge price just before the off, then the likelihood is that someone knows something you don't. Of course, drifters do win, but there is no question that the late market is very accurate when the smart money is going down, so it pays to proceed with caution.

USE THE BETTING MARKET AS PART OF YOUR FORM STUDY

Form study is traditionally associated with trawling through ratings and watching past videos, but what the betting market has said about a horse on previous starts is something that should be built into your analysis. The late market is a very accurate guide to a horse's chance and is basically giving you a steer as to the expected form level the horse will run to that day. That information can be invaluable when assessing races down the line. For example, if a horse is punted off the boards on its debut but then runs deplorably, it's likely to be much better than the bare form suggests.



“THE BIG DAYS ARE WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT AND SATURDAY IS TO BE SAVOURED EVERY WEEK,, How to find the winners of the sport’s biggest races



David Jennings, deputy Irish editor

It’s 8.45am on a Saturday. It’s decision time. A lie-in or get up and start studying. Always pick the second choice, accompanied with a bacon sarnie, and get down to your local newsagent to pick up a copy of the Racing Post. The process of finding a winner has begun.

There are winners to be found in every race at every meeting and we all need help finding them. Programmes like The Opening Show give you a taster of what lies ahead on terrestrial television later that day. If you’re a horseracing fan, the big days are what it’s all about and Saturday in particular is to be savoured every week. The best horses, the best races, the best chance of making money. Hopefully.

Where to start? Everyone has their own ideas but there is something all the more enjoyable about backing a winner when it comes in the main race of the day - we’re talking the Group 1s, the championship jumps races, the gold-plated handicaps. Here’s what you should look out for when hunting for the winners of the sport’s greatest races.

IF THE PRICE IS RIGHT . . .

One of the great things about meetings such as the Cheltenham Festival and Royal Ascot is the opportunity to back top-class horses at top-class prices. This statement also applies to other domestic jumps races such as the Hennessy Gold Cup or Flat prizes such as the Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe. And while everyone’s concept of value rightly differs, if you believe the favourite is in a league of their own and still a decent price, don’t be afraid to get stuck in. At least you’ll be more likely to remember who won a certain renewal of one of the sport’s most prestigious contests . . .



RACING POST

BETTING ON THE BIG RACES

CHARACTER BUILDING

The biggest races provide the ultimate test for a racehorse – over jumps or on the Flat. They are often run at a fierce gallop from beginning to end, which is something only the brave, classy and downright tough can handle. The big days also provide a stern examination in terms of temperament. Pressure-cooker environments can cause some horses to boil over, much like a human under intense scrutiny, but the true greats have an unflinching ability to perform no matter what the circumstances. Attributes like this are difficult to quantify, but the classiest of them all usually stay coolest under pressure and land the odds as a result.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

The biggest races attract the most bets and the most interest, and probably the most income. Therefore, bookmakers are always keen to entice punters and, in order to do this, they really push the boat out in terms of offers and specials. This can come in the form of extra places on big handicaps,

money back if your horse finishes second to the favourite, or enhanced prices on the odds-on favourite. In such a competitive environment, concessions are rife, so keep your eyes peeled and make the most of the bookies' generosity.

IN THE DRIVING SEAT

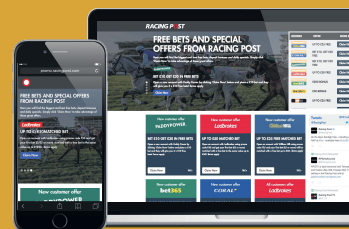
Jockey bookings are a big pointer to a runner's chances in the classiest races. It's not rocket science, but keeping it simple can yield great results. Big owners and top yards tend to have more than one runner in top-level contests (think Ballydoyle on the Flat or Gigginstown over jumps), and whoever the stable jockey decides to ride demands obvious attention. And while things don't always go to plan - the second or even third strings can win! - it's always a good place to start.

HORSES FOR COURSES

An old adage that often rings true. It's simple – some horses just love certain tracks. If you know a horse has shown a particular

fondness for Cheltenham's stiff climb, Sandown's big fences or Newbury's long straight, then you could well be on to a winner. Repeat winners of the big prizes are not uncommon, especially over jumps, and a cursory glance at the race's roll of honour can often prove worthwhile.

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Moments during life as a punter can test even the hardest of souls. The final-fence falls, the nowhere-to-go run up the rails. They're waiting to happen and will shape your outlook on betting – as well as bring you crashing down if ever you get too high. But if you're a fresh face to the game, you're

in for some fun. You're destined to go through the odd rough patch, as every good punter does, but you'll be sure to experience feelings of euphoria only provided by betting – by that gutsy grey everyone had written off, by the horse you saw in the paddock at Cheltenham that time, by the

filly you've followed since her debut. You'll feel your blood pump during the frantic dash for the winning line, you'll feel the hairs on your neck stand tall and you'll even find yourself taking part in the finish like you're in the saddle.

