

INSIDE TRACK



The Association of Irish Racecourses



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Latest news from the Association of Irish Racecourses

Leopardstown promises top-tier racing with vibrant entertainment

Leopardstown Racecourse CEO Tim Husbands updates us on the preparations for day one of the Irish Champions Festival next Saturday

What challenges do you face when preparing for an event of this scale, and how do you overcome them?

Customer experience is paramount. We take learnings from each raceday, with feedback from customers, staff, contractors and beyond, to see how we can make the race day experience enjoyable and comfortable. We send out customer experience surveys after race days, and take this feedback into account when considering improvements.

We make decisions based on this and on projected attendance – key priorities for improvement are traffic into the racecourse, and food and beverage.

With that in mind, we have increased communication around alternative routes via Junction 15 on the M50, provide free shuttle buses from Naas / Red Cow, Sandyford Luas and Heuston Station.

For food and beverage, we have introduced Skippio, a bar queue-skipping app, to speed up access, and extended our food offering with a 'food yard' of high-end street food vans, giving customers greater variety.

Are there any new features being introduced this year?

For our racegoers this year, we have a couple of new experiences on site that we are extremely excited about.

Keep an eye on our social channels in the lead up for competitions to win a 'Trip to the Start' to watch all the action from the starting gates.

We have a new post-race analysis feature taking place in the parade ring after each race and broadcasting within the racecourse, and racegoers will be able to take their picture with the Irish Champion Stakes trophy.

How much hospitality places are there on the day and are there any still remaining?

Our 1888 Restaurant and private suites are completely sold out, as is our new Real Deal package. Places are filling up fast for the remaining places in the popular Leopardstown Pavilion.

Are you involved in attracting overseas runners and how does that work?

At Leopardstown, we work closely with both connections and international agents to raise awareness and make the process as easy as possible. Building and maintaining these relationships is a year-round process involving overseas visits and regular visibility from the team at international race meetings. We back this up with regular communications inclusive of a bespoke brochure which is issued shortly before the initial entry stage each May.

Is it a family-friendly raceday or is geared more towards the serious racegoer and racing professionals?

There's something at Irish Champions Festival for everybody. We think it's



perfect place to socialise with friends and family and enjoy top-class racing.

In terms of being family friendly we have some super family food options, a playground, a soft play area, and of course junior racegoers have the chance to meet jockeys outside the weigh room. Under 12s go free at the racecourse.

Does Irish Champions Festival have a significant economic impact on the local community?

The combined effect of both international visitors and a strong local audience makes the Irish Champions Festival a strong economic driver for

the community, particularly through tourism and hospitality.

This event draws international visitors, notably from the UK, France, and Japan, who travel specifically to experience the weekend.

Raceday customer experience surveys also indicate that many attendees choose to stay overnight, which further enhances the economic impact by increasing demand for accommodation and other services in the area.

Local attendees often treat the event as a social occasion so restaurants, pubs, and other entertainment venues benefit.

Are there any standout races or horses who you anticipate will be highlights of your raceday?

The Group 1 Royal Bahrain Irish Champion Stakes is undoubtedly the highlight. The race was the joint sixth best race in the world in 2023, and this year's running looks to be as competitive as ever. There is strong representation from UK trainers within the 33 high class entries including 2023 winner Auguste Rodin, Los Angeles, William Haggas' Economics, and Japanese runner Shin Emperor.

The Group 1 Coolmore America 'Justify' Matron Stakes has attracted multiple group winners: Irish 1000 Guineas winner Fallen Angel, Coronation Stakes winner Porta Fortuna, Opera Singer and Ylang Ylang.

Why should readers of The Irish Field go racing at Leopardstown on Saturday, September 14th?

Day one of the Festival is an experience that combines top-tier horse racing with vibrant entertainment. For racing fans, we have a nine-race card featuring five group races, and unique experiences such as a photo opportunity with the Royal Bahrain Irish Champion Stakes trophy, and exclusive opportunities to win a trip to the start of a race.

See off the night with a sing-along with Mimi Lane after racing, Complete Madness tribute band, and a DJ until close.

