

## RACECOURSE REVIEW

# Trentham on top for a racing experience

**Our Racecourse Spy recently holidayed in New Zealand and reports on experiences of Wellington Cup Day at Trentham Racecourse**

**N**EW Zealand rugby is riding a wave of popularity generated by a long-awaited World Cup win. Judging by the atmosphere on course and the age profile of the crowds at Wellington Cup Day, Kiwi racing is equally vibrant. It's easy to understand why – excellent value for money, convenient public transportation, and an overall sense of patrons' needs being at the centre of the day's racing.

#### CONVENIENT TRANSPORT

Trentham racecourse is conveniently located along a Wellington commuter rail line. For Wellington Cup Day three express services were laid on for the 35-minute journey from the city centre. A return ticket cost NZ\$13, equating to a remarkably inexpensive €8.30. What made train travel even better was the 30 second walk from the platform to the racecourse entrance! The trains were packed with groups of late teens and 20-somethings intent on a sociable day out. From speaking to some patrons, Wellington Cup Day is a traditional date on the city's social calendar; the fixture was well advertised by way of posters in many city centre business premises.

Contrast the Wellington rail travel experience with the current situation at our premier tracks, Leopardstown and the Curragh. Both are situated right beside a LUAS and railway line respectively, serving Dublin city centre. Up to recent years, trains called at the Curragh stop on Derby day.

For planning reasons, the LUAS Green Line Racecourse stop has yet to open. Shuttle buses from rail stations are all very well, but if the aim is to increase attendances, especially from among younger sections of the population, convenient public transport to racing is a must. If the will is there, what's to prevent the re-introduction of Derby Day trains from Heuston Station direct to the Curragh?

#### ADMITTANCE

Standard racecourse admittance was NZ\$25 (€16), or NZ\$20 (€12.80) if booked online in advance. Access to the Members' Stand cost NZ\$75 (€48), and proved worthwhile – the stand houses seating overlooking the parade ring (known locally as the bird cage) and the finish line. More expensive corporate and mar-



The members stand on Trentham Cup day



No major race meeting is complete without a fashion competition



The Public stand at Trentham

#### WINNERS

>>Good value admittance  
>>Excellent transport links  
>>Value for money in food and drink

#### LOSERS

>>Tote only betting  
>>No previews in racecard

of iced water were prominently positioned at most of the public bars. A range of dining options was available. Racegoers on the move could choose from beef rolls and hotdogs costing NZ\$6 (€3.80), steak sandwiches at NZ\$5 (€3.20) and other quick food choices similarly sensibly priced. Such food was widely available from food halls and kiosks located throughout the public enclosures. Racegoers were encouraged to bring picnics onto the lawns in front of the public stands. Many patrons brought portable gazebos, adding to the carnival atmosphere.

#### OTHER FACILITIES

The 84-page race card cost NZ\$3 (€1.90) and was not overly reliant on advertising content. While the card did not contain detailed race previews or runner analyses, it did have full listings for the day's other fixtures in New Zealand and Australia, and "how to" TAB betting guides.

The card was available in pdf format from the course website on the Wednesday afternoon before racing. This facility allowed the uninitiated to get an advance sense of the day's racing (there were 10 races on the card), and appeared not to detract from the sale of racecards on the day. The NZ Racing Board encourages feedback on the raceday experience by way of an online survey advertised in the card – participants had the chance to win an iPad.

Unobtrusive MC commentary helped racegoers follow proceedings. Immediately after the finish of races parade ring interviews were conducted with winning trainers, jockeys and connections. Helpfully, winning and placed horses' names, rather than numbers only, were announced with the race results. Horses' saddle cloths were much larger than the Irish equivalent, and grooms leading the horses wore bibs with the horse numbers prominently displayed on front and back. Both pieces of equipment made viewing the parade ring activity from a distance easier than the current Irish experience.

Female jockeys feature prominently in New Zealand racing, and five of the 10 winners were ridden by women, including the winner of a feature race the Harcourts Thorndon Mile. As in Irish racing, family dynasties are involved – Six O'Clock News, the Wellington Cup winner, was trained by Trent Busuttin, whose father Paddy Busuttin trained Castletown to win the race in 1991, 1992 and 1994.

A free draw for racecourse members was held during racing, with prizes of betting vouchers worth NZ\$250. And it seems no major race meeting is complete without a fashion competition – in Trentham's case there was a myriad of competition categories, including "Mature Woman of the Carnival", "Rembrandt Man of the Carnival" and "Hat of the Carnival".

funds racing from the income derived from TAB.

With the increasing dominance of online and telephone betting options, the use by bookmakers of betting exchanges, and the widely publicised fall in turnover in the betting ring, the NZ experience provoked thoughts of what the atmosphere at an Irish racecourse would be without the betting ring. The ring is a colourful aspect of the Irish racecourse experience – it is hoped that whatever the outcome of the Government's current review of racing, any changes to betting regulation will in some way preserve the tradition of the on-course bookie, however not at any price.

#### FOOD AND DRINK

Together with the easy rail transport access, it was the range and value in food and drink facilities at Trentham that impressed most, and against which equivalent Irish racecourses compare unfavourably.

A sample of the drinks prices reflects the value for money on offer – a 18.75cl bottle of sparkling wine cost NZ\$12 (€7.70), beer NZ\$5-7 (€3.20-4.50), and a spirit with mixer NZ\$8 (€5.10). In line with the country's mature attitude to alcohol consumption, complimentary glasses

queue packages were also available on the day.

#### BETTING

The betting experience in New Zealand is similar to that in France, with a tote monopoly, meaning no on-course betting ring. The Tote is run by TAB, which is owned and operated by the New Zealand Racing Board; the Board