PRICEWISE PEARLS

TOM SEGAL'S ACE ADVICE

1. STICK TO WHAT YOU KNOW BEST

Racing can be incredibly complicated and there are many ways to approach winner-finding, but attempting to use all of them is extremely hard mentally. Work out which method suits you best, whether it be using speed figures or form ratings or whatever, and stick to it because the losers are easier to take when you've done all the work that has been successful for you in the past.

2. WATCH AS MUCH RACING AS YOU CAN

Race reporters do an incredibly good job on the whole but you have to remember they can only read a race through their own eyes and their own way of thinking. More often than not, you will see a race differently and therefore watching races and making up your own mind about horses is hugely significant.

3. ANALYSIS TO PARALYSIS

The racing media and fans often make racing far more complicated than it really is. Ground and draws are often discussed to near death before a race and then forgotten about when the actual contest is run. None of us really knows the ground and the draw advantage on any given day and they can change quickly, so simply trying to identify which horse can run the fastest must always be the first port of call.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF JOCKEYS

It amazes me that intelligent people still massively underestimate the importance of the jockey. Of course they can't make a horse run faster than they are able to, but their actions can prevent a horse achieving its true level of ability very easily and do so in every race, every day.

5. REMEMBER, IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE FUN – IT'S ONLY HORSES RUNNING ROUND A FIELD AFTER ALL

The whole point of having a bet is to find some enjoyment and help us get through the day with a smile on our face. It's crucial to work out what sort of betting suits your own personal temperament and not to take it too seriously.



MAXIMUM PAYOUTS

Bets with British and Irish bookmakers are subject to maximum payout limits, meaning your returns will be no more than the figure set out by each firm. Maximum payout restrictions usually range between £500,000 and £1 million, but each bookie will specify their terms on their website. Conor Murphy (below), the Nicky Henderson stable lad who landed a £50 five-horse accumulator at Cheltenham in 2012, bagged a million, but if maximum payout limits hadn't been in force he'd have actually collected £3.1m



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Keith Melrose on the rugged romanticism of the betting ring, one of the racecourse's most entertaining arenas



Keith Melrose, reporter

Money has become largely notional in modern life. Parting with one's hard-earned doesn't feel such an appropriate idiom when all you're doing is wafting so much plastic at a beeping terminal. Online betting, too, feels pretty staid when compared with the original appeal of striking a wager.

As transactions go, an on-course bet is as raw and romantic as it gets. You find a bookmaker who disagrees with your assessment of a race, you hand them your money, then turn to the track to see who's right.

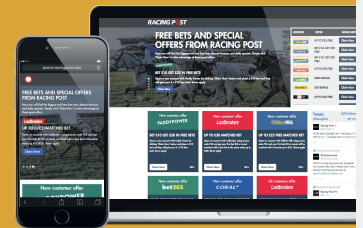
The Runyonesque edge of the betting ring has been smoothed down the years, but it still provides rough seas for the novice. With bookies' prices more in unison than they were in the days before betting exchanges, layers offer all sorts of sirens on the rocks to entice punters, from bright-lit signage to smiling, winsome bet-takers.

What's important is the numbers. Nowadays, ring betting resembles nothing more than a game of whack-a-mole: scan for the best odds and strike before the price goes. Outright bets are really that simple. State your stake, your horse (preferably its racecard number) and take your receipt.



Each-way betting is a little more tricky and some bookies try to pull a fast one with stingy terms. These are normally towards the bottom of the board. As a rule of thumb, you'll find someone betting a quarter of the odds in the majority of races and anyone advertising a sixth is having you on. And, of course, the more places to aim at (first two, three or four, even five) the better. Handing over your money is naturally a means to a hoped-for end, which is picking up a satisfyingly thicker pile from the same place you left it. While it's the cheery young lass who takes your money, usually it's the scowling, weather-beaten miser who hands you your wad. That should tell you everything you need to know.

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“LIABILITIES WOULD DICTATE HE SLASH THE HORSE’S PRICE – BUT WILLIAMS’ DUSTER REMAINED UNMOVED”

Many good bets have lost and many bad bets have won.

At the 1999 Cheltenham Festival, the bookies were all running scared of Nick Dundee, the Edward O’Grady-trained hot favourite for the Royal & SunAlliance Novices’ Chase. All except ‘Fearless’ Freddie Williams, 12 months on from a triple heart bypass, who offered 11-8 while everyone else was 5-4 and shorter.

Williams was approached by a patron who was acting as a placer for high-rolling punter JP McManus.