'It all comes down to this!' **Web:** leopardstown.com

There is a nine-race card at Leopardstown next Saturday, featuring two Group 1 races and some unique experiences

Laytown worth a visit next Monday

RACING on the beach is back at Laytown on Monday week, September 16th. It's well worth experiencing this truly unique event, the only official racemeeting in Ireland run on a beach. Gates open at 2.30pm and the first race is due off at 4.35pm.

As the tide recedes on race day, the racecourse is swiftly set up for an exhilarating six-race card over six and seven furlongs. This one-of-a-kind event draws massive crowds of intrigued spectators, locals, and devoted horse racing enthusiasts who come to witness the spectacle of horses thundering down the sand. **Web:** laytownstrandraces.ie

Ballinrobe's final fling coming soon

FRIDAY, September 13th marks the final day of the 2024 season at Ballinrobe, and it promises to be a fantastic evening of racing and socialising. The eight-race National Hunt card starts at 3.25 pm, with gates opening from 1.30 pm.

Attendees will be treated to live music from Streetwise.

The Friday Finale package, available for just €25 per person, includes admission, a racecard, a €6 drink voucher, and a €6 food voucher. Designed for groups of five or more, this package offers great value, but spaces are limited, so booking in advance is essential. **Web:** ballinroboracecourse.ie

Million reasons for you to go racing

THE Goffs Million, Europe's richest race for juveniles, returns to the Curragh on Saturday, September 28th. Off the track there will be fabulous style, free kids entertainment and live music. The eight-race card also includes the Goffs 500 and the Glentoy Student Derby. **Web:** curragh.ie

New managers at six racecourses

THERE has been a changing of the guard at many racecourses in recent times with over a quarter of our tracks under new management.

Since Eoghan O'Grady's appointment as manager at Cork Racecourse Mallow last year, there have been no less than six other new racecourse manager appointments in 2024.

Ruth Morrison took over at the helm at Downpatrick following Richard Lytle's retirement. Aidan McGarry moved from the position of manager at Navan to Naas, thus enabling his operations manager Ciaran Flynn to progress to the position of General Manager at the Co Meath track. At Kilbeggan Racecourse, chairman of the board Stephen Hefferman stepped in as general manager at the midlands track following the tragic passing of Paddy Dunican.

New to our industry but not to management are Michael Lynch at Limerick Racecourse and Karl McCay at Killarney Racecourse.

AIR would like to formally welcome all these new managers to the Association and wish them the very best of luck.

Strong overseas challenge expected

Evan Arkwright, Racing & Sponsorship Manager at the Curragh, tells us what's in store on day two of Irish Champions Festival

What challenges do you face when preparing for an event of this scale, and how do you overcome them?

We are lucky to have such an established and experienced team in the Curragh who have years of experience activating large scale events and racing festivals. We have a tremendous grounds team who ensure the racecourse is looking at its best for each and every event.

Together with our event partners and our exceptional raceday staff, we have built up a team with a wealth of experience and this is hugely beneficial when activating large racedays such as Irish Champions Festival. At the end of the day, we must keep the race goers' experience front and centre and ensure their experience at the Curragh is one which delights and inspires and of course, one which encourages them to return.

Are there any new features being introduced this year?

Absolutely! We have significantly upweighted our raceday activities to ensure there is something for everybody to enjoy. You may have seen our Manes v Motors activation on our social channels which saw professional Irish racing driver Max Hart pit automotive power against jockey Chris Hayes at the Curragh Racecourse. Our aim is to bring this to life at the racecourse on September 15th when we will have a Formula 1 simulator for racegoers to enjoy!

In addition, we have an incredible Carnival at the Curragh activation which sees the Curragh Racecourse put on our biggest ever selection of family fun activities. Children (who go free at the racecourse) can enjoy superslides, carousels, spin the wheel and our racecourse train at our mini-carnival.

And for those who prefer a gentler pace, they can enjoy a relaxing afternoon in our Whispering Angel marquee with our roving musicians, wander around the racecourse and simply take it all in. There is something for everybody to enjoy.

How much hospitality places are there on the day and are there any still remaining?

