

RACING POST



THE
**DEFINITIVE
GUIDE**

TO
BETTING ON THE
ALL-WEATHER



David Bellingham

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INTRODUCTION

It was the evening of 6 January 1994, and I was lounging about in my room at the Towcester Travelodge in Northamptonshire, just south of the town on the A43. My original plan had been to attend the jumps fixture at Towcester the following day and then drive down on the morning of 8 January for what is now known as the Tolworth Hurdle meeting at Sandown. However, the weather intervened, and the Towcester meeting was likely to be frozen off, but I was desperate for some horse action so had decided that if my original destination was unable to race, I would grab the bull by the horns and go up to attend the All-Weather fixture at Southwell instead.

Even though All-Weather racing had been going for over four years I had never been to a meeting before, not that I had anything against it (I had already witnessed racing on non-grass surfaces at first hand when attending the Breeders' Cups of 1991, 1992 and 1993). It was just that there was usually a Flat turf or jumps fixture taking place closer to where I live, but I had always intended to go to an All-Weather meeting at some point and this might turn out to be an opportunity.

Just in case it turned out that I was indeed going to end up at Southwell, I decided to sit down on the floor of my room at the Travelodge and try to calculate some 'speed figures' for the meeting. I had kept the results from the pull-out section of the *Sporting Life Weekender*, both for the Flat and the jumps, and had them filed away in a rather snazzy green folder with gold leaf provided by the publishers, which I had fortunately brought along with me. I also had a calculator close at hand, without which I would have been well and truly lumbered. I was fascinated to see how these speed figures would perform at a British All-Weather fixture, knowing how important they were for bettors in the US, particularly on dirt. I'm not going to

pretend these figures were anything elaborate as this was going to be an unintended visit if it turned out that way, but at least they would be something and without them I would have been totally in the dark.

With Towcester duly having been called off and after consulting the road map in my car, I made my way up the M1 and somehow managed to arrive at Southwell racecourse. Don't ask me how, as the route I took then isn't one I would entertain now, but I was there safe and sound and that was the main thing. In those days meetings at this time of year counted towards the Flat Jockeys' Championship. I still think they should do so now, but that's a completely different subject. However, for that reason some big-name jockeys were riding at this fixture, not least Frankie Dettori and Jason Weaver. Frankie would go on to ride 233 winners that year to clinch the title, while Jason rode 200. That's quite a feat for someone to achieve that milestone and yet still not be champion jockey. Other notable riders at this meeting were Jimmy Quinn and Joe Fanning, the only others apart from Frankie to still be riding now, while Chris Rutter, Dale Gibson and Nicky Carlisle have all gone on to high office.

Frankie rode the first winner on the card, a horse named Akabusi (trained by Lord Huntingdon) in the first division of the 7f maiden. It was also the perfect start for the speed figures as they had him well out in front, so I was feeling quite pleased with myself. Things got even better when Just Harry won the following 1m handicap under Darren Biggs, but despite now being two from two punting-wise I never thought for one moment this game was going to be easy (experience had told me how futile such thoughts can be). I was now approaching this new game with a degree of confidence, though, and that was always going to be important.

The third race on the card was a 1m claimer and even though I thought No Submission would win, I decided to sit the race out. I didn't like claimers then and I still don't. I just find them too hard to fathom and usually they are uncompetitive races from the punter's point of view. The eight-year-old duly won easily under Frankie, but although I had stuck to my guns and decided not to invest in this contest, part of me was a little sore that I had missed a 3-1 winner! No Submission would go on the win 19 times on the All-Weather in his career, 15 of those at Southwell, and it was watching him rack up so many wins at Southwell which first brought home to me the whole concept of an All-Weather track specialist.

I had my punting boots back on in time for Rad to win the second division of the 7f maiden under Wendyll Woods, while the

winning run continued when Warwick Warrior easily landed the 6f handicap under Jason Weaver. The sixth race was a no-bet contest for me as not only was it a 1m3f claimer, but it was also a 1m3f *amateur-riders'* claimer! I don't think I would have backed the 50-1 winner Sporting Spirit in any case.

