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Horse Racing Phrases and Commonly used Terms.

Allowance

Inexperienced riders (apprentices, conditionals and amateurs) are allowed a weight concession to compensate for their lack of experience against their colleagues. The 'allowance' is usually 3lb, 5lb or 7lb, with it decreasing as the young jockey rides more winners.

Amateur

A non-professional jockey who does not receive a fee for riding in a race, denoted on the racecard by the prefix Mr, Mrs, Miss, Captain etc. Some races are restricted to amateurs-only.

Apprentice

A trainee Flat jockey connected to the stable of a licensed trainer. Apprentices have a weight allowance when they ride in races against professional jockeys and can compete for the annual Apprentice title, given to the winner of the most races during the season.

Breeze-Up

Type of auction, usually for two-year-olds, at which the horses for sale run for a short distance to allow prospective buyers to assess them.

Bumper

A Flat race run under Jump Rules, used to educate young prospective jumps horses before they tackle hurdles or fences. Officially called National Hunt Flat Race.

Black type

Term used by the bloodstock industry to denote a horse that has won or been placed in a Pattern/Listed race. Horses 'going for black type' are attempting to win or be placed in a Pattern/Listed race to improve their breeding value.

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Bleeder

A horse that tends to break blood vessels during a race.

Blinds

Another name for blinkers.

Blinkers

A form of headgear worn by the horse, consisting of a hood with cups around the eyes. They are used to limit a horse's vision and reduce distractions, with the aim of making it concentrate. A horse wearing blinkers is denoted on a racecard by a small b next to the horse's weight (b1 indicates that the horse is wearing blinkers in a race for the first time).

Blowout

A short workout, usually a day or two before a race, designed to clear the horse's airways before the race.

Boxed in

A horse that cannot overtake another horse because it is blocked by other horses.

Boxwalker

A horse that constantly walks around its stable and doesn't settle.

Break (a horse) in

Teaching a young horse to accept riding equipment and carry a rider.

Breather

Restraining or easing off on a horse for a short distance to permit him to fill his lungs during the race.

Backward

A horse that is either too young or not fully fit.

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Conditional jockey

A Jump jockey, under 26, who receives a weight allowance for inexperience until he has ridden a certain number of winners. A conditional jockey is licensed to a specific trainer. Some races are restricted to conditionals-only.

Conditions race

A race in which horses are allotted extra weight according to factors including sex, age, whether they are a previous winner etc. This is a better-class race for horses just below Group or Listed level.

Conformation

A horse's build and general physical structure; the way he is put together.

Connections

People associated with a horse, such as the owner and trainer.

Course specialist

A horse that is proven at a track in previous races.

Covered up

When a jockey keeps a horse behind other runners to prevent it running too freely in the early stages of a race.

Chaser

A horse that takes part in steeplechase races.

Checked

When a horse's run during a race is momentarily blocked by another horse or horses.

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Cheekpieces

Strips of sheepskin that are attached to the side of a horse's bridle. They partially obscure a horse's rear vision, with the aim of getting the horse to concentrate on racing. Horses wearing cheekpieces are denoted on a racecard by a small p next to the horse's weight.

Chute

Extension of racecourse, usually at the top of the home straight, to allow straight run from the start.

Claimer (jockey)

An apprentice Flat jockey.

Claiming race / Claimer

A race in which each horse's weight is determined by the price placed on them by connections. The lower the claiming price, the lower the weight. Horses can be 'claimed' (bought) by other owners/trainers for the specified price after the race.

Classic

Group of historic major races for three-year-olds in the Flat season. In Britain the five Classics are (in running order) the 2,000 Guineas, the 1,000 Guineas, the Oaks, the Derby and the St Leger – most European countries have their own versions of these Classics. A Classic contender is a horse being aimed at one of these races or is regarded as having the potential to compete at that level.

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Draw

A horse's starting position in the stalls allotted in races on the Flat. Stall numbers are drawn at random by Weatherbys (except in a handful of top races that allow each horse's connections, having been randomly selected, to choose the stall number for their horse). A horse with a seemingly advantageous draw is said to be "well drawn". Stalls are used for Flat racing only.

Dwell/dwelt (at the start)

To start slowly.

Dark horse

A horse regarded as having potential but whose full capabilities have not been revealed. A trainer will plan a horse's campaign carefully so that it does not carry too much weight in a major handicap. Punters often perceive these types of horses as a 'dark horse'.

Entire horse

An ungelded horse.

Flat racing

Racing without jumps. The centrepiece of the Flat racing season is the Turf season, which runs from late March to early November. Races are run over a minimum distance of 5f up to a maximum of 2m6f. However, the birth of All-Weather racing in 1989, has allowed Flat racing to continue year-round, and the official Flat racing season now runs for a calendar year to include those Flat races run on all-weather surfaces.

Front-runner

A horse whose running style is to attempt to get on or near the lead at the start of the race and stay there as long as possible.