The St Leger experience at the racecourse is completely sold out and we expect the small number of places remaining at our Oaks restaurant to sell out shortly. There is still ample opportunity to pre-order Curragh picnic baskets and charcuterie boards through our website. On the day, Orby's by Lucy, Shoda Café at the Queens Room and the Champagne Bar serve food alongside our Champions Hall restaurant. We also have various food trucks offering a great selection of food around the racecourse.



Does this meeting attract a significant number of overseas visitors?

Irish Champions Festival is a key date in the diary for every racing fan and we see that in our visitor profile more than ever. Day two at the Curragh Racecourse is the richest raceday in the 2024 racing calendar with over €2.5m in prize money won on the day. We've noted significant interest from Rewards4Racing UK members and, with runners from around the world, we expect a large number of overseas trainers and owners. Race and Stay also have a number of visitors attending the racecourse whom we look forward to welcoming.

Are you involved in attracting overseas runners and how does that work?

We are actively in contact with overseas trainers to encourage them to run at the Curragh Racecourse. British trainers have enjoyed good success at the Curragh throughout 2024 and we expect a strong challenge from them throughout all eight races, in particular the Flying Five where Bradsell and Believing are set to run.

The Charlie Appleby-trained Ancient Truth is targeting the Goffs Vincent O'Brien National Stakes and Giovelotto will be a leading contender for the Comer Group International Irish St Leger. We expect a large British-trained challenge in the Tattersalls Ireland Super Auction Stakes and we are delighted that we are very likely to have three German-trained runners in the St Leger too.

Is it a family-friendly raceday or is geared more towards the serious racegoer and racing professionals?

Without question, this will be a great day out for families. Irish Champions Festival is one of our biggest race events throughout the year, and as such it's a huge opportunity for the Curragh to showcase a day at the races to younger racegoers. We've an incredible line-up of activity for all the family to enjoy and would love to welcome families to the racecourse. The quality of racing on offer, including the final classic of the season and four Group 1 races, means that Irish Champions Festival at the Curragh is a must-go for all serious racegoers and the racing purist.

Does Irish Champions Festival have a significant economic impact on the local community?

We know that each of our events at the Curragh, and particularly the big

festivals, have a big impact on hotel nights throughout Kildare and Dublin. Our most recent economic survey in 2021 investigated the financial impact of the Curragh to the local and national economy and revealed that the Curragh contributes in excess of €100m to the local and national economy. Anecdotaly we see the impact of the racecourse for many local businesses from hairdressers, boutiques, restaurants and hotels.

How has sponsorship evolved for this year's meeting? Are there any new partnerships you are excited about?

We are lucky to enjoy longstanding relationships with many of our Irish Champions Festival sponsors and very much appreciate their involvement and support in delivering an exceptional event with world class racing and entertainment for racegoers to enjoy.

Moyle Stud, in particular, is hugely supportive in terms of the children's activity in the Moyle Stud Kids Zone and the raceday stable staff are very appreciative of the stable staff canteen. All race sponsors also provide significant prizes that are presented to the grooms in charge of the horses in each race judged to be the best turned out.

Every sponsor, large and small, contributes in no small way to the delivery of a superb raceday experience whether through race prize money or through a racecourse activation which brings a value added experience to the racegoer.

Are there any standout races or horses who you anticipate will be highlights of your raceday?

It's set to be a very special day with Bradsell, Believing, Ancient Truth, Henri Matisse, Bedtime Story, Vauban and Kyrios all set to appear.

Why should readers of The Irish Field go racing at the Curragh on Sunday, September 15th?

It's the richest raceday of the year. The card features the last Irish classic of the season, four Group 1 races and over €2.5m in prize money.

And alongside the races, Carnival at the Curragh will deliver some fantastic family fun for racegoers where kids will be utterly entertained! Our Manes v Motors experience matches amazing action on the track with some amazing fun off it! Older kids and adults will thoroughly enjoy reaching heart stopping speeds in our Formula 1 simulator!

Web: curragh.ie

Sunday's card at the Curragh features four Group 1 races



We expect a large number of overseas trainers and owners