

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BRITISH HORSERACING



WRAY VAMPLEW AND JOYCE KAY

Encyclopedia of British Horseracing

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Encyclopedia of British Horseracing

The *Encyclopedia of British Horseracing* offers an innovative approach to one of Britain's oldest sports. Whilst it considers the traditional themes of gambling and breeding, and contains biographies of both human personalities and equine stars, it also devotes significant space to previously neglected areas. Entries include:

- Social, economic and political forces that have influenced racing
- Controversial historical and contemporary issues
- Legal and illegal gambling, and racing finance
- The British impact on world horseracing
- History and heritage of horseracing
- Links between horseracing and the arts, media and technology
- Human and equine biographies
- Venues associated with racing
- Horseracing websites.

The *Encyclopedia of British Horseracing* provides a unique source of information and will be of great interest to sports historians as well as all those whose work or leisure brings them into the world of racing.

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Introduction

Horseracing, the first truly national sport in Britain, has a longer history than most, stretching back at least to the days of Henry VIII. It also has many unique features. First, there are two distinct codes, the traditional flat and the 'more recent' National Hunt which emerged in the nineteenth century. Second, it is highly professionalised with little room for the amateur. It has no grass roots, no junior level: while many spectators at cricket and football matches will have played the sport, few racegoers will have ridden a horse let alone raced one. Another unusual aspect of racing is that it has no fan base. Spectators seldom follow particular horses or jockeys as they would a local team and there is little shared, communal experience associated with winning...or losing. Racing is largely for individuals, both participants and spectators.

There are other major differences. Unlike most sports, there are few celebrities to empathise with or admire, although in Victorian times jockey Fred Archer was said to be the best known sportsman after W.G. Grace. Today Frankie Dettori is probably the only racing professional to be widely recognised and even his undoubted charisma does little to raise a positive profile. Nor is it a sport for the sedentary viewer as an afternoon at the races might only contain ten minutes of action. In other sports, you take your seat and the event unfolds before you. In racing, to get the most from the spectacle you have to follow proceedings from stand to paddock, from paddock to rails, from rails to winners' enclosure. Along the way you can place a bet, the original and still the main rationale for the sport. Racing and betting have always gone hand-in-hand, from the simple wager on match racing in the eighteenth century to the multi-million-pound industries of the twenty-first century. Other sports *have* betting but racing in Britain *needs* betting. It is because of this close connection that there is a widespread perception of the sport as corrupt.

Racing is so far removed from 'average' sport that it sometimes fails to recognise that it has a problem, particularly with its image. It sees nothing incongruous with trying to bring in a crowd on the basis of activities – funfairs, bouncy castles, shopping – which have no relevance to the contests taking place. Football fans take their children to see the main event, the match, not the sideshows. Given a free afternoon, most people would not choose to spend it at a racecourse. Horseracing now has to compete for the time and money of sports fans who have never had more choice, in an era of saturation coverage of football, at a time when investigative journalism and a sensationalist press

are ever more adept at rooting out scandals and misdemeanours. It continues to function in an age when most of the population has no affinity with the land, with horses, with riding, hunting or country pursuits because the majority are from urban rather than rural backgrounds. It lacks fans to speak up for it as a sport partly because of the close-knit, navel-gazing world in which it operates and partly because its relationship with gambling still evokes disapproval. Against all this, what hope does racing have of maintaining itself as a viable, acceptable, wholesome product for future generations to enjoy?

Despite a few innovations such as artificial surfaces and computerised handicapping, the sport remains rooted in the past. Races are still measured in miles and furlongs, jockeys in stones and pounds and horse values in guineas. Nineteenth-century dress codes are still maintained in the exclusive enclosures at Royal Ascot and Epsom Downs on Derby day while the ordinary racegoer, in jeans and T-shirt, munches burgers beside the funfair. The two branches of racing are equally far apart. The flat has the wealth, the prestige and the international dimension while jumping retains its local links, lowly status and poorer prize money. Yet paradoxically the Grand National is the one race that captures the public attention on a worldwide basis.

