



## NEWS RELEASE

### **JOCKEYS RATE BRITAIN'S BEST RACECOURSES**

THE Professional Jockeys Association today announced the results of the most extensive ever survey designed to assist the country's 60 racecourses in improving their facilities for riders.

Over the past 12 months, jockeys have been rating racecourses on nine criteria relating to general facilities including car parking, security, showers, saunas, and physiotherapy, plus catering.

Haydock Park was heralded as the best racecourse for overall facilities with jockeys commenting on its top class amenities. Closely behind the Merseyside track were Chester, Kempton Park and Doncaster, which were also ranked as excellent.

Others praised included Kelso, for the helpful ladies on the admission gate, Towcester for its "grand" doormen, Southwell for great gatemen, Taunton for friendly staff, Windsor for helpful parking attendants and Wetherby for the contribution made by Rachel Blizzard in the ticket office. Clerks of the Course singled out for going the extra mile were Charlie Moore at Uttoxeter, Edward Arkell at Fontwell Park, Sulekha Varma at Nottingham and William Derby at York.

Racecourses receiving acclaim for their washing facilities included Newton Abbot for "plenty of showers" and Catterick Bridge for its powerful shower. The hot tub at Chepstow and the steam room at Ascot also received the thumbs up.

Sandown Park was highlighted concerning its good facilities for female jockeys, and Perth was praised for its great physiotherapist Diane Hunter. Aintree quite simply "looks after jockeys brilliantly".

Discussions will take place with racecourses that did not fare so well in the survey of facilities. For example, at Pontefract, which was rated 'average' by Flat jockeys, a proposal for significant improvements has already been drawn up following meetings with the PJA's Industry Liaison Officer Dale Gibson.

Washing facilities were a common failing amongst racecourses. Many racetracks were criticised for a lack of sufficient showers, including Hexham which has only one. Countless jockeys reported racecourse showers as "dated", "cold" and "lacking power". Carlisle's new weighing room complex - which was opened last week by Lester Piggott - has been eagerly anticipated because previously there were only two showers with one not working when the other was on.

The changing rooms at Great Yarmouth and Brighton are damp and wet, and the physiotherapist at Thirsk has to work in the tearoom - however, Flat jockeys appreciated having the use of a physiotherapist even if they are located in obscure places. Many requested that physio cover during the Flat season be increased from the current 330 meetings. Jockeys commented - tongue-in-cheek - about the "need for a taxi" from the car park to the changing room at Musselburgh.

Comfort areas can be limited at some tracks with wooden benches at Newton Abbot and only four plastic chairs at Leicester and Beverley. The premier National Hunt track, Cheltenham, was marked poorly in the parking section for allowing "random people" to park in the jockeys' car park.

Ayr was rated the best for its food, with Doncaster, Huntingdon, Chester and Towcester not far behind.

A common factor influencing a high score in the food survey was the use of the "Travelling Tea Boy" Matty Stephens, who provides the food at three of the top five tracks. Matty also attends to the catering needs of jockeys at eight other racetracks in the Midlands and the South. Jockeys commented on the excellent job that he does in providing different healthy options on request. Many suggested that more racecourses should employ him.

Another caterer highlighted by the jockeys as "different class" was Derek Andrews at Fontwell Park and Brighton whom they singled out as the best caterer in racing.

Other jockeys commented on the "top nosh" available at Huntingdon and "groovy food" served at Cheltenham. The tea ladies at Plumpton, Perth, Carlisle and Haydock were described as "class". Credit went to Hereford which provides "cracking" food, and for its presentation of a wide selection of fruit on cocktail sticks.

It was disappointing that 19 tracks were rated "poor" for food, with Newcastle languishing in last place scoring only five points out of a possible 30. However, jockeys have total confidence in the clerk of the course James Armstrong and the racing surface at Gosforth Park. Most of the tracks not stepping up to the plate were marked down for serving food which was described as inappropriate for professional sports people, lacking variety and healthy options. Another common complaint was when food ran out before the last race.

## QUOTES

### **Julia Scott-Douglas, Head of the PJA's Sports Nutrition Team:**

"Jockeys need to eat a well balanced diet to help them maintain peak performance and cope with their hectic lifestyles. A racecourse may be the only place they eat in a busy schedule. It is important to them that racecourses offer a good choice of tasty satisfying and well-presented food. Jockeys, the PJA and their nutrition team appreciate the efforts of the racecourses to provide food and have produced some detailed guidelines to assist them in making the most appropriate and cost effective menu choices.