“Will you take 80 grand at that 11-8?”

Williams accepted, and the received wisdom of liabilities would dictate he slash the horse’s price before the receipt was even in his customer’s hand. But Williams’ duster remained unmoved.

“Aren’t you cutting him?”
the man asked.

“No. I don’t fancy him,”
came the reply.

A pause. “Well, will you take
another 80 grand?”

Another pause. “Aye.”

Minutes later, Norman Williamson on Nick Dundee and Paul Carberry on Looks Like Trouble drew away from the field at the top of the hill. Far out of punters’ earshot, Williamson turned to Carberry and said: “How you going, Carbs? I can barely hold on to this thing.” Carberry, scrubbing along, gave him the answer he wanted.

It turned out that Williamson’s main dangers were underneath and in front of him, rather than to the side. Three out and upsides, he and Nick Dundee had a disagreement – the jockey went for a big one while his mount looked for a shorter one. They got it wrong and crumpled on landing. The Irish banker was sunk.

Looks Like Trouble cantered home in isolation. He would win the following year’s Gold Cup, so it feels a little harsh to call him a lucky winner. But Freddie Williams certainly was.



A WINNER'S A WINNER: HOW TO MAKE IT PAY DURING THE WEEK

Five handy hints for punting on lower-grade racing in midweek



Richard Birch, tipster

The horses may generally be of a lower standard at midweek meetings as opposed to the premier weekend fixtures, but always remember the old saying – ‘a 3-1 winner at Fakenham pays exactly the same as a 3-1 winner at Ascot’. Here’s five hints to improve your punting in low-grade handicaps.

1. COURSE WINNERS

Look for horses who have a particularly good record at certain courses. Brighton, Plumpton, Cartmel, Fakenham and Beverley are just five examples of tracks that boast particular characteristics which some horses love and some horses hate. Following a track specialist at these venues often proves profitable.

2. WEIGHTY ISSUE

Identify horses who have dropped appreciably in the weights. To sum up my approach to winner finding in a few words, I am relentlessly searching for handicappers competing off a mark 5lb or more below their last winning rating who have previous form under the day’s conditions.

3. SWITCHING YARDS

Moderate horses who have lost their form are frequently rejuvenated by a change of scenery so be alert to the chances of runners making a first appearance for a new stable. When a horse moves from a stable you consider to be average or poor to a top yard, it is time to get the money down.

4. ALL-WEATHER WATCH

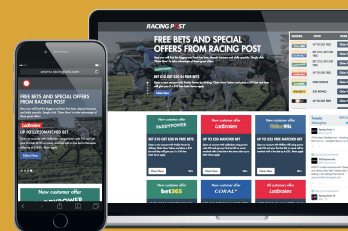
An increasing proportion of the annual fixtures granted to racecourses are now allocated to tracks which stage all-weather fare. The early signs from Newcastle are

highly promising for punters. It looks a very fair, albeit stiff track, where the form is much more likely to work out consistently than at Lingfield, which remains a minefield for punters owing to the short straight and tendency for all the runners to cluster up towards the finish.

5. GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM

Sheer common sense dictates that ploughing through deep mud in the depths of winter is a more arduous task than bouncing off midsummer fast ground. Always look for horses who carry low weights when the mud is flying, and increase your stake if the selection is receiving a double-figure amount of weight from the majority of their rivals.

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WEIGHT-WATCHERS: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE HANDICAP SYSTEM

Graham Dench with the basics of handicapping, an understanding of which is crucial for finding winners

Handicaps are races in which horses are weighted according to their past performances. They comprise around 60 per cent of the programme in Britain but vary enormously in strength, quality and value.

Weights carried in handicaps are based upon ratings compiled by an experienced team of experts employed by the British Horseracing Authority. The essential proposition that they work by is that every horse should have a broadly equal chance, provided it is running over an appropriate distance on suitable ground, and provided also that they are in good health and fit to do themselves justice. Handicaps are graded, with qualification bandings designed to keep horses in appropriate company, running against opponents of broadly similar ability.

Over jumps the general maximum weight a horse will carry is 11st 12lb, dropping to 10st for the bottomweight, while on the Flat the general maximum weight is 9st 7lb, dropping to 8st for the bottomweight. If a horse has registered a recent win, they will carry a penalty (extra weight) before their rating is reassessed proper. The standard penalties in place are 7lb over jumps and 6lb on the Flat.

It is a matter of simple physics that the more weight a horse carries on its back, the slower it will go, and the basic formula by which handicappers work has been tried and tested in tens of thousands of races run over many decades.

There will usually be a degree of subjectivity involved in the rating a horse is given, and hence the weight it carries, but the sliding scale used by the BHA dictates that over five furlongs one length equals 3lb, and over 15f and beyond one length equals 1lb. Over jumps one pound per length is used in most instances, except over extreme distances or on very testing ground.