This book, however, unlike most encyclopedias, will not list the winners of this and other big races or the champion jockeys of the past century. It will not describe each of the 59 British racecourses in detail, explain the intricacies of betting terminology or provide biographies, human or equine, of the hundreds of personalities who have contributed to the history of racing. Anyone interested in these minutiae of the turf will find ample reference books to satisfy his or her curiosity. Among the most useful are the range of recent publications by Channel Four racing and, in particular, the excellent but unfortunately out-of-print *Encyclopaedia of British Flat Racing* (Mortimer *et al.*, 1977). Other invaluable sources are the *Racing Calendar*, *Ruff's Guide to the Turf*, the *Daily Telegraph Chronicle* and of course, the press especially the *Racing Post*. This is now the only specialist racing paper following the demise of the *Sporting Life* and in addition to newsprint coverage provides an unparalleled website for racing enthusiasts.

Instead of recycling old material, this volume examines some previously neglected areas such as the link between racing and the arts, alcohol and the church, and looks at the social, economic and political forces that have shaped the development of the sport. The focus is on Britain (not just England!) and its influence on world racing as well as the impact of other racing nations on the domestic scene. A major theme is continuity and change in attitudes within the sport and outside racing circles. Issues such as animal welfare, levels of prize money and transparency of decision-making are ongoing. Those of state involvement, Jockey Club rule and the sanctity of the Sabbath have gone.

There will always be debate about aspects of horseracing, not least how to spell the word or words – is it horseracing, horse-racing or horse racing? There is no standard version but this book has opted for horseracing, as in the British Horseracing Board. Similarly, traditional racing measurements have been retained along with the simplest form of race names – sponsors have generally

been omitted and commonly-accepted abbreviations have been adopted in the case of the King George (King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Diamond Stakes) and the Arc (Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe).

It is a daunting task to cover over three centuries of thoroughbred horseracing. It is equally daunting to keep up with the rapid changes that have affected the sport in the past decade. The last two years alone have seen the abolition of betting tax, the doubling of Sunday and evening fixtures, and the promise of both Tote privatisation and the relinquishing of the disciplinary power of the Jockey Club. The time-honoured fixture list is currently under threat and there are plans afoot for race meetings on Saturday mornings. As racing fights to secure its place in the twenty-first century leisure market, who knows what else will have changed by the time this book is published!

Wray Vamplew
Joyce Kay
June 2004

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A

Horsebox

Airborne was the last grey to win the Derby in 1946; he also won the St Leger, one of only four grey winners in the twentieth century, the most recent being Silver Patriarch (1997).

Aliysa won the Oaks in 1989 but was disqualified after failing a drugs test, handing the race to Snow Bride. The subsequent dispute with the Jockey Club led to her owner, the Aga Khan, removing his horses from Britain until 1995.

Alycidon, second to Black Tarquin in the 1948 St Leger, went on to win the stayers' triple crown (Ascot Gold Cup, Doncaster and Goodwood Cups) in 1949, the first horse to do so for 70 years.

Amrullah took part in 74 races between 1982 and 1992 without ever winning, although he earned over £26,000 in place money.

Androma is one of only two horses to have won the Scottish Grand National twice, in 1984 and 1985 – the other was Barona (1975 and 1976).

Aunt Edith was the first filly to win the King George, in 1966; there have only been four others (Park Top 1969, Dahlia 1973 and 1974, Pawneese 1976 and Time Charter 1983).

Abandonment

Racing can be abandoned at any time of year because of weather or ground conditions. Thunderstorms, fog, high wind, flooding and torrential rain may result in the loss or curtailment of a dozen flat race days each year while snow, frost and waterlogged courses have led to over 100 lost days during a winter jump season. In years of exceptionally bad weather, racing has been abandoned for weeks; in 1963 no meetings could be staged from January to early March because of heavy snow and frost while the summer drought of 1976, followed by an exceptionally wet autumn, saw nearly 90 days of jump racing alone lost to both hard ground and waterlogging. A total of 79 fixtures succumbed to the weather in 2002, a fairly average year, with a further 6 halted during the meeting.

Races may be abandoned for a variety of reasons. When Edward VII, a great supporter of racing for nearly 50 years, died in May 1910, all fixtures in Britain

2 *Abandonment*

and Ireland were cancelled for two weeks – a total of 30 race days – although most took place at later dates. The funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in September 1997 also led to the cancellation of the racing programme as did the funeral in April 2002 of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, a great patron of National Hunt racing, and that of her late husband, George VI, 50 years earlier. Sixteen flat race fixtures were abandoned from April to June 1921 because of the industrial crisis (largely the repercussions for the railways of a miners' strike) and further meetings were lost in May 1926 as a result of the General Strike.