The best was yet to come, however, as somehow Royal Citizen managed to get back up after looking beaten in the concluding 1m4f handicap, thereby completing a treble on the day for Dettori. I was more than delighted with his 7-1 odds, and even more delighted when a swift count of the cash after racing had revealed that I had made a profit of well over £700 on the day! That was no mean feat considering that my average stake was a bit smaller than it is now. I remember driving away from the track with a real sense of satisfaction, not only because of the financial benefit but because I had a most enjoyable experience. Incidentally, the Sandown meeting I was due to attend on the Saturday was also abandoned and I ended up going to the jumps fixture at Warwick instead.

I vowed that I would be back at Southwell as soon as possible, despite the course being over 100 miles from my home, and that I would also try to get to Lingfield and Wolverhampton (the latter had only just become an All-Weather track). There is no doubt that because of what happened on that cold winter's day back in 1994 I became hooked on All-Weather racing, and it's a passion I have retained to this day.

In 1997 I was fortunate to realise a lifetime's dream when I landed a job with *Raceform* (soon to become part of the *Racing Post*), where I stayed until 2018, though I still do work for them on a freelance basis (Spotlights, analysis and close-ups). It wasn't long after joining the company that I began to write under the pseudonym of 'King Of The Sand' in the *Racing and Football Outlook*, and soon after that I took over compiling *Raceform's* Split Second speed ratings. These two jobs became very closely knit, as speed figures were a vital part in coming up with my weekly selections as 'KOTS' and they still play a big part in my betting now. That will become very clear throughout these pages.

The idea for writing this book was first discussed at the start of 2020, the plan being to publish in the autumn of that year. It had been 12 years since my last book, but I had been keen not to write another one until things had changed sufficiently to make another volume worthwhile. I felt that now was the time as not only had Newcastle become an All-Weather venue, but Wolverhampton

had changed its surface for a second time and Great Leighs had reinvented itself as Chelmsford City.

However, soon after the idea for the book was first mooted Covid happened and everything changed, hence the two-year delay. Another major change occurred when Southwell ditched its Fibresand surface in favour of Tapeta at the end of 2021, so there was something else new to discuss.

As I said in the last book, horseracing should be fun, but it can be an opportunity to make money if you put a little work in and know what you are doing. Hopefully, how to spot those opportunities will come across within these pages.

CHELMSFORD

It had been a long time coming (indeed I never thought it would happen) but here we were about to see the revealing of a brand-new racetrack, the first in England since Taunton opened its doors in 1927. There had been a series of frustrating delays over the previous couple of years, but now we were on the cusp of a new adventure, or so it seemed.

It was 18 April 2008 and at that time I was working for *Racing Post/Raceform* as a race analyst and compiler of the *Raceform* Split Second speed ratings. I was also writing the 'King Of The Sand' column in the *Racing and Football Outlook* and it was in that capacity that I had received an invitation to attend the opening fixture, which was due to take place two days later. I was given details on where to go and what I was likely to see and it was made quite clear this wouldn't be the sort of normal race day experience I was used to. For one thing, although the racing infrastructure was now complete and had met all the criteria required to stage a proper race meeting, the public infrastructure was not. Therefore, attendance at this meeting would be by invitation only and I remember feeling privileged that I had been included in that group. The anticipation grew when, after a near two-hour drive, those stirrup-shaped floodlights suddenly loomed on the horizon.

It was a rather strange environment for a race meeting to take place in. Apart from Cartmel, I had never been to a racecourse where all the facilities were on the inside of the track, but that was the situation here and it remains the case at the time of writing. I also remember the mud, lots of it, because I was basically viewing racing from a building site. Many of my press colleagues had taken advantage of the blue plastic coverings you could place over your



They have just over a circuit to go in the staying event at Chelmsford (Megan Rose Photography).

shoes to keep the mud off them, but for some reason I didn't use them, something I quickly regretted. These were all trivial matters in the overall scheme of things, though, and having been given a guided tour of the facilities, including all the areas the public would eventually be able to use, it was now time for history to be made.