A weight-for-age table provides allowances designed to give immature horses an equal chance against their elders. Once again, this is on a sliding scale, which adjusts according to age, distance and time of year.

When assessing a race and adjusting ratings, the recent form of horses going into the race is just one of potentially dozens of factors that are taken into account. It's an inexact science, but the general aim is to find the most reasonable and plausible assessment possible.

While the races themselves are assessed on a daily basis, the handicapping team's adjustments are published only once a week, on Tuesday. New ratings published that day will take into account all racing up to and including the previous Saturday, and they will be applied to all handicaps from the following Saturday onwards.



THE BIGGEST WINNER

The longest-priced winner in British racing history is Equinoctial, who struck at odds of 250-1 when he landed a novice hurdle at Kelso in 1990



TIMING IS EVERYTHING IN THE RACE TO SNAP UP VALUE

Tony McFadden on the pros and cons of ante-post betting, a popular pastime that provides a wealth of opportunities as well as moments of despair

Ante-post betting refers to wagers placed before the final declaration stage of a race. In Britain this is 24 hours before the majority of jump races and 48 hours in advance for Flat races.

Intense competition between bookmakers, aiming to be top price in high-profile day-of-race markets, allied with the perception that the layers are quicker to slash ante-post prices than they were in yesteryear, has led critics to declare the demise of the long-range punt. However, reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated.

Ante-post betting is not without risk – not least because, in contrast to day-of-race betting, you lose your money if your horse does not run – but value still exists and the rewards can be great.

As the saying goes, timing is everything. For punters, it is often difficult to evaluate a horse's performance in the immediate aftermath of a race. Those setting the odds would also benefit from a period of reflection

and further analysis, but commercial pressures – such as a desire for a namecheck on TV – lead to quotes being hastily offered about future events virtually as soon as the horses cross the line. Not surprisingly, mistakes are made and value prices are available, albeit briefly.

For example, after his fall in the King George in 2015, Don Cossack was pushed out to 8-1 (from 5-1) for the 2016 Cheltenham Gold Cup, despite being firmly in contention in one of the highest-quality chases run in Britain in years when coming a cropper. When it came to the Gold Cup three months later, he was the 9-4 favourite.

And while bookmakers can be quick to overreact to defeats, they can also be slow to fully appreciate the merit of winning performances.

So the message is to act quickly after a race if you think a value price exists.

Many punters dislike ante-post betting for fear of losing without getting a run for their money. The non-runner no-bet concession – which the majority of bookmakers offer on every race at Cheltenham in the fortnight leading up to the festival – removes that risk.

Yorkhill was 5-1 in the Neptune Novices' Hurdle market on the Saturday before the festival in 2016, but was the same price for that year's Supreme, which was also a legitimate target for the Willie Mullins star. In the end, he ran in the Neptune and won at 3-1.



RACING POST

ANTE-POST BETTING

Ante-post punters were able to take a price bigger than the likely SP, safe in the knowledge their stake would be returned if he didn't run. As an added bonus, had something happened to short-price favourite Yanworth on the morning of the race then Yorkhill backers would not have incurred a rule 4 deduction, which would have been applicable to bets struck on the day.

While many people associate the term 'ante-post' with long-term bets, the period between the six-day stage of a race and the final declarations is often ripe for exploiting – particularly with regards to the each-way terms on offer.

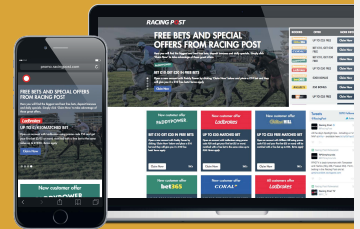
The majority of bookmakers will price up every possible runner, even if their participation is in doubt. This leads to a situation whereby it is possible to take each-way terms that are unlikely to be so generous on the day, when the field might be much smaller.

Those ante-post punters who backed Wicklow Brave each-way at 16-1 in the Irish St Leger in 2016, getting 1-5 the odds for the first three places, would have been on excellent terms with themselves when he featured among four declarations, meaning a healthy profit was in store so long as he beat home the 80-1 outsider. It would have been an excellent bet even if he had not sprung a surprise and beaten the long odds-on favourite Order Of St George.

On the flipside, in some races such as handicaps like the Ayr Gold Cup in which a maximum field is assured, the each-way terms can often be more advantageous on the day when it is not unusual for bookmakers, in a bid to draw custom, to offer extra places.