Another recent cause of abandonment was the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001. Fears that transportation of horses and the gathering of spectators at racecourses might lead to accelerated spread of the virus resulted in a total shutdown of the sport for a week in early March. Although some courses in unaffected areas were able to resume promptly, others including the major National Hunt venue at Cheltenham found themselves in infected zones and therefore unable to hold meetings. The flagship Cheltenham National Hunt Festival in mid-March was abandoned for the first time in 57 years, causing dismay to thousands of British and Irish racegoers, trainers, owners and jockeys, none more so than the connections and fans of the Irish hurdling star, Istabraq. The three-time Champion Hurdle winner was to attempt a fourth consecutive victory, a feat never before achieved, but was robbed of his opportunity. Although he started the race in 2002, he was by then past his prime and was quickly pulled up and retired from racing.

As restrictions extended into the summer, flat racing in some areas was also affected. Over 120 days racing were eventually lost during the epidemic and with over 100 weather-related abandonments because of the unusually wet winter, 2001 proved to be the worst on record for lost racecards. A previous outbreak of foot-and-mouth, in the winter of 1967–68, also saw disruption to the racing programme. The sport was shut down completely for six weeks from the end of November to the beginning of January with a loss of 81 meetings and a further 29 days were added to the total thereafter because of regional restrictions. With little work in Britain, several top jockeys headed to France to race there. The impact of disease on horseracing fixtures, however, has a long history. In 1744 racing was prohibited by magistrates of many northern towns because of the 'direful distemper attending the horned cattle.'

The other major cause of abandonment, and by far the most serious in the first half of the twentieth century, was war. The curtailment of racing during the war years led to significant problems, not only for racecourses, trainers, jockeys and others employed in the industry but also for breeders. During both world wars the continuance of racing was viewed by many as unpatriotic and wasteful of fuel, but an exception was made for races at Newmarket where the local community was almost entirely dependent on the sport. Wartime Classics and other major races were transferred to the headquarters of racing and 1915 saw the Derby take place away from Epsom Downs for the first time in its history. A limited number of meetings were also held at Lingfield, Windsor and Gatwick, where substitute Grand Nationals were run during the period 1916–18, but northern racecourses remained closed, Newbury was turned into a POW camp and the Epsom grandstands were requisitioned by the army.

Between 1940 and 1945 flat racing was again subject to severe restrictions with fixtures sanctioned at only a handful of courses and horses banned from competing outside their own region. This time provision was made for northern racing at Pontefract and Stockton while further south Ascot, Windsor, Salisbury and Newmarket were allowed to hold meetings. The industry managed to survive without attracting criticism that it was impeding the war effort, aided by well-publicised support from the royal family – Sun Chariot and Big Game, running in the colours of George VI, won a wartime fillies' Triple Crown and the Two Thousand Guineas in 1942. The same year saw the Jockey Club take steps to reduce the size of the racehorse population to save on scarce fodder: horses of five years old and over were banned from handicaps, owners were encouraged to dispose of moderate animals especially geldings and the stock of broodmares was reduced by 25 per cent. Over 60 flat-race meetings were held in both 1943 and 1944 but National Hunt racing was less fortunate. There were no Grand Nationals from 1940 to 1945 – Aintree was taken over by American forces – and the entire jumps season was abandoned in 1942–43 and 1943–44. A limited number of race days was finally agreed from January 1945 and the Cheltenham Gold Cup was run for the first time since 1942.

In cases of cancellation resulting from weather, royal funerals or disease, replacement meetings are frequently organised by the British Horseracing Board, particularly if the original fixture included an important race. The King George VI Chase, the highlight of the Boxing Day racecard at Kempton Park, was lost to bad weather in 1995 and finally staged at nearby Sandown Park in early January. The two disasters affecting the Grand National in the 1990s, however, elicited different responses from the authorities. The 1993 race, declared void after two false starts, was never re-run but the 1997 race, abandoned on the Saturday because of an IRA bomb scare, took place instead on the following Monday in front of a small but defiant crowd. In general, re-scheduled fixtures, even for major meetings, seldom attract the anticipated numbers and revenues of the original race day and racecourse executives have cause to rue the intervention of any event that leads to abandonment.