The first race on the card was a 6f fillies' maiden which was won easily by the 7-4 favourite Temple Of Thebes (Ed Dunlop/Stevie Donohoe) and the initial feedback was positive, about the track itself at least. Things appeared to go well in the following few weeks including the first fixture open to the public on 28 May (another meeting I had the pleasure of attending). In September of that year the track even staged a fixture that was advertised as a Breeders' Cup Trials meeting and even though events here would be unlikely to have much bearing on what was due to happen on the other side of the Atlantic later in the autumn, this was still a notable meeting with plenty of good horses and good prize money on offer, including four valuable conditions events. Even internationally renowned South African trainer Mike de Kock had a few runners on the card, and he didn't leave empty-handed, winning the concluding contest over 1m1f with Lucky Find, albeit the gelding was the least fancied of his two runners!

It was therefore sad, especially for someone like me who personally witnessed the track's early development, when Great Leighs was placed into administration the following January (the last

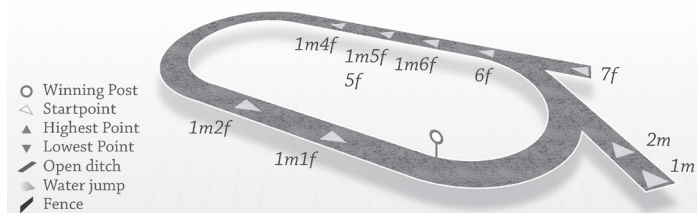
fixture took place on 11 January) and everything suddenly ground to a halt, just nine months after the optimism and excitement of that very first fixture. However, despite several false dawns the track eventually reopened on 11 January 2015, not as Great Leighs but as Chelmsford City Racecourse.

Happily, the track has established itself since then with good prize money and often a nice type of horse. For instance, Highfield Princess's record at the track read 1121213 before her meteoric rise in the summer of 2022, while after Newbury was abandoned on 16 April 2016 due to waterlogging the meeting was transferred to Chelmsford including the three Group 3 contests, the Greenham, Fred Darling and John Porter. It wasn't long before the track was staging classier contests in its own right with the introduction of two Listed races for fillies and mares, the Queen Charlotte Stakes in 2018 and the Chelmer Stakes in 2019. The former event has already established an attractive Roll Of Honour, having been won by the dual Group 1 winner Billesdon Brook in 2019 while Highfield Princess herself won it in 2021.

Chelmsford has always had a Polytrack surface (silica sand with fibres made from various components and covered with wax) and was a floodlit track ever since the Great Leighs days. The circuit is just over 1m round with separate starting chutes for races over 7f and 1m, while the back and home straights are around 2f in length. It's also a wide track, 22 metres in width with two sweeping bends of more than 135 metres in radius. Therefore, you often find that the field fans right out on the entrance to the home straight and the real question here is whether those who stay inside (and therefore cover less ground) are favoured or whether those who come wider find themselves on the faster part of the track.

Unfortunately, it isn't a question that can be answered beforehand. As with the other tracks you may need to wait until a few races have been run to see what is happening, but it can be worth the wait as on many occasions a bias (towards or against the inside rail) can be identified. Of course, it's no good to you if you have already placed a bet as you don't know what the jockey's intentions are, and even if they already had a plan in mind it might have to change subject to circumstances. My own view is that (and this is true of a couple of the other tracks as well) attempting to put in a sustained effort from off the pace close to the inside rail is difficult. It may not be true at every fixture of course, hence the need for a little patience.

Such biases can be useful to in-running players, but also to those of us who analyse a contest post-race with a view to the future. In other words, was the horse helped or hindered by where they raced, especially when making their final efforts? Were they flattered or can their performance be forgiven and even be marked up? When the horse in question runs again you will be in possession of the sort of information many other punters aren't. Therefore, taking the time to do this is time well spent.



FIVE-SEASON TOP JOCKEY, TRAINER AND SIRE STATISTICS FOR CHELMSFORD

Below are the top jockeys, trainers, and sire statistics at Chelmsford since the start of 2018 to the end of June 2022. To qualify for the listing and to provide a more meaningful sample, a jockey must have had at least 20 rides at the track within that period and a trainer at least 20 runners. Both must have had at least 10 winners and a strike rate of at least 10 per cent. There is a little more flexibility when it comes to sires. Again, they must have had at least 20 runners during the period but need to have had five winners or more and a strike rate of at least 15 per cent. As is shown, the profit or loss is to a £1 level stake.