"We are currently working with the Racecourse Association to produce a general instruction detailing some minimum catering requirements. The instruction will be helpful, benefiting both jockeys and racecourses by reducing costs and wastage."

### **Kevin Darley, Chief Executive of the Professional Jockeys Association:**

"Owners, trainers and punters expect jockeys to perform to their best at all times, so the weighing room facilities for jockeys are extremely important.

"We want to headline the racecourses that are doing their best for jockeys. Without doubt, in the most important areas, Haydock Park is a standout with a fantastic weighing room, and others like Chester, Kempton Park and Doncaster are in their slipstream.

"The quality of food can be a more subjective issue, but we would certainly emphasise those racecourses which make a great effort, providing the best quality and range. In this case, Ayr and Doncaster are first class.

"The food that jockeys receive at racecourses is very important because many riders will arrive for racing after coming straight from work riding at stables with little opportunity to eat good food.

"Racecourses don't necessarily have to spend more money. Set menus with good appetising food and water fountains rather than expensive bottled water would be a step forward and more cost-effective than some current arrangements.

"Through Dale Gibson and Julia Scott-Douglas, we will now be taking up the most pressing matters with racecourses where we believe improvements need to be made. A great number of racecourses are getting it right, but we need to discuss with others how things can be made better."

**Caroline Davies, Racecourse Services Director of the Racecourse Association, responding on behalf of racecourses:**

"Racecourses welcome factual and constructive feedback arising from this detailed work undertaken by the PJA and its members.

"It is appreciated that jockeys have pressured lifestyles. We value guidance on suitable menus from the professional nutritionists and are working with the PJA to achieve consistency across all racecourses whilst allowing them to retain the flexibility to provide menu preferences for jockeys.

"Racecourses continue to raise standards by making significant investment in all facilities, including those for jockeys."

**League tables**

**OVERALL FACILITIES**

(Maximum possible score - 45)

**Excellent**

Haydock Park 40 points

Chester 39

Doncaster, Kempton Park 38

Ascot 37

Aintree, Huntingdon, Catterick Bridge 36

Exeter, Sandown Park 35

**Good**

Epsom Downs, Southwell, Perth, Chepstow 34

Newbury, Goodwood 33

Newmarket (Rowley Mile), Cheltenham, Taunton, Ffos Las 32

Market Rasen 31

Salisbury, Wetherby, Bangor-on-Dee, Plumpton 30

**Average**

Redcar, Fontwell Park, Newton Abbot, Warwick 29

Windsor, Nottingham, Ludlow, Cartmel, Wolverhampton, Leicester 28

Stratford, Sedgefield 27

Musselburgh, Wincanton, Towcester, Worcester, Folkestone 26

Ayr, Uttoxeter, Kelso, Hamilton Park 25

Hereford, Lingfield Park 24

York 23

Ripon, Newcastle, Brighton, Bath 22

Carlisle (rated before new Racing Centre opened in June 2010), Beverley,

Hexham, Fakenham 21

Pontefract 20

**Poor**

Thirsk 18

Great Yarmouth 15

Newmarket (July) 14

## FOOD

(Maximum possible score - 30)

### **Excellent**

Ayr 29 points

Doncaster 28

Huntingdon, Towcester, Chester 27

Ascot, Market Rasen, Ludlow, Fontwell Park, Aintree, Haydock Park 26

Plumpton, Kempton Park, Epsom Downs 25

### **Good**

Hamilton Park, Newmarket (Rowley Mile), Great Yarmouth, Hereford, Uttoxeter, Nottingham, Ffos Las 24

Chepstow, Cheltenham, Warwick, Southwell, Brighton 23

Catterick Bridge, Goodwood, Fakenham 21

### **Average**

Windsor, Sandown Park, Wetherby, Perth 19

Newbury 18

Exeter, York 17

Ripon, Stratford, Bath, Musselburgh 16

Wolverhampton, Salisbury 15

### **Poor**

Taunton, Worcester, Lingfield Park 14

Carlisle, Folkestone 13

Newmarket (July), Bangor-on-Dee, Kelso, Sedgefield 12

Pontefract, Cartmel, Hexham, Wincanton 11

Leicester, Redcar, Newton Abbot, Beverley, Thirsk 10

Newcastle 5

*Marks are based on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent*

ENDS 1,415 words

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30 June 2010