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Tyrrel, J., *Running Racing – the Jockey Club Years since 1750* (London: Quiller Press, 1997).

See also Weather.

Accidents

So much can go wrong at the track and on the gallops. Horses have minds of their own and surprising agility for their size. They can rear in the parade ring, charge the starting gate, bolt, cross their legs, break blood vessels, run out at bends, or strike the heels of another runner. Even ones that are well schooled in training sometimes react unpredictably when they come to fences on the racecourse itself while back in the stables and breeding sheds lads and handlers run risks from frightened or excited horses. Jockeys can be pulled off by the

4 Africa

starting gate, fall off because of a saddle slipping, or have a rein snap so that they cannot control their mount. The condition of the course can lead to disaster if the ground is too hard or too soft or, as in September 1989 at Doncaster, if the drainage system subsides and produces deep holes in the running track. Even getting to the racecourse can be hazardous when you are driving tens of thousands of miles each year and, although no jockey has been killed flying to a meeting, Frankie Dettori and Ray Cochrane were lucky to escape with their lives in an accident at Newmarket in May 2002 in which their pilot died.

Jockey Club figures show that a fall can be expected every 14 rides over jumps and hurdles. Imagine the state of mind of a jockey who has not fallen for twenty rides knowing that one is almost inevitable in the very near future. But at least a jump jockey knows that most falls happen when his horse meets obstacles deliberately placed in its path and can be mentally prepared to take action. Flat racing has no such advance warning system and when a horse slips over at 30 mph or more, often in the midst of other 500-kilo creatures, the consequences can be severe. The 1962 Derby is a prime example when 26 runners set off but only 19 finished. A combination of poor horses falling back, good horses moving up, and badly placed horses switching position led to a crowded collision at Tattenham Corner. One horse had to be destroyed and six jockeys needed treatment, two of them suffering concussion.

One of the greatest dangers is a loose horse running out of control. The problem is worst at small tracks where the course is narrow and races take place over several laps. Sedgefield, for example, saw carnage in 1999 when three horses unseated their riders at the first fence in a novices chase and a well-intentioned, but unsuccessful, attempt to catch the leading loose horse merely headed them in the wrong direction. Had the next race not been over the flat, hurdles would still have been in place which might have halted the trio. As it was they met the rest of the field on a bend and in the collision another six horses were brought down. Three were killed instantly in what was a 60 mph crash.

Any serious accident is investigated thoroughly by the Jockey Club who will seek feedback from the jockeys on aspects of the race, from the course inspectors on the state of the ground, from the vets on the horses and from the doctors on the injured riders.

See also Safety.

Administration

See Weatherbys.

Africa

With racecourses named Newmarket and Gosforth Park and races called Queen's Plates, South African racing has obvious links with Britain. English settlers brought racing to Africa in the last decade of the eighteenth century and since then, in spite of its occasional isolation for political or medical reasons – fear of

African horse sickness led to strict quarantine conditions – there has continued to be a limited traffic in horses, jockeys and trainers between the continent and Britain. Although thoroughbred racing was also introduced to Zimbabwe, Kenya and other parts of East Africa, it has flourished most strongly in South Africa.

British punters have become more aware of the sport there since betting shops and satellite television began to feature meetings, initially when domestic racing was wiped out by bad weather. (Similar time zones allow South African races to be transmitted live in Britain during the afternoon.) But the only South African horse to have made a significant impact on the international scene has been Colorado King, who won in America in 1963, and Hawaii, a prolific winner in his homeland who became Champion Grass Horse of 1969 in the States. He went on to sire 1980 English Derby winner Henbit and 1978 runner-up Hawaiian Sound. A number of successful racehorses have gone in the opposite direction. Sunstone, son of 1911 Derby winner Sunstar, became champion sire in South Africa; Wilwyn, winner of 20 races in England and the first to capture the Washington DC International Stakes in 1952, also did well there as did Sybil's Nephew, a six-time winner and runner-up in the 1951 Derby. But in general horses exported to Africa have been moderate racers or unsuccessful sires. Royal Lancer, winner of the 1919 St Leger and Irish St Leger was shipped off to South Africa after failing as a sire in Britain; more recently Ribofilio, a son of Ribot, beaten favourite in the 1969 colt Classics and a great disappointment on the racecourse, was also sent there.