JOCKEYS

%	RIDES	WNS	P/L (£1)	NAME
50	26	13	+6.43	FRANKIE DETTORI
29	135	39	+23.43	JIM CROWLEY
27	94	25	+10.46	RYAN MOORE
25	156	39	-49.32	JAMES DOYLE
24	244	59	-12.46	OISIN MURPHY
21	47	10	+53.63	FINLEY MARSH
20	97	19	-5.63	WILLIAM BUICK
19	176	33	+38.17	R. KINGSCOTE
19	90	17	-14.66	ANDREA ATZENI

18	271	49	-40.36	ADAM KIRBY
18	197	36	+38.17	P.J. MCDONALD
18	114	21	-8.02	MARTIN HARLEY
18	113	20	-47.87	JAMIE SPENCER
17	169	29	-55.82	S. DE SOUSA
17	150	26	+2.89	JASON HART
17	133	23	+43.93	RAY DAWSON
16	148	23	+19.99	JOE FANNING
15	310	45	-97.01	ROBERT HAVLIN
15	247	38	-16.53	JACK MITCHELL
15	200	29	-31.71	JASON WATSON
15	151	22	+4.93	KIERAN SHOEMARK
15	101	15	-13.33	PAT COSGRAVE
15	93	14	-24.08	ROBERT WINSTON
14	330	47	+102.77	CALLUM SHEPHERD
14	267	38	-26.89	FRANNY NORTON
14	205	28	-37.05	ROSSA RYAN
14	161	23	-15.88	CIEREN FALLON
14	144	20	-24.50	BEN CURTIS
14	131	18	+0.63	MARTIN DWYER
14	74	10	-22.43	NICKY MACKAY
13	166	22	+79.48	SEAN LEVEY
13	159	21	-37.46	MARCO GHIANI
13	156	20	-50.88	DYLAN HOGAN
13	120	15	-52.51	CHARLES BISHOP
12	332	40	-43.48	HOLLIE DOYLE
12	83	10	-31.88	HARRY BENTLEY
11	341	38	-152.60	TOM MARQUAND
11	205	23	-77.56	STEVIE DONOHOE
11	184	21	-48.04	DAVID EGAN
11	170	19	-24.72	A. RAWLINSON
11	171	18	-35.20	HAYLEY TURNER
11	170	18	+7.63	ROB HORNBY
11	141	16	-38.68	GEORGE ROOKE
11	132	15	-77.36	HECTOR CROUCH
10	645	65	-163.29	LUKE MORRIS
10	374	37	-159.51	DAVID PROBERT
10	267	26	-76.93	DANIEL MUSCUTT
10	172	17	+27.25	DOUGIE COSTELLO
10	130	13	-43.38	PADDY MATHERS
10	97	10	+8.38	GABRIELE MALUNE

TRAINERS

%	RNRS	WNS	P/L (£1)	NAME
29	75	22	-25.68	CHARLIE APPLEBY
26	221	58	-42.92	J. & T. GOSDEN
25	93	23	+39.67	RALPH BECKETT
23	162	37	-30.92	SAEED BIN SUROOR
23	125	29	-35.05	SIR M. STOUTE
22	68	15	+0.28	JOHN QUINN
22	67	15	+20.20	OWEN BURROWS
20	117	23	-26.19	JAMES TATE
20	207	41	+38.18	RICHARD HUGHES
19	78	15	-3.56	CHARLES HILLS
19	115	22	+0.70	IAN WILLIAMS
19	136	26	+62.44	MICHAEL BELL
19	127	24	-45.07	ROGER VARIAN
18	160	28	-71.66	WILLIAM HAGGAS
17	435	76	-32.42	C. & M. JOHNSTON
17	122	21	-19.06	S. & E. CRISFORD
16	279	46	-50.67	DAVID SIMCOCK
16	137	22	-62.62	HUGO PALMER
15	66	10	-3.43	JOSEPH TUIE
15	78	12	+6.58	MICK CHANNON
14	220	30	-29.68	HENRY SPILLER
14	140	20	+29.44	MARK USHER
13	203	27	-84.84	ANDREW BALDING
13	207	27	-41.28	ARCHIE WATSON
13	102	13	-25.19	C. FELLOWES
13	143	18	-44.20	SIR M. PRESCOTT
13	378	50	-141.16	STUART WILLIAMS
12	85	10	-40.65	JAMES FANSHAWE
12	198	24	+15.23	J. CHAPPLE-HYAM
12	558	68	-92.54	MICHAEL APPLEBY
12	124	15	-10.63	MIKE MURPHY
12	179	22	+19.96	ROBERT COWELL
11	186	20	-30.72	DAVID O'MEARA
11	198	22	-43.28	ED DUNLOP
11	101	11	-1.38	GAY KELLEWAY
11	90	10	+0.58	GEORGE SCOTT
11	208	23	-58.15	JAMIE OSBORNE
11	204	23	-61.04	MARCO BOTTI
11	105	12	-39.20	RAE GUEST

