

# INSIDE TRACK



The Association of Irish Racecourses

# What do racecourses do on non-racedays?

Racecourses play a pivotal role in their communities, staging all kinds of events in collaboration with local groups

CHANCES are that your local racecourse stages 10 racedays or less during the year. So what happens there for the rest of the year?

Racecourses play a pivotal role in their communities, hosting a wide array of events that aim to benefit the local area and foster some positive collaboration. It's important to support and celebrate the great work that they do that might go unnoticed. Here are just a few examples from a selection of our racecourses.

## Limerick

Limerick Racecourse has long been the location for the annual Limerick Show, a key event in the calendars of both locals and travelling attendees.

During the pandemic, Limerick and several other tracks opened their facilities to become major vaccination centres, playing a crucial role in the public health response.

More recently, Greenmount was the chosen venue for the local city and county election vote counting centre. This highlights Limerick Racecourse's importance not just in sports but also in civic life.

## Fairyhouse

Fairyhouse Racecourse also provides community outreach through significantly diverse mediums and hosts a variety of events that serve the community in numerous ways.

It is a popular venue for the annual Darkness into Light walk for Pieta House, raising awareness and funds for mental health.

The racecourse also accommodates pony club camps for the Ward Union and Meath Pony Clubs and operates the Stepping Stones crèche, highlighting their dedication to youth services.

Moreover, it hosts the Dunboynne College graduation and a retreat for the Makki Trust each September.

The site also features a weekly market and the Stirrup Cup coffee shop, which opened in March and serves the community daily from 6am to 6pm.

## Thurles

Thurles Racecourse is a family-owned track and is deeply involved with local



schools, providing a venue for charity walks and other educational activities.

Last year, Thurles hosted a tractor run to support a local primary school, showcasing its commitment to education and community accessibility.

The racecourse also holds annual poc fada competitions each summer and provides facilities for Garda training courses, reinforcing its role as a versatile community asset.

## Punchestown

Punchestown Racecourse is somewhat of a cornerstone of the local community, hosting a plethora of events beyond racing.

Each September, it hosts the Eadestown Field Day, a major fundraising event which features equestrian classes, a dog show, arts and crafts, and more. The Kildare and West Wicklow SPCA Dog Show is another popular fundraiser held at Punchestown.

The racecourse grounds are open to walkers, providing a valuable recreational space for the increasingly populated area. It collaborates closely with local GAA clubs Eadestown, Ballymore Eustace, and Nass to offer facilities and organising volunteer-for-funds campaigns on racedays.

Punchestown regularly welcomes local schools and overseas university groups for interactive tours, providing educational insights into the world of horseracing.

During elections, Punchestown's event centre often serves as a count centre as well as being a flagship HSE centre during the pandemic.

Its facilities are used year-round for major trade shows and events, which bring significant business to the locality.

Additionally, Punchestown is a venue for MCD concerts and festivals, further cementing its role as a key community hub.

## Clonmel

Tomorrow (Sunday, July 7th) Clonmel Racecourse will host the local Agricultural Show and the track will also stage a week-long Tipperary Pony Club summer camp this month.

In May Clonmel welcomed the Vintage Car Show through its gates and the local cycling club will stage a cyclocross event there in October.

The local athletic club trains at Powerstown Park all year round, there are numerous fundraising school walks, and the track is also used by the local Brothers of Charity to bring users of its service for exercise.

## Dundalk

Dundalk Stadium stages 43 fixtures per year and some of these double up as fundraising events for local clubs, raising as much as €100,000.

The track sponsors two youth football teams and donates to various sports clubs in the area.

**Clonmel Racecourse will stage the local agricultural show this weekend**

It recently hosted a Lithuanian community event that attracted thousands of attendees, including the Lithuanian ambassador. Another event staged there recently was a truck show which attracted truck enthusiasts from all over in a bid to raise money for charity.

Last year Dundalk Stadium held a charity 5km run (on the tarmac ambulance road) which raised money for a local man who became disabled after falling off his bicycle.

## Naas

Naas hosts a park run every Saturday and is another 'Darkness into Light' charity run venue each year.

It will host 'Taste of Kildare' for the first time in September and the track also stages several dog shows annually, along with Treo Eile (retired racehorses) parades and a military show.

Naas sponsors jerseys for five local sports teams and supports several charities including Hurling for Cancer and the Coast To Curragh cycle.

## Roscommon

Athletics is the major non-raceday activity at Roscommon Racecourse. Up to 1,000 children take part in the annual schools cross-country competitions there, and the facility is also used by Connacht Athletics for their junior and senior cross-country events.

The track also hosts the Roscommon County Hurling poc fada competition.



Fundraisers at Dundalk Stadium have raised as much as €100,000 for local clubs



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# Latest news from the Association of Irish Racecourses

## Getting ready for the Galway Races

Manager **Michael Moloney** updates us on preparations for the Summer Festival

THE 2024 Galway Festival is just three weeks away.

Racecourse manager Michael Moloney and his team have been preparing for the event ever since last year's Summer Festival ended and will be ready to welcome over 120,000 racegoers through the gates during the seven-day meeting which starts on Monday, July 29th.

It's a mammoth operation, Michael told us, noting that the weeks were disappearing "quick and fast" as the count-down continues.

After a week of recovery following last year's Festival, Michael and his team were straight back to business, creating and distributing surveys to catch up on the feedback from attendees.

