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A Day At The Races

By Sharon Stajda

The allure and the excitement of the race track....

I wanted to find out once and for all what separates the winners from the losers at the race track?

When asking avid horse betters, "What does it take to pick a winner here at the track?" most answered "skill." When asking, "What finally makes you lay your money down?" most answer, "guts."

If you go to the track on any given day, you will see hordes of people enjoying a day at the races; making bets and yelling their hearts out in hopes that their "pick" will be the first to the finish line.

If one looks closer you will see another kind of better; a handicapper. A handicapper stands out in the track crowd. The handicapper has come to the track prepared to win. Between races, you won't see them getting up for food or drink. Their faces are buried deep into the horse better's bible; "The Daily Racing Form". A true horse handicapper derives much of their skill for picking winners from studying "The Daily Racing Form".

The Daily Racing Form is the only daily publication that is strictly geared to the horse racer. The Daily Racing Form has been around since 1894. Its headquarters are in Chicago, Illinois. The first publication printed on November 17, 1894 was only four pages long. It was and remains today the number one "America's Turf Authority" publication. Over 112 years later, the Daily Racing Form has evolved into a complex newspaper which publishes all the needed statistics for handicap races across the United States, along with insightful editorials on the world of racing. The paper publishes daily with the exception of Christmas day.

When polling several handicappers on what kind of race they prefer to bet on, all agreed: "a stakes race."

Stakes races occur annually, like the Kentucky Derby or Belmont Stakes. These races carry large purses, so they ultimately attract the cream of the crop in horses, jockeys, and trainers. As one handicapper told me, "There are fewer surprises...the talent is there...ripe for the picking."

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Other forms of races include claiming races. Claiming races are the most common types of races at the local track. In a claiming race, every horse on the field is up for sale. A price is pre-established by the owner(s) before the race begins. A horse may be claimed for its entered price by any other licensed horse owner. This transaction is done through a racing secretary. Once the race is over and a horse has been "claimed", the ownership of the horse is then transferred to its new owners. A claiming race evens the running field, as an owner would not enter a horse that is worth a greater value where the horse could be claimed at low value.

When handicapping a claiming race, I was told it is important to review past performance, jockey, and track condition. Does the horse prefer a dry track verses wet? Has the jockey been doing well with the horse?

Another type of race is the maiden race. This is the handicappers least favorite. A maiden race is made up of horses that have never before won a race.

Last but not least is the allowance race. The allowance race is where the Track Handicapped (Track Secretary) sets the conditions and the type of horses that can be entered into the race.

The handicappers I had the pleasure of spending the day with strongly advise: "Collect information, rely heavily on the performance of a horse, get to know the better jocks and trainers, and always refer to the Daily Racing Form. Oh yeah, and have the guts to put your money on the nose."

Sharon Stajda loves the thrill of a day at the races. For more information on horse racing, visit the following url:

<http://www.oldandsold.com/articles31n/horse--racing-1.shtml>

Major Road Bikes Cycle Races

By Alastair Hamilton

The major professional road bikes riders ride the major cycle races, and they are grouped together into the UCI Pro Tour and all the best races are included

The Best Riders Ride The Best Races.

The major cycle races in the world of bike racing are now all part of the UCI Pro Tour Races, this is quite a big list, which you can find below. All of the twenty Pro Tour teams have to ride them along with other teams invited by the organizers, who are usually local teams or the best of the lower ranked Continental Tour teams. All the races have a complicated points system that would take too long to explain here.

The Pro Tour Races are split into sections, which are: –

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· The Spring Classics, · The Major Tours, · The Autumn Classics, · The Shorter Tours, · The World Championships,

And then there are the other important but not so famous races.

The Major Tours.

The BIG three, the Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia and the Vuelta a España, they are all three weeks long and are the hardest races on the calendar and are the major cycle races of the year. All three go over the biggest mountains in their respective countries and venture in to neighbouring ones, sometimes for a few days. Until recently all bike racers rode the "Big Three", now they specialise and pick and chose their objectives. The organisers are not too happy about the UCI Pro Tour as they feel they are losing some of their power over their own races and were only included at the last minute this year and are still arguing over next year.

The Spring Classics.

The Spring Classics are the monuments of the one day races, all are held in the more northern European countries, apart from the first one, Milan–San Remo, but which is in the north of Italy in March and can get bad weather, like the others. The Tour of Flanders, Gent–Wevelgem and Paris–Roubaix are all ridden over the worst road conditions possible, with short sharp hills and cobbles, when it rains these roads turn into mud baths and are as easy to ride on as an ice rink. The others are more hilly and more suited to Tour riders and the better climbers, all these races are a must to see as anything can happen, but it is always a hard man who wins a major cycle race in the spring.

The Autumn Classics.

The Autumn Classics start just after the Tour de France, before and after the Vuelta a España and around the World championships. All these races have different characters and are held in different countries around Europe. The best known are the Classic San Sebastian in Spain, which is hard and hilly, the Paris–Tours, which is mostly flat and to round off the season, the Giro di Lombardia, which is

the last big race of the Pro Tour and is held, like Milan–San Remo, in the north of Italy.

The Shorter Stage Races.

These shorter stage races are dotted around the season and around Europe, some are used as training races for the stars to tune there form for the big stage races, but all are very important and carry much prestige for all. Paris–Nice is the first and is always a good pointer to a riders form for the Spring Classics or the Giro d'Italia. Then the more hilly races like Pays Vasco, Tour de Romadie, Tour de Swiss and the Dauphine Libere are a good build up for the Tour de France. They are all hard fought for wins in themselves and never easy.

The World Championships.

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The World Championships are now held very late in the season (September) and the big stars of the Tour de France don't usually ride, but for the single day specialists its still the race to win, and never won easily. The rainbow jersey is the jersey all riders dream of wearing for a year and will fight hard for it. The "Worlds" are the only races that riders compete for their country and not their sponsor, so there can be some strange allegiances.

Other Races.

There are other races on the Pro Tour calendar that are very important but not so well known, everyone wants to win these also, and in the end a win is a win. The Pro Tour teams can also ride in the lower Continental Tour races, some of these are well known and very prestigious, they carry less UCI points but are hard fought over, there is never an easy win in Professional cycle sport, especially in the major cycle races.

Alastair Hamilton publishes regularly technical articles on road bikes (

<http://www.bike-cycling-reviews.com/road-bikes.html>

) to some cycling online magazines. Reach

further reviews on bike components and cycling news at

<http://www.bike-cycling-reviews.com>

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