11	106	12	+13.88	SHAUN KEIGHTLEY
11	113	12	-14.63	SIMON DOW
10	124	12	-3.25	AMY MURPHY
10	266	27	-49.38	CHARLIE WALLIS
10	277	28	-80.65	DEAN IVORY
10	157	16	+35.63	IVAN FURTADO
10	163	17	-12.50	TONY CARROLL

Note: In the case of trainers who hold a joint licence, the statistics for the individual who held it previously have been incorporated into those for the joint licence.

SIRES

%	RNRS	WNS	P/L (£1)	NAME
35	23	8	+12.32	THEWAYYOUARE
30	27	8	+82.96	THE GURKHA
23	26	6	-0.38	KODI BEAR
22	82	18	+7.00	WAR FRONT
21	61	13	-18.38	DECLARATION OF WAR
21	112	24	-28.01	FRANKEL
21	56	12	+13.97	POWER
21	61	13	+9.85	SPEIGHTSTOWN
20	64	13	+6.45	ROCK OF GIBRALTAR
20	65	13	+88.00	WAR COMMAND
19	74	14	+5.28	ARCANO
19	27	5	+8.08	BLAME
19	174	33	-50.82	DUBAWI
19	31	6	-3.54	KITTEN'S JOY
19	199	37	-12.54	LOPE DE VEGA
18	28	5	+0.43	ANJAAL
18	40	7	+25.83	BIG BAD BOB
18	91	16	-4.43	CHARM SPIRIT
18	73	13	+13.01	GLENEAGLES
17	35	6	-0.20	AUSSIE RULES
17	30	5	-1.62	FARHH
17	70	12	+4.33	FASTNET ROCK
17	102	17	+16.74	NEW APPROACH
17	82	14	-27.56	SIYOUNI
16	401	64	-29.43	DARK ANGEL
16	44	7	+41.00	EXCELLENT ART
16	49	8	+4.94	KENDARGENT
16	32	5	-3.50	MAKFI
16	100	16	-24.89	SEA THE STARS

15	135	20	-18.24	CAPE CROSS
15	53	8	-0.25	DICK TURPIN
15	67	10	-24.23	DRAGON PULSE
15	111	17	+45.48	FOXWEDGE
15	53	8	+10.30	GOLDEN HORN
15	102	15	+57.45	HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR
15	213	31	-56.53	INVINCIBLE SPIRIT
15	60	9	-11.67	LEROIDESANIMAUX
15	144	22	-11.30	LETHAL FORCE
15	52	8	-2.64	MEHMAS
15	46	7	-4.00	MORPHEUS
15	33	5	-9.50	MULTIPLEX
15	111	17	+36.50	NATHANIEL
15	41	6	-12.30	SCAT DADDY
15	73	11	+42.63	SLADE POWER
15	47	7	-1.75	TWILIGHT SON

These types of statistics are widely available (albeit less so with the sires) and constantly updated elsewhere, but when I first generated them for this book a couple of things struck me, especially among the jockeys. The top three riders in terms of the percentage of winners-to-rides are big names, those you would expect at most racecourses not just at Chelmsford, but you would also expect them to have a level-stake loss given how often these riders are backed blind. Not in this case, though, and given the total number of rides during the period (especially in the case of Dettori and Moore) it seems clear to me that when they turn up at Chelmsford they do so for fancied rides. It's certainly true of Dettori, hence a 50 per cent strike rate! Clearly with Frankie the only way is Essex.