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First string

Where a trainer and/or owner has more than one runner in a race, the horse considered to be the stable's main fancy is referred to as the stable's first string. Clues to which horse this is can be whether it carries the owner's first colours, is ridden by the stable jockey and/or is shorter odds in the betting than a stablemate.

Group / Graded races

These races form the upper tier of the racing structure, with Group/Grade 1 the most important, followed by Group/Grade 2 and Group/Grade 3. Group races are run on the Flat; Graded races are run over jumps (the most important Flat races in the United States are also Graded).

Green

Used to describe an immature or inexperienced horse.

Hacked up

Describes a horse winning easily.

Handicap

A race where each horse is allotted a different weight to carry, according to the official handicap ratings determined by the BHA Handicappers. The theory is that all horses run on a fair and equal basis – the 'perfect' handicap being one where all the runners finish in a dead-heat.

Hard ridden

Used to describe a horse whose jockey is expending full effort on the horse, and using his whip.

Headquarters

Newmarket, traditionally seen as the home of Flat racing, is often called Headquarters.

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Hurdler

A horse that races over hurdles, which are lighter and lower than fences.

Hurdles

The smaller obstacles on a jumps course. Horses usually have a season or two over hurdles before progressing to fences, though some continue to specialise in hurdling and never run over fences, while some horses go straight over fences without trying hurdles first.

In running

Refers to events that take place during the course of a race.

Juvenile hurdler

The youngest category of hurdler – juvenile hurdlers are those that turn four years of age (on January 1) during the season in which they start hurdling.

Jocked off

Term used to refer to when one jockey is replaced by another on a horse he usually rides or for which he has already been booked to ride in a particular race.

Length

A unit of measurement for the distances between each horse at the finish of a race; the measurement of a horse from head to tail.

Levy

A surcharge collected from bookmakers, based on their turnover or gross profits, which goes towards prize-money, improvements to racecourses, and other areas such as scientific research. The body responsible for this is the Levy Board.

Mare

Female horse aged five years old or above.

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Minimum trip

The shortest race distance: five furlongs on the Flat, two miles over jumps.

Non-trier

A horse that is prevented by the jockey from running to its full ability. Non-trying is a serious offence prohibited by the rules of racing, and jockeys (as well as the horse and owner) can be banned from racing if they are found guilty, while the horse's trainer risks a fine and/or a ban.

Nursery

A handicap on the Flat for two-year-old horses.

National Hunt

Racing over fences and hurdles; officially referred to as Jump racing.

Overnight declarations

Horses entered for a race must be 'declared to run' and this usually happens the day before a race – horses left in a race at this stage are known as 'overnight declarations' and they comprise the final field for each race which appears on the day of the race in newspapers and in racecards. At this stage a trainer must also 'declare' the jockey who will ride the horse and any equipment (e.g. blinkers) the horse will carry – this information also appears on racecards in newspapers and at the racecourse.

Overround

In theory, a betting book can be fairly weighted between bookmaker and punter. However, to ensure a profit margin, a bookmaker will alter the odds in their favour. Overround is a means of expressing to what extent the odds are in favour of the bookmaker. An evenly weighted book is expressed as 100%, and the more the odds move in the bookmaker's favour the more that figure rises. Thus a book that is weighted 20% in favour of a bookmaker is expressed as 120% overround.

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Over the top

When a horse is considered to be past its peak due to too much racing/training and needs a rest.

Off the bridle

Describes a horse being pushed along and losing contact with the bit in its mouth.

Off the pace

When a horse is some distance behind the front-runners in a race.

One-paced

Describes a horse that is unable to raise its pace in the closing stages of a race.

On the bridle

Describes a horse running comfortably, still having a bite on the bit. A horse that wins 'on the bridle' is regarded as having won easily.

Open ditch

Steeplechase jump with a ditch on the approach side to the fence.

Out of the handicap

When handicap races are framed, there is a maximum and minimum weight that horses can carry. When a horse's rating means that its allocated weight is lower than the minimum for that race, it is said to be 'out of the handicap'. e.g. in a Flat handicap where a horse set to carry the minimum weight of 7st 7lb is rated 65, a horse rated 62 would be allocated 7st 4lb in the long handicap but would have to carry the minimum 7st 7lb in the race – this horse would be described as being '3lb out of the handicap' (ie it would be carrying 3lb more than its 'true' handicap weight).

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Pacemaker

A horse that is entered in a race with the intention that it will set the pace for another horse with the same connections.

Parade

Before major races, the horses often line up in racecard order (numerical order) and led in front of the grandstands to allow racegoers to see them. At the end of the parade the horses are released to canter down to the start.

Penalised horses

Horses that have incurred a weight penalty as a result of previous successes.

Penalty

Additional weight carried by a horse on account of previous wins. In a handicap, a penalty is added to a horse's original weight if it has won in between being entered for the race and running in it, as the handicapper has not had the opportunity to re-assess that horse's handicap rating. A penalty (commonly 6lb) is shown after the horse's name on Racing Post racecards – e.g. Horsename (ex6).

