INTRODUCTION TO HORSE RACING
Horse racing has been taking place in the UK for many hundreds of years. Chester, the oldest racecourse in the country, dates back to the sixteenth century. The sport is split into two main divisions, flat racing and National Hunt or jump racing.

The flat season traditionally runs from April to October and the jump season from approximately October to late April.

However, these seasons are not strict and since the introduction of All Weather tracks we can enjoy flat racing all year round. These days you can often see jump racing at the height of summer as well.
Flat racing takes place seven days a week and features some of the world’s most famous races.

Horses run on the flat from the age of two. It's rare for a flat horse to continue running past the age of six, and certainly for them to still be racing when they hit double figures.

A flat horse tends to reach its peak at four or five years old.

During the flat season much action is on three year old horses due to the five classics restricted to this age group:

- The 1,000 and 2,000 Guineas, run at Newmarket in early May.
- The Derby and Oaks, run at Epsom in early June.
- The St Leger, run at Doncaster in mid-September.

These races form the three most important weekends of the flat racing calendar.

But there are many more major flat festivals held throughout the season for example:

- Chester’s May meeting, Royal Ascot in mid June, Newmarket in July meeting, Glorious Goodwood, late July to early August and York’s Ebor meeting in mid August.

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There are numerous different types of flat races.

Firstly, there are pattern or black type races. These are the most prestigious races and include Group 1, Group 2, Group 3 and listed races.

There are many other types of flat races which determine the type or quality of a racehorse.

Conditions races are for horses not quite at the black type racing level. Weights at these races are determined by age and sex, not by rating.

Handicap Races – where the horse carries a weight determined by its official rating.

Nursery – is also a handicap race but for two year olds only.

Maiden – these races are for horses who have never won.

Novice races – in flat terms is a two or three year olds who has won two or less races.

Auction – races for yearlings or two year olds sold at public auction for a price not exceeding a specific amount.

Claiming Stakes – the weight a horse carries is determined by the connections price placed on them. The lower the price the lower the weight.

Seller – a low class race where the winner is offered at public auction after the race.

Apprentice – for apprentice jockeys only.

Amateurs – for amateur jockeys only.

Ladies – for female amateur and apprentice jockeys.

Gentleman – for male amateurs only.
Most horses start in jump or national hunt racing at the age of three or four and graduate through the ranks. They'll start in bumper races followed by a season of hurdling after which they either continue to specialise in hurdle racing or move onto bigger fences.

A hurdler’s best years are between the ages of five to seven, while chasers usually peak between seven and ten with some often racing into 12 years of age.

There are three main types of jump races:

**Chases** – these are races where rigid fences of approximately five feet in height must be jumped.

**Hurdles** – where smaller, less rigid, obstacles must be jumped

**NHF or Bumpers** – which are flat races for jump horses to gain racing experience on flat conditions, before beginning a career in hurdling or chasing.

The jumps season’s climax is the Cheltenham festival which is run mid March. The entire jumps calendar is geared towards this festival which covers four days (Tuesday to Friday) of top quality jumps racing, including 12 races of Grade 1 status.

Some of the most notable Grade 1 races at the festival are:

**The Champion Hurdle**, **The Arkle**, **The World Hurdle**, and of course the **Cheltenham Gold Cup**, which is the most prestigious race in the jump season.

There are other major jumps races throughout the season - none more famous than the Grand National, the jewel in the crown of a three day jumps festival at Aintree racecourse in early April.
Similar to Flat racing the main events are Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3 and Listed races

**Handicap races** – Same as on the flat where the weight a horse carries is determined by its official rating.

**Novice** – chase or hurdle races open to horses who have not won this type of race this season.

**Juvenile novices hurdle** – a race for three year olds only.

**Hunter Chase** – a unique weight for age race for horses that are certified by a master of hounds and ridden by amateurs.

**National Hunt Flat Race (NHF or Bumper)** – designed to give experience to young horses. Normally restricted to four to six year olds.

**Beginners chase** – restricted to horses that have not won a chase.

**Conditional and Apprentice** – in jumps racing apprentice races are called conditional.

**Amateurs** – for amateur jockeys only.

**Claiming stakes** – where the weight a horse carries is determined by the connections price placed on them. The lower the price the lower the weight.

**Seller** – a low class race where the winner is offered at public auction after the race.
If the purpose of horse racing was to simply find the best horse in each race, all races would be run at level weights and the best horse would most often win.

The problem for punters is that’s not how the majority of races are run.

All horses after sufficient runs are awarded an official rating and that rating is used to allocate weights in handicap races, which comprise the vast majority of races.

The official handicapper assesses the merits of the runners in each race and allocates a weight to each runner.

This allocation is based on various criteria like race distance, winning time, their ages, and the margins that have separated the runners.

The idea being that each horse in the race has an equal chance of victory, according to the ratings.

The highest rated horse in the race will be allocated the highest weight and the other horses are all relative to the top horse.