It's well worth looking further down the list too, as although their strike rates aren't as high as the previously mentioned trio, the likes of Callum Shepherd and Sean Levey do rather better around here than the betting market would have indicated. They aren't the only ones, though, so if you like one ridden by one of those jockeys who show a good profit such as Messrs Shepherd and Levey, it should fill you with a bit more confidence.

CHELMSFORD DRAW AND PACE STATISTICS

Below are the draw and pace statistics for each distance at Chelmsford from 1 January 2020 up to 30 June 2022. The statistics for pace (next to Front-Runners, Prominent Horses and Hold Up Horses)

are shown as an Impact Value, with an IV of 1.0 meaning average. The way these IV figures are arrived at is explained in more detail in the 'Track and Pace Bias' chapter, but for now suffice to say the higher the figure the more that group is favoured over the trip.

The draw statistics are fairly self-explanatory. Next to the draw are the number of horses to have started from that stall within the period, followed by the number of winners from the stall and then the percentage of winners to runners from that draw, not the percentage of winners to the number of races.

5f

Front-Runners	1.7
Prominent Horses	1.4
Hold Up Horses	0.6

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	83	13	16
2	84	15	18
3	82	13	16
4	81	10	12
5	76	12	16
6	76	5	7
7	64	9	14
8	51	1	2
9	37	5	14
10	26	2	8
11	15	1	7
12	9	0	0

6f

Front-Runners	2.2
Prominent Horses	1.2
Hold Up Horses	0.6

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	142	22	15
2	143	25	17
3	151	16	11
4	147	15	10
5	147	7	5
6	138	19	14
7	122	16	13
8	106	11	10

9	92	9	10
10	69	8	12
11	51	4	8
12	42	1	2
13	18	0	0
14	12	1	8

Apart from early speed being an advantage over the sprint trips, so is a low draw and this is a theme that will be repeated at most of the All-Weather tracks, particularly those that stage sprint races around a bend and this bias will be of more significance at some tracks than others. The layout of the course is very much a contributory factor with a left-hand bend soon to be negotiated. Clearly a wide draw is a major disadvantage over these distances, as on many occasions a horse will be stuck out wide while rounding a long sweeping bend and the ground loss would be significant.

7f

Front-Runners	2.3
Prominent Horses	1.2
Hold Up Horses	0.6

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	179	25	14
2	181	19	10
3	177	26	15
4	176	16	9
5	176	16	9
6	169	20	12
7	153	19	12
8	133	9	7
9	120	13	11
10	92	6	7
11	78	3	4
12	53	7	13
13	33	5	15
14	32	3	9
15	13	0	0
16	9	0	0

1m

Front-Runners	2.1
Prominent Horses	1.1
Hold Up Horses	0.7

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	141	26	18
2	142	21	15
3	141	11	8
4	142	18	13
5	143	12	8
6	131	19	15
7	116	11	9
8	100	9	9
9	85	4	5
10	68	7	10
11	54	4	7
12	37	1	3
13	23	4	17
14	18	0	0
15	10	1	10
16	3	0	0

The draw becomes less significant over 7f and 1m, but it doesn't disappear completely as a very high draw is still a potential stumbling block. A handy early position is at least as much of an advantage as it is for the shorter trips.

1m2f

Front-Runners	1.6
Prominent Horses	1.4
Hold Up Horses	0.7

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	164	28	17
2	159	25	16
3	156	17	11
4	163	22	13
5	159	17	11
6	148	21	14
7	131	15	11
8	110	7	6
9	90	5	6
10	80	3	4
11	62	6	10
12	44	1	2
13	32	1	3
14	17	0	0

15	12	0	0
16	4	1	25

1m5f 66yds

Front-Runners	0.6
Prominent Horses	1.2
Hold Up Horses	1.0

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	21	0	0
2	20	4	20
3	22	3	14
4	21	0	0
5	18	3	17
6	17	5	29
7	13	2	15
8	12	2	17
9	10	1	10
10	8	1	13
11	3	0	0
12	3	1	33
13	3	0	0
14	1	0	0

The draw statistics for races over 10f are revealing and for quite some time now it has made my life rather easier, especially for those races run over this trip with bigger fields. When doing a tipping piece of some sort, either for the *Racing Post* Spotlight or for the Sandform website, I could basically ignore those drawn in the top half of the field and even if a horse had attractive credentials on several other fronts, experience told me to resist the temptation to recommend them. It wasn't easy but doing so spared me plenty of heartache.