Pulled up

A horse that drops out of a race and does not finish.

Pulling

When a horse is unsettled during the early part of a race and uses too much energy, fighting the jockey by pulling against the bridle.

Pushed out

When a horse is ridden vigorously, but without full effort by the jockey.

Quarters

The hind parts of a horse, specifically between flank and tail.

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Rating

A measure of the ability of a horse on a scale starting at zero and going into three figures. Flat Jump racing use different scales; the highest-rated Flat horse is usually in the 130s and the top-rated jumper in the 180s.

Rule 4

Tattersalls Rule 4 (c): One of the most commonly invoked betting rules, dealing with deductions from winning bets in the event of any withdrawn runner(s) from a race. The rule applies to winning bets struck at prices (e.g. morning prices) laid before a withdrawal (other than ante-post bets, which are unaffected by Rule 4 (c)) and to starting-price bets where, after a late withdrawal, there is insufficient time to re-form the market. The rate of deductions is in proportion to the odds of the non-runner(s) at the time of the withdrawal.

Staying on

When a horse is finishing strongly in a race, possibly a sign of good stamina reserves.

Steeplechasing

A race over fences, open ditches and water jumps, run over distances from two miles up to four and a half miles.

Stewards' Enquiry

A hearing held by the stewards into a race to determine whether the rules of racing have been broken.

Stick

A jockey's whip

String

All the horses in a particular training stable.

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Schooling

Training a horse for jumping.

Second string

The stable's second choice from two or more runners in a race.

Selling plate/selling race

Low-class race in which the winner is offered at auction afterwards; other horses in the race may be claimed for a fixed sum. If the winning stable buys back its own horse it is said to be 'bought in'. The racecourse receives a percentage of the selling price of each horse.

Selling plater

A horse that is entered in a selling plate because it is not expected to win in any higher grade, or because it can do well against moderate opposition, which may result in a betting coup.

Silks

See 'Colours'.

Spread a plate

When a horse damages or loses a horseshoe before a race, it is said to have 'spread a plate'. The horse has to be re-shod by a farrier, often delaying the start of the race.

Springer

A horse whose price shortens dramatically.

Tongue tie

Strip of material tied around a horse's tongue and lower jaw to keep it from swallowing its tongue, which can clog its air passage. A horse wearing a tongue tie is denoted on a racecard by a small t next to the horse's weight (t1 indicates that the horse is wearing a tongue tie in a race for the first time).

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Trip

Another term for the distance of a race. When a horse has the stamina for a certain distance, it is said to 'stay/get the trip'

Turned out

- 1) Racecourses often have a 'best turned out' award for the horse judged to have been best presented in the paddock.
- 2) A racehorse that is taking a break from racing/training and is out in the fields is said to have been 'turned out'.

Turn of foot

A horse's ability to accelerate in the closing stages of a race. A horse with a 'good turn of foot' has good finishing speed.

Under starters orders/under orders

The moment a race is about to begin. Once the horses are in the stalls for a Flat race, or have lined up at the start for a jumps race, they are said to be 'under starter's orders' as the jockeys are waiting for the starter's signal to begin the race.

Unfancied

Not expected to win.

Valet

A person employed to prepare a jockey's equipment in the weighing room.

Visor

Similar to blinkers, but with a slit in each eye cup to allow some lateral vision. A horse wearing a visor is denoted on a racecard by a small v next to the horse's weight (v1 indicates that the horse is wearing a visor in a race for the first time).

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Weighing in/out

Each jockey (wearing his racing kit and carrying his saddle) must stand on official weighing scales before and after the race, so that the Clerk of the Scales can check that the jockey is carrying the correct weight allotted to his horse. If a jockey is above the allotted weight before the race, his horse can still compete but must carry overweight. When the weights carried by the winner and placed horses have been verified after the race, there will be an announcement that they have 'weighed in'. This confirms the race result and at this point bookmakers will pay out on successful bets.

Weight cloth

A cloth with pockets for lead weights placed under the saddle to ensure that a horse carries its allotted weight.

Weight for age

A graduated scale that shows how horses of differing ages progress month by month during the racing season, the differences being expressed in terms of weight. This allows horses of differing ages to compete against each other on a fair basis, based on their age and maturity, in what are known as weight-for-age races.

Weights

Lead placed in a weight cloth. When these weights are added to the jockey's weight and other equipment, the total weight should equal the weight allotted to the jockey's horse in a race.

Well in

When a horse is considered to be favoured by the weights in a race, it is said to be 'well in'.

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Whip

Or stick. Used by jockey as an aid to encourage or steer and balance the horse.

Work rider

A stable employee, not necessarily a licensed jockey, who rides horses in training on the gallops.

Walkover

A race involving only one horse. The horse and its jockey must past the winning post to be declared the winner.

Yard

A trainer's premises from where racehorses are trained.

Yielding

Irish term to describe racecourse going that is soft.

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