So how can you spot which races are likely to cut up? Looking at how many runners usually contest the race is a good starting point. Also, does one trainer dominate the entries? If so, it is unlikely they will run the majority of them. Have any trainers stated the race is the target for their horse? Do any of the horses hold an alternative entry around a similar date? Is there one horse of considerable superior ability other connections may want to avoid? Does the weather forecast suggest ground conditions may be extreme? These are all factors to consider.

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3:30 Cheltenham

17 MAR 2017 CH4

3m2½f (3m2f70y) (New) Cheltenham Gold Cup Chase (Grade 1) (POSSIBLE ENTRIES) (Class 1) (6yo+)

NO. FORM	HORSE	AGE	WGT OR	JOCKEY ALLOWANCE TRAINER RTP%	TS RPR	ODDS
11-111	Thistlecrack	9	11-10	J: T: Colin Tizzard ⁶⁵	125 168	7/2
F1-431	Cue Card	11	11-10	J: T: Colin Tizzard ⁶⁵	160 184	6/1
11/1-2	Coneygree	10	11-10	J: T: Mark Bradstock	145 173	7/1
11F11-	Don Cossack	10	11-10	J: T: Gordon Elliott ⁴⁴	171 186	7/1
1F23-2	Djakadam	8	11-10	J: T: W P Mullins ⁶⁷	166 181	12/1
1111-1	Douvan	7	11-10	J: T: W P Mullins ⁶⁷	163 180	12/1
FU22-1	Valseur Lido	8	11-10	J: T: ² Henry De Bromhead ⁶⁵	84 175	12/1
321-21	Native River	7	11-10	J: T: Colin Tizzard ⁶⁵	158 172	20/1
113-45	Blaklion	8	11-10	J: T: Nigel Twiston-Davies ⁶⁵	148 162	25/1
4614-1	Carlingford Lough	11	11-10	J: T: John E Kieley ⁵⁰	153 174	25/1



POT OF GOLD

Take the plunge in the pool and you might just find yourself on the way to riches



Graeme Rodway, tipster

The beauty of the Placepot, a popular bet that rewards punters of all stakes and sizes.

The Tote is the only bookmaker providing pool betting on racing in Britain and, while it offers traditional win, place and each-way bets, the service really comes into its own with bets that give punters the opportunity to win a large amount of money for just a small layout.

Tote Exacta (picking the first two in a race), Trifecta (first three), Jackpot/Scoop6 (picking the winner of each of the six nominated races on a single day) are good examples, but the most popular bet available at every British and Irish meeting every day is the Placepot.

This bet offers the chance to win without even backing a winner. The task sounds so simple: you need to find a horse to be placed in races 1-6 on a racecard. However, it isn't as easy as it looks and the average Placepot dividend is £407 to a £1 stake. If you get really lucky, the bet has the potential for a huge payout and the record dividend stands at £91,774.50 for just a quid.

You can pick more than one horse in each race and perm up selections to give yourself a better chance. The more perms you choose, the more expensive the bet will cost, but the greater the likelihood of a win.

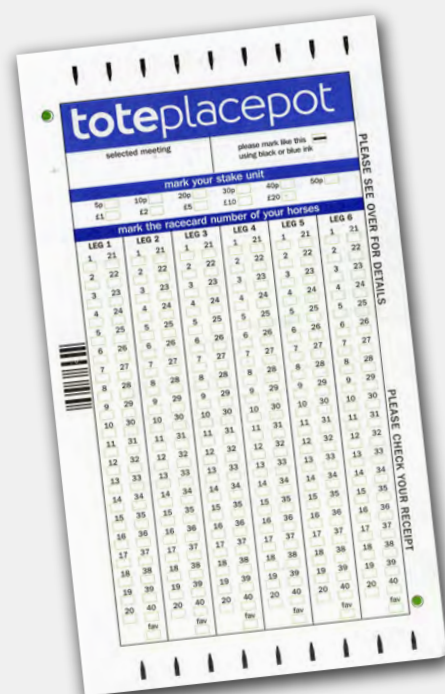
If you choose two horses in every race it will equal 64 lines (2x2x2x2x2x2) but, instead, my preferred strategy is to have at least one race in which I include just one horse, the Placepot banker. That helps keep the cost of the perm down and also opens up the opportunity to include three, or even more runners, in another race in the bet.

My Placepot banker will usually be the most solid, consistent horse on the card, a horse who can be relied upon to run its race. I'll go through the form and try to find a runner who has been placed in at least 50 per cent of its races, if not more.

Beware not to play too safe, however. Small dividends are also common and if the favourite is placed in every race the bet will almost always pay less than £20, and in most cases less than £10.

Therefore, it's worth leaving out the market leader in at least two of the races and the shorter price the favourite, the better. I'll often look for races in which the favourite is forecast to go off at shorter than 2-1 and then include two or maybe three against the market leader, in the hope it is unplaced, thus bolstering the dividend.

