

Picking winners

One of the most important parts of the racing experience is having a close look at the horses before the start of each race. The best place to do this is the Pre-parade Ring, around which the horses are walked before they are saddled up. You can then take another look in the Parade Ring. Good signs to watch out for include a coat with a good sheen, an alert appearance, a well-muscled body and an easy loose stride with a springy step. A horse that is sweating a lot or that is too agitated is wasting energy unnecessarily and may not 'settle' easily into the rhythm of the race.

Reading form

The 'form' contained on a racecard gives you an idea of a horse's past performances, but bear in mind that all races are not equal. When studying the form, you should consider the distance of the races in question, the condition of the ground and the "class" of the field (the quality of horses involved). You should also consider how old the horse is and how recently it ran – too recently and it might be tired, too long ago and it might be rusty. Finally, you should look at how much weight it is carrying relative to its rivals.

Placing bets

You can either bet on a horse to win a race, or for it to be "placed" (to finish first or second in a field of up to seven horses, or in the top three in a field of eight or more). "Each way" bets involve making two bets, one on the horse to win and one on it to be placed. Betting on a horse to be "placed" usually earns around a fifth of the amount as betting on it to win. The exact figures are published on bookmakers' boards. The minimum bet is £2, though it should be noted that a £2 stake "each way" costs £4.

There are three ways of making a bet at the course:

- totepool betting outlets use a pool system to calculate how much money each winner receives. The prices that are published at the time of your bet will give an indication of your winnings, but the amount you earn will only be confirmed just after the race when all bets are in and the calculations have been made.
- The bookmakers occupying the betting ring have boards publishing the odds on offer for each horse. You can shop around to find the best price for the bet you wish to make, though bear in mind that not all bookies will accept an "each way" bet.
- The racecourse betting shop operates in much the same way as a high street betting shop, and will also allow you to place bets on other meetings being held around the country.

Whenever you place a bet, be sure to state the course, the race number (or its scheduled start time), your stake, the type of bet you want to make and the horse. To avoid any confusion over misspelling, you can give the horse's racecard number rather than its name, and check the ticket (receipt) you are given immediately as mistakes cannot be rectified once a race has started.

Betting Terms

Betting is a major part of the fun of a day at the races. If you haven't bet on a race before or you only have the occasional flutter, it can all look a little confusing, so here are a few useful phrases that might help.

Accumulator	A bet that involves making selections in more than one race. The winnings from each successful race are wagered on the result of the next, so the accumulator is only successful if all the selections win. The chances of winning are very low – but if you do, you can win a fortune!
Ante-post	Betting that takes place prior to a race meeting, anything from a day or two beforehand to several months.
Evens or Even Money	Odds that will deliver the same amount in winnings as the original stake, effectively doubling your money.
Exacta	In races of three or more runners, you pick two horses to finish first and second (in the correct order).
Forecast	First and second in the correct order.
Jackpot	You pick the winners of the first six races at the designated meeting.
Odds on	When the additional money earned by a successful bet is less than the stake originally wagered.
Place	You bet on the horse to be placed. You can only have a 'place bet' in races with more than four runners. You will win if your horse is: first or second in races of five, six or seven runners; first, second or third in races of eight runners or more; first, second, third or fourth in handicaps of sixteen runners or more. Some bookies also pay out on horses that finish 5th in very large fields.
Each-way	An each-way bet is effectively two bets; a bet to win and a bet that your horse will be placed. So if you bet £5 'each way' remember that you will actually need to pay £10 – £5 for each bet.
Placepot	You pick horses to be placed in each of the first six races (or to win any race with fewer than five runners).
Quadpot	You pick a horse to be placed in each of the Quadpot races (usually races 3-6).
Reverse Forecast	First and second in either order.
Rule 4	The last minute withdrawal of a horse from a race (particularly if it was one of the favourites) will often upset the odds of the remaining horses. A 'rule 4' helps the bookies deal with this eventuality by allowing them to reduce the amount they pay out by a set amount.
Scoop6	You pick the winners of each of six nominated Saturday TV races. This has become a popular bet among syndicates and if successful, there could be a chance to win more than £1 million!
Toteswinger	You bet on the horses to finish first and second, first and third or second and third.
Trifecta	You pick three horses to finish first, second and third, in correct order in select races of eight runners or more.
Win	You bet on the horse to win the race.