On the flat, weights range from 9st 7lb to 7st 10lb and on the jumps from 12st to 10st.

For example, this is a Class 5, three year old handicap for horses rated 0-75. You can see the top horses ‘Boots and Spurs’ and ‘Tortoni’ are both rated 75 by the official handicapper and must carry 9st 7lb.

The lowest rated horse is ‘King Laertis’ who is only rated 45. This is 30lbs below the top rated horses and therefore should only have to carry 7st 5lb.

However the minimum weight allowed in this race is 8st 2lb. Therefore ‘King Laertis’ is running ‘out of the handicap’. Basically he is having to carry much more weight than he should against this opposition.
‘Going’, or the condition of the ground at a racecourse, is said by most to be the most important element in horse racing.

If a horse is unable to act on the going then it’ll be very difficult for it to win on that type of ground. It’s the responsibility of the clerk of the course to give the official going, which conditions reported as follows:

- Heavy
- Soft
- Good to soft
- Good
- Good to firm
- Firm
- Hard

Check a horse’s overall form to find its best runs. If they have certain type of ‘going’ then you can decide what its preferred going is.

If a horse has been winning on soft or heavy and today’s conditions are reported as good to firm, then be suspicious about that horse’s performance on that surface.

More skilled horse racing punters can also tell if a horse will act on a particular going by its ‘action’. This means they can judge how a horse moves. Bringing its knees high would point to a soft going preference but if the horse travels closer to the ground it’s deemed to like faster and harder ground.
Horses like athletes will perform better over their preferred distance. Horses know their limits, but unfortunately can’t tell you what its preferred distance is.

A system used by many bloodstock agents and punters is something called the “Dosage Index”. It is used to assess a horse’s pedigree and can determine its best distance, stamina and speed.

As a horse develops and grows the trainer should then be able to better assess the optimal distance for the horse.

There are other complications though with distance, including which course the horse is running at, a long straight demanding 6 furlongs may suit the stamina of a 7 furlong specialist.

The beauty of horseracing in the UK is that the courses these horses run on are all different so some horses, give added meaning to the phrase ‘horses for courses’!
British racecourses come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Understanding the characteristics of each course is a useful weapon in a punter’s armoury.

The first thing you’ll notice is that some courses are left handed and some are right, horses can also have a preference for either direction.

For example: Desert Orchid was one of the greatest steeplechasers ever. He won 27 races, however 25 of these victories were on right handed tracks. On left handed tracks he lost four out of six attempts.

In contrast, High Chaparral was much better going left handed to when he ran right handed.

As well as the direction of travel, courses also suit different running styles. It’s unlikely a horse who wins regularly at a tight track like Chester will suit a galloping track like York.

This is due to the way the race is ridden. Certain tracks suit front runners, like Goodwood, while others are more suited to hold up horses.

These course anomalies apply to both flat and jump racing. In jump racing, certain tracks have stiff fences like Wetherby and Sandown, so if a horse is coming from three victories at easier courses, it may find it difficult.

It’s often why you see repeat winners at courses like Cheltenham. This course is undulating with a steep uphill finish. So, a horse that’s won on a flat course like Aintree, might not be able to repeat the same success at Cheltenham.
In Flat racing a horse’s draw position can be the difference between winning and losing.

The draw is very controversial. Some of the big handicaps now have a more formal way of allowing connections to pick their stall via a raffle process, rather than just randomly assigning numbers to the runners.

There are clear biases on certain tracks depending on where a horse is drawn. This is particularly acute over distances of a mile or less.

Even modern techniques available to the clerk of the course can’t make the ground even and fair over the entire track and draw is still a key part of any selection process.

As with any sport fitness is key. You want a fit and in form horse to be carrying your money.

However, assessing fitness isn’t that easy as most punters don’t have access to the horse on the gallops or working at home.

So, we have to rely on the FORM guide to see if we can assess how fit a horse is.

Some horses may be easy to get fit as they often run well first time out or after a long break. Others though may need to run consistently to hit top form, especially sprinters who can pick up several wins in quick succession.

Looking at trainers records is also a good way to judge if a horse may be fit or not. Some trainers can get a horse ‘right at home’ and it could have been trained specifically for a certain race ‘laid out’.
The key to success with horse racing is the ability to identify value bet situations.

Value is determined by identifying the available odds being either greater than the true chance of winning or less and then to have the discipline to methodically back or lay only when these situations arise.

Do this and then all the laws of mathematics and probability dictate that in the long term, you will make a profit.

The only way to identify value is through painstaking study of each individual race. To do this requires experience and a thorough knowledge of the many factors that influence both the prediction of the likely winner of the race and the betting market for the race.

There are many tools available to aid your prediction, including long term horse racing statistics, knowledge of individual horse, trainer preferences, track knowledge and videos.

Then there is always luck, which may be put down as gut instinct or more appropriately the benefit of years of experience.

VALUE BETTING

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