And remember, if you go out in one of the first two races, you can always play the same selections in the Quadpot. That is the Placepot's consolation bet and operates in exactly the same way, but instead starts at race three and requires you to select a horse to be placed in races 3-6 on the card. Good luck.



PLACEPOT RECORDS

11/12/2015 – Cheltenham: £91,774.50

03/10/2003 – Newmarket: £63,284.30

28/02/2015 – Southwell: £51,326.60

21/06/2010 – Chepstow: £50,362.40

06/10/2007 – Redcar: £49,436.30

**figures courtesy of Betfred*



“NO BET HAS A GREATER CHANCE OF BRINGING FORTH A HAPPY RETIREMENT”

Award-winning sports writer Steve Palmer on the lure of the facespitter, the bet that has the potential to change your life



Steve Palmer, sports writer

My betting career started in my late teens two decades ago and I immediately had a sense of impatience. I wanted to win big and take my life on an unusual course. I craved what has become widely known as the facespitter bet.

I loved playing sport, I loved having a drink – I loved lots of things that were badly restricted by the world of work. I had my first job aged ten, toiling in the store room of a toy shop, and instantly realised how much I hated working. Playing, whether you are ten or the ripe old age of 38 I reached this

year, is much more fun than working. The only job I've ever enjoyed was that of putting green attendant on Weymouth seafront, but I got the sack for reasons beyond my control. Working is a mug's game, I quickly concluded.

The facespitter was, and is, the ultimate solution. It has been my lifelong dream to produce the facespitter – a winning wager so enormous that you can spit in the face of your boss because you no longer need a job. The facespitter delivers retirement.

The best way of attempting to win a fortune is through what are known as transatlantic doubles, when you predict the winner of the European Tour golf event and put him in a double with the winner of the tournament taking place across the Atlantic Ocean on the US Tour. The double odds are typically huge.

Even the each-way place return (normally paying a quarter the odds the first five) on a transatlantic double usually yields plenty. I spent several years regularly trying to win £1 million on this type of double. I would know the maximum payout limits of every bookmaker – some will cough up only £50,000, while others are happy with £500,000 – and strike my bets accordingly.

I often used to go to a Ladbrokes shop and place a double that returned £500,000, then pop round the corner to another Ladbrokes to have exactly the same bet again.

My masterplan was to get a mate to collect the second £500,000 once both golfers triumphed, so there would be no issue with breaching the maximum-payout rules.

Weekly attempts to gain a million quid can be draining on your wallet, but I was winning enough from other bets – mainly golf singles – to be able to have a series of serious cracks at the facespitter. I won bundles in 2012 and had my bank balance at six figures for the first time in my life. Wise owls were urging me to buy a house, but as a single man chasing retirement I had no interest in bricks and mortar. Winning just meant I could have higher stakes and £500 each-way doubles became the norm.

I've landed the transatlantic double about 15 times, but never with a stake significant enough for it to be a facespitter, so I have remained a wage slave, although I banked £52,000 on the day Branden Grace won the Dunhill Links Championship and Ryan Moore landed the Justin Timberlake Open.

No bet has a greater chance of bringing forth a happy retirement than the transatlantic double. If you are single and without dependents, you are mad if not trying to conjure a facespitter as often as possible. Free yourself.



FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

How to spot the winners in the paddock



David Carr, reporter

Racecourse reporter David Carr shares his paddock expertise, providing invaluable pointers on what to look for when you're at the track.

WHY WILL IT GIVE ME AN EDGE?

Unlike virtually any other sport, horseracing allows spectators the chance to get up close and personal with the athletes just minutes before they are due to perform. The runners in the 100m final at the Olympics don't limber up right in front, allowing you to study their wellbeing as they do their final warm-up before the race of their lives, but the runners in top horseraces do. And you don't have to be any sort of equine expert to get plenty out of it.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO GO?

Runners are invariably in the pre-parade ring 20 or so minutes before a race and make it into the paddock ten or 15 minutes before the off. But on a cool day you might have a wait as some horses will not have their rugs taken off until the jockeys get mounted and you do want to see them in the flesh.

WHERE SHOULD I STAND?

Even the sharpest elbows cannot always guarantee the ideal spot as hundreds surround the parade ring at a top meeting but the best viewing is done on a level patch of ground by the side of the paddock, so you get the chance to see each horse approach head-on and study them from the side before they turn a corner.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

You're looking for anything and everything that suggests you are watching an athlete primed to run for their life. The tell-tale signs include:

▶▶ Imagine Usain Bolt stripped, ready for action and strutting round at the start – many of the things that make him look a likely winner are the same sort of things you are seeking to find in a racehorse. Like well-defined muscle tone, in the case of a horse, over its buttocks and behind the ribcage.