1m6f

Front-Runners	1.0
Prominent Horses	1.3
Hold Up Horses	0.9

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	43	4	9
2	43	8	19
3	42	5	12
4	40	6	15
5	37	10	27

6	36	6	17
7	24	4	17
8	21	1	5
9	19	1	5
10	12	0	0
11	5	0	0
12	4	1	25
13	1	0	0

2m

Front-Runners	2.0
Prominent Horses	0.9
Hold Up Horses	0.7

STALL	RUNNERS	WINNERS	%W/R
1	21	4	19
2	21	2	10
3	21	3	14
4	20	3	15
5	18	2	11
6	15	2	13
7	8	2	25
8	4	3	75
9	2	0	0

The statistics for races of 1m5f and further are shown for information purposes, but they are from a limited sample so I wouldn't draw any hard and fast conclusions from them.

DUNDALK

I don't get to Dundalk as often as I would like and that is something I need to put right in the future as it's a great place to visit and the backdrop is worth the entrance fee alone! Racing on sand in Ireland is hardly new as they have been racing on the beach at Laytown since 1868, but All-Weather racing as we understand it didn't take place in Ireland until Dundalk staged its first fixture on its Polytrack surface in August 2007 and the venture has been an unqualified success. Certainly, the immediate feedback was positive from jockeys and trainers and there was clearly an appetite for such a track to appear in Ireland. There are always plenty of runners with many meetings having eight races and the track also stages contests of real quality, with several Listed contests taking place during the year plus two Group 3 events, the Mercury Stakes over 5f and the Diamond Stakes over the extended 1m2f. As you will be able to see later in the book, the track has also seen the debuts of horses who have gone on to success at the highest level.

The track is a left-handed oval of around 10f with a home straight of just under 3f. In 2013 came the introduction of a false rail on the inside of the track on the home bend, which had the effect of fanning the horses out and reducing the likelihood of crowding against the inside rail (a similar false rail was introduced at Southwell in December 2021). The 5f track is quite a strange one and those with long memories may remember the old sprint track at Haydock on which the Vernons Sprint Cup (now the Betfair Sprint Cup) was run. The start was on a chute which joined the round course on the turn out of the back straight, with the field running straight for over a furlong before a dogleg turn which brought them into the home stretch. The sprint track at Dundalk is rather like that. There is also a small chute at the entrance to the back straight for races over 1m and there is no doubt that Dundalk is a galloping track.



A good time is being had by all at an evening fixture at Dundalk (RP Photos).

Although Dundalk does stage a few fixtures in the summer, the focus is between the autumn and the following spring. Windsor has its Monday evening fixtures, Kempton its Wednesdays, Wolverhampton its Saturdays, and Dundalk its Fridays. However, during the winter months the traditional Friday evening fixtures have now been joined by a Wednesday afternoon meeting, thereby opening up still further the opportunities for those horses who show an aptitude for an artificial surface. There is one subtle difference between Dundalk and its British counterparts, though.

British trainers have the option of running their All-Weather horses at six different venues, but unless Irish trainers are willing to travel their horses over the water (which they have done with great success) then at the time of writing Dundalk is their only option. This has an interesting result in that, especially during the winter, the same horses will return on a regular basis so you will see many familiar names among those taking part. This may not be ideal for the professionals, but for the All-Weather punter it's not a bad situation as with these horses meeting each other week in and week out and the field sizes often at their maximum (especially in the handicaps), the form has a certain uniform structure to it. There is certainly room for at least one more All-Weather track in Ireland, though, and hopefully before long that will come to fruition.