This plays a big role in planning and improving the Festival, and the several thousand responses lets the team know what worked well but, more importantly, what needs tweaking. For example, this year we can expect a more central location for the Ladies Day marquee which is such a focal point on the Thursday of the meeting.

There is a full-time team of 10 at Galway Racecourse but this grows to over 1,600 for raceweek, when you include catering staff, bookmakers, racing officials, et cetera.

Representatives from Diageo (owners of Guinness) will shortly arrive at Ballybrit to oversee their sponsorship of the Galway Hurdle, which – now running for almost 30 years – is thought to

be one of the longest standing sports partnerships in Europe.

Standing back from the job for a moment, Michael reckons: "If you were to try and set up an event like this for the first time now, it wouldn't be possible. The success that we have isn't just down to me and the staff, but everyone who has been involved over the last 155 years and that's the truth of it."

Michael, who recently became a Director of the Association of Irish Racecourses, works closely with external agencies such as An Garda Síochána, emergency services and local businesses, who need to be kept in the loop regarding planning.

Making the week as safe as possible is a top priority for Michael, as is ensuring a steady flow of traffic into the racecourse and back out to the roads and the city.

The marketing of 'Galway Races' is probably unlike any other racecourse promotional projects. Others have tried to replicate the magic of Galway but it's impossible as Galway is unique in that it takes place at the height of the holiday season and attracts people who might never go racing for the rest of the year no matter how hard you try to tempt them.

However, Galway Races is competing with every other holiday destination and music festivals for those people in search of some summer entertainment.

"We as a country, and particularly here in Galway, are very lucky to have



so many summer festivals take place each year," says Michael. "It is fundamental to make sure people know in advance that the races are coming up and what will be on offer."

By the time the gates open on the Monday of raceweek, Michael's job is pretty much done. He credits his team of staff who boast years if not decades of experience for running the show on

racedays, particularly the groundstaff who have the course watered by 4am.

"I'm always on hand to fill in and help out where I can," he said. "During races I take my seat in the head-on box to see the horses come uphill around the home bend and I turn to watch the crowds in the stands. The atmosphere alone makes it all worth it."

**Web:** galwayraces.com

## Keeping our horses as safe as possible

► **Mark Costello**

EQUINE welfare is a hot topic and a key area in Horse Racing Ireland's Strategic Plan. So how do racecourses play their part in ensuring our racehorses are kept as safe as possible on racedays?

One of the most important things racecourses must do is provide safe ground for summer jumping. Putting the correct amount of water on the track can be a challenging and expensive operation but racecourses, their groundstaff and clerks of the course are generally held to do an excellent job.

There is plenty of detail on racecourse requirements in a 45-page manual supplied by Horse Racing Ireland and the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board. This document sets out the operating guidelines and standards which are expected of licensed racecourses.

Topics covered range from the racing surface itself (road crossings, running rails, hurdles and fences, starting stalls, et cetera) to the racecourse stables and horsebox park, veterinary and medical facilities, parade ring and betting ring specifications, weighroom layout and facilities for racehorse owners.

What's noticeable is that every rule is written with the horse's welfare in mind. For example, the racecourse stables must be in a suitably quiet and secure area, with adequate supplies of hot and cold water, electricity, and non-slip walkways.

There is a repeated emphasis on



providing sufficient space for the same management of horses in all the key areas, such as the wash-down area. As has been widely reported, all racecourse stableyards now have CCTV, and the stables themselves must meet very specific criteria – with no protruding fittings or wires that could lead to an injury.

Racecourses must provide facilities for the pre- and post-race sampling of horses, a trot-up area, a veterinary treatment box, and a discreet casualty management area in the event of an

equine fatality. The Irish Blue Cross vehicles must be able to easily access all horse areas of the racecourse.

The manual is very detailed – right down to the type of brushes and dustbins which must be provided in order to keep the horse areas as clean and safe as possible. To comply with these requirements and to ensure that horses' safety is prioritised, racecourses invest significant sums and it is increasingly important that they do, so that injuries are minimised.

## Stage set for Killarney JulyFest

KILLARNEY Races is set to open their gates for JulyFest running from Monday week, July 15th to Friday 19th inclusive.

Off-track entertainment includes a visit from the Rose of Tralee contenders, live music and the Lee Strand Ladies Day fashion event, which will see 10 winners taking home a prize. The overall winner for win a VIP trip for two to Paris and Milan. Watch out too for Frankie Foster from Raceday, the Racing TV social media channel, who will be paying his first visit to Killarney.

## Midlands National at Kilbeggan

TG4 will be at Kilbeggan on Friday week, July 12th, to cover the track's highlight of the season, the Midlands National. Gates open at 3pm and the first race is at 5pm. The feature race is worth a whopping €100,000, thanks to Kilmurray's Homevalue Hardware, worth €100,000. More reasons for attending include the Sustainable Style Ladies Competition and plenty of children's entertainment.

**Web:** kilbegganraces.com

## Bellewstown loses former chairman

THE Association of Irish Racecourses has expressed its sympathies on the passing of Jim Corcoran, former chairman of Bellewstown Racecourse for 17 years. Jim was a long-standing member of AIR. Condolences are extended to Jim's family. May he rest in peace.

## Strong performance at HQ

LAST weekend's Dubai Duty Free Irish Derby Festival at the Curragh saw an increase in crowd numbers, a notable achievement given the number of competing events taking place around the country and Saturday's abysmal weather. Early reports suggest that Derby day itself proved a winner in terms of customer satisfaction while the big race proved to be a thriller.