▶▶ Just as a pot belly would put you off an Olympic sprinter, the racehorse 'carrying condition' – ie fat – may not be in top physical shape, although some horses are

naturally more robust than others and may well carry a bit of condition even after a couple of runs.

▶▶ The aura of physical wellbeing that an athlete gives off is also seen in a horse – look for a sleek, shiny coat that positively shouts good health.

There are also negatives to look out for:

▶▶ Horses sweating, getting edgy if not downright unruly, or showing signs of 'greenness' – a newcomer neighing in excitement at every gust of wind, for example, or seemingly startled as their jockey gets on board.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Context is crucial. Ability and effectiveness to handle the trip and ground counts for plenty. I might be as fit as a flea but I'm still not worth a bet to beat a Usain Bolt who has been out of training for a month. And the green, unfit, coltish horse may still win. But paddock inspection can give as big a clue as any as to how an animal is likely to perform.

AND REMEMBER...

... of all the millions of pounds bet on each race nowadays, most comes out of the pockets of off-course punters and few of those who go racing bother to make a trip to the paddock. So anything you see there is virtually for your eyes only. Which has to give you an edge, doesn't it?



IN THE BLOOD

The importance of pedigrees and purchase prices



Martin Stevens, bloodstock editor

How genetics can inform your betting decisions

Pedigrees and sales information should inform your betting decisions rather than dictate them. It's all well and good being able to identify a well-bred horse but, just because he is a son of a champion sire and a half-brother to a Classic winner, it doesn't necessarily mean he has inherited the right mixture of genes for him to succeed. Think how much variation between human siblings there can be.

Take, for example, a colt called Taj Mahal. He is by the best stallion in the world in Galileo and out of a mare in You'resothrilling whose first three foals were Irish 1,000 Guineas heroine Marvellous, star miler Gleneagles and CL Weld Park Stakes winner Coolmore. But Taj Mahal failed to win any of his first five starts despite punters, beguiled by that

pedigree, ensuring he was sent off favourite each time.

Auction values should be approached with similar wariness. A price-tag resembling a telephone number is indicative of a superior pedigree and stunning looks, but no-one can tell what engine that physique contains until the racecourse test.

Royal Ascot scorer Sir Isaac Newton (cost £3.78 million) and Oaks winner Was (£1.26m) are two examples of pricey purchases who justified the huge sums invested in them but, on the other hand, Pietro Testa (£2.73m) and Chess Master (£1.79m) showed precious little talent.

Then there was the notorious case of The Green Monkey, the most expensive thoroughbred ever sold at public auction at a staggering \$16m. He failed to win in three starts.

Where a little knowledge of breeding can serve you best in terms of punting is recognising when a horse might improve for a greater test of stamina. It is not uncommon to see horses whose sires and siblings excelled over longer distances campaigned over an inadequate trip. They may have struggled in those races but are often worth following when given a more suitable challenge.

On the other side of the coin, it is worth studying the pedigrees of runners in races

run over 1m4f or further to make sure they stand a chance of staying the distance. A horse with too many speed influences in its family is likely to run out of stamina reserves long before his more stoutly bred rivals.

Pedigrees and sales prices may be unreliable indicators of talent but, combined with some awareness of what to expect the major sires to produce, they should form an essential part of the punter's armoury.



OUT OF THIS WORLD

Why the once-far-flung global form lines are no longer out of reach



Ron Wood, race analyst

International racing expert Ron Wood on the increasing familiarity of being able to track the action abroad

It's never been easier to follow and punt on the big international races and the many horses from Britain and Ireland who are targeted at these events.

One of the most obvious examples of racing's globalisation is the Dubai World Cup Carnival, which runs from January through to the end of March and gets full coverage in the Racing Post. Horses from all over the world – including a good number from Europe – travel to Dubai to compete for huge prizes at Meydan. But while the prospect of comparing form lines from all over the globe

might once have seemed an impossible task, that's not the case now. With increased television coverage, the Racing Post's vast database and Google or Twitter to aid further research, the international scene is an increasingly familiar one.

Okay, it'll probably still take a bit longer than usual to study a race containing runners from four or five different countries, but it's a fascinating challenge and can prove a welcome change from the more mundane day-to-day domestic action.

It helps when there are worthwhile punting angles, with the markets not always as informed as they would be for a 'home' fixture.

All leading bookmakers offer prices on Meydan, and there's also exchange and in-running betting on every race, but it's not just Dubai. With internationally recognised races all over the planet, there will usually be at least one or two firms with prices no matter where the meetings are being staged.