A few British riders have tried their luck in Africa. Ernie Johnson, 1969 Derby-winning jockey, also rode winners in Kenya, as well as India and Hong Kong, and Derek Stansfield, killed in a fall at Hamilton in the same year, rode regularly in East Africa. The Wootton family, trainer Richard and sons Stanley and Frank, worked in South Africa en route from their homeland, Australia, to a successful spell in Britain. Frank, aged 9 years 10 months, rode his first winner in South Africa and later became British champion jockey from 1909 to 1912. South African jockeys John Gorton and Michael Roberts also made an impact on British racing. Gorton was fortunate in his British contacts, having been apprenticed to Frederick Rickaby, son of a Newmarket trainer, and encouraged by veteran trainer Sir Jack Jarvis who maintained close links with South Africa. He rode regularly in Britain from 1969 to 1974, winning the Oaks with Sleeping Partner in 1969 and the Coronation Stakes at Royal Ascot with Jacinth in 1973. Roberts established himself in Britain in 1986, having won the champion jockey title 11 times in his native land. By 1994 he had ridden 1,000 winners on the British turf, won the King George on Mtoto in 1988 and Opera House in 1993, the Two Thousand Guineas on Mystiko in 1991 and the Oaks on Intrepidity in 1993. He was champion jockey in 1990 when he rode 206 winners.

South Africa has proved to be important for British racing in another context. The Joel brothers, Solomon and Jack, left London to make their fortunes in the diamond fields of Kimberley at the end of the nineteenth century and, with some of the proceeds, became important owners and breeders of racehorses back in Britain. Between them, they won 14 Classics and passed on

6 Age

their passion for racing to their children who won a further 8, as well as consecutive King Georges in 1967 with Busted and 1968 with Royal Palace. Jack's son, Jim, in particular continued to make a significant impact on both flat and jumps racing and was one of the last great English owner-breeders, reviving the fortunes of his father's Childwick Bury Stud. He was leading owner on the flat in 1967 and in National Hunt racing in 1979–80 and 1986–87, and is one of the few to have owned both a Derby and a Grand National winner – Royal Palace in 1967 and Maori Venture in 1987.

Further reading

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Roberts, M. and Tanner, M., *Champion's Story* (London: Headline, 1994).

Age

Descriptions of racehorses are often age-related. A foal is the term used for a horse from its birth until 1 January of the following year, while a yearling refers to any horse during the 12 months from then to 31 December. Thereafter, males aged two to four are colts, females are fillies, racing two-year-olds are sometimes referred to as juveniles, and animals still running at five, the age of thoroughbred maturity, or older, are horses or mares according to gender.

The age at which horses normally race has varied considerably over time and according to the distance run. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was unusual for an animal to race until it was five or six years old and it often continued until it was ten or even twelve. Only mature horses were capable of competing in the gruelling 4-mile races, often run in heats, which were then in vogue. As shorter races became more fashionable, the racing age fell. The Derby, Oaks and St Leger, first run in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, were always restricted to three-year-olds, but at a time when control of racing was lax and rules often unenforceable, it was inevitable that frauds, involving the substitution of older for younger horses, would occur in these and other age-restricted races. The most notorious case was the 1844 Derby in which two of the runners were found to be four-year-olds after an examination of their teeth, the method by which age is normally determined. By the early nineteenth century, shorter races for two-year-olds, equally susceptible to fraud, had appeared and the fashion for sprints culminated in yearling races over as little as two furlongs. The Jockey Club banned yearlings from the racecourse in 1859 and gradually imposed tighter controls on the sport, reducing the possibility of age-related offences.

It has remained the norm for flatracers to start their careers at two and for most top-class horses to retire before they reach five. In human terms, this would be the equivalent of completing an athletic career while still at primary school. National Hunt racing, however, is different. Horses are not allowed to race over hurdles and fences until the age of three and four respectively but often continue until twelve or thirteen years old; steeplechasers are usually at