In 2016 I wrote a couple of Spotlight verdicts for two races in South Korea, which was a new test. As well as the local contingent, there were runners from Europe, Japan, Singapore and the UAE, but there was loads of information available and it was enjoyable piecing it all together.

No article on international racing would be complete without mentioning the Breeders' Cup, which has long seen some of Europe's best talent – both equine and human – take on the Americans on their own patch, and there have been some epic races over the years. With my parents being big fans of Lester Piggott, one of my earliest racing memories is watching countless re-runs of Royal Academy's Breeders' Cup Mile success in 1990 – I think we just about wore out the tape!

The Breeders' Cup is still going strong and is as accessible as any meeting around the world from a punting point of view.



IT'S MORE THAN JUST HORSES

Make winners of the people involved too

Betting on racing is more than just win and each-way. Among bookies' daily and longer-term prices sit countless specials, some of which can remain in-play for more than a year. If you fancy placing a punt on something other than a race, take a look at each list of specials on the respective bookmaker sites. Here are some of the less conventional markets you might encounter in the long term and on a daily basis.

LONG TERM

Similar to ante-post markets, longer-term specials are available on outcomes to events such as jockeys' titles and trainers' titles all season long. Getting involved in these markets when you think someone or something could represent good value can prove a shrewd move. As well as giving you the chance to boost your betting bank, they also provide an interest in an event you might otherwise ignore. Other long-term special markets include trainer outrights and sire outrights, such as a horse to sire a Classic winner in its first crop.

DAILY

As well as betting on individual races and horses, punters can also invest in its participants on a daily basis. Outright markets, such as total winning distances at chosen tracks, provide bettors with an interest from start to finish, while the availability of odds about jockeys and trainers riding and saddling multiple winners presents punters with a fresh approach in their bid to profit from the action. As well as being fun and quirky, they can often prove rewarding if you are prepared to take a bold view.

PARTY TIME

#winning



What to do with your winnings? The possibilities are endless and your options will depend on your returns, but here are a just few ideas about how to celebrate:

BUY SOMETHING MEMORABLE

It's always good to have something to show for it, and what better way to remind you of a big winner than to splash the cash on something you need? You might have won enough to pay for a new car. If not, just keep it simple and get that shiny new Mac you've been dreaming about.

GET THE DRINKS IN

You'll be the toast of your friends if you offer to get the next round immediately after backing a winner. The more lavish among you might opt for something more bubbly, but a simple round of drinks, paid for exclusively by the bookies, will taste just as nice.

REINVEST!

If you're playing with the bookies' money and you're really sweet on one in the next race, why not play up? As the old saying goes, you need to speculate to accumulate . . .

Additional Betting Markets now available on the Racing Post app.

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Access them by tapping the Extra tab on cards



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Racing Post backs responsible gambling
18+ gambleaware.co.uk



THE KEY TO BETTING SMART IS STAYING IN CONTROL

According to GambleAware, "73% of adults in Britain gamble at least once a year, and the vast majority do so responsibly". However, it is estimated 350,000 people are suffering from a gambling addiction in the UK.

If you feel like your gambling activity could be impacting your relationships, work or yourself, there is help at hand. Listed below are just three of the main support networks and helplines to give you advice on how to stay in control.

GAMBLEAWARE'S TEN TIPS FOR STAYING IN CONTROL

1. DON'T THINK OF GAMBLING AS A WAY TO MAKE MONEY
2. ONLY GAMBLE WITH MONEY YOU CAN AFFORD TO LOSE
3. SET A MONEY LIMIT IN ADVANCE
4. SET A TIME LIMIT IN ADVANCE
5. NEVER CHASE YOUR LOSSES
6. DON'T GAMBLE WHEN YOU'RE DEPRESSED OR UPSET
7. BALANCE GAMBLING WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES
8. DON'T TAKE YOUR BANK CARD WITH YOU
9. TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS FROM BETTING
10. DON'T DRINK OR USE DRUGS WHEN GAMBLING

NATIONAL GAMBLING HELPLINE

HELPLINE: 0808 8020 133 (8AM TO MIDNIGHT, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK)

GAMBLEAWARE

WEBSITE: GAMBLEAWARE.CO.UK
HELPLINE: 0808 8020 133 (8AM TO MIDNIGHT, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK)

GAMCARE

Website: www.gamcare.org.uk
Helpline: 0808 8020 133 (8am to midnight, seven days a week)

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

Website: gamblersanonymous.org.uk

IBAS

During your betting life, you may encounter disputes arising from gambling. If this happens, you are advised to contact the Independent Betting Adjudication Service (IBAS). In its own words, "IBAS acts as an impartial adjudicator on disputes that arise between gambling operators who are registered with IBAS and their customers".

Website: www.ibas-uk.com

Number: 020 7347 5883

