

# INSIDE TRACK



The Association of Irish Racecourses



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## Latest news from the Association of Irish Racecourses

# Go racing over Christmas and be entertained

THE Christmas racing period is just around the corner and Leopardstown, Limerick and Down Royal are expecting bumper crowds for their festive fixtures.

Corporate hospitality for three of the four days at Leopardstown is already sold out, as are some of the bundle packages for racegoers. General admission is €35 each day if tickets are bought online in advance. A flexi-ticket is priced at €45 and premium level access is €95 per day. Before racing each day there will be an expert preview broadcast from the Festival Marquee at approximately 10.45am. There is live music after racing each day too, both in the Racing Hall and the Marquee.

Leopardstown's race programme has been slightly tweaked, with the result that the Grade 1 race on the opening day (December 26th) is the three-mile novice chase, sponsored by Racing Post. Day two is 'Paddy Power' day, as usual, with two Grade 1 races - a two-mile novice hurdle and a two-mile chase. This meeting attracted over 17,000 punters last year. The third day's highlight is the Savills Chase over three miles, which is expected to see a rematch between recent Punchestown runners Fact To File and Galopin Des Champs. The three-mile Christmas Hurdle is the day's second Grade 1 and is likely to feature both Teahupoo and Home By The Lee.

Sunday, December 29th is the fourth and final day of the Christmas Festival, and is billed as a day for all the family

with face painters, games and bouncy castles promised.

On the track the focus will be on the two-mile December Hurdle and the Neville Hotels Novice Chase.

### Limerick buses

Leopardstown is not the only track running shuttle buses for customers over Christmas. At Limerick there will be buses running from Limerick city to the racecourse each day.

Limerick's Christmas Festival will kick off on December 26th with Big Boss Events bringing the Big Boss Top to racegoers, adding a flair of festival fun to the day.

Ladies Day will take place on day two, when Holman Lee Agency models are set to dazzle in a fashion show, showcasing local and regional boutiques. Later, Munster take on Leinster in a rugby clash between rivals which attendees can stay and enjoy at the racecourse.

Day three will see the prestigious Grade 1 Faughen Novice Chase, with prize money of €100,000 up for grabs. This is the race which provided such drama last year as Gaelic Warrior had to fight to get past stable companion Il Etait Temps. Both horses went on to great things at the spring festivals.

A family fun day, in association with Horse Racing Ireland, will round off the festivities on December 29th. Day four is set to be a blast for kids, with play and games areas, carnival rides, and more.



There are 10 racemeetings scheduled between December 26th and 31st

Mr Binman is again the title sponsor of the Limerick Christmas Festival. Racecourse CEO Michael Lynch said: "It's a brilliant partnership for Limerick Racecourse and their continued sponsorship for our four-day Christmas Festival is key to its success and a key driver for our sustainability goals. I must also acknowledge the wonderful support of all our other sponsors and in particular McMahon Builders Providers, Diageo, Lyons of Limerick, Campion Insurance and Quinnbet.

"The team are working really hard to put on a great four-day Festival and we are really looking forward to opening our gates on St Stephen's Day - I'd advise everyone

to come early, avail of the bus service and enjoy some great racing."

General admission tickets for adults are €25 on St Stephen's Day and just €20 on the other three days.

### Down Royal

All hospitality packages for Down Royal on December 26th are sold out.

There's just general admission tickets left and they are good value at only €20, which includes your racecard.

This fixture is sponsored by Metcollect Ltd, a leader in metal and hazardous waste recycling.

Gates open at Down Royal at 10.30am with the first race due off at 11.40am.

# Storm damage puts Cork and Listowel to the test

THE directors of Listowel Racecourse met this week to assess the significant damage done to the track's racing surface, facilities and buildings by a recent storm.

The Co Kerry track is bordered by the River Feale which burst its banks following Storm Bert and flooded the racing surface. Fixtures and fittings were washed away and water also entered some racecourse buildings.

Racecourse director Pat Healy reported on Thursday: "It's going to cost a lot of money to put things right. The electrics and flooring are damaged, the gravel in the stableyard has been dragged into the river, exposing pipes and cable ducts, and the stablestaff canteen was severely affected. The Easyfix matting in the parade ring was washed away, and there is dirt and muck everywhere.

"The big problem we have is the ambulance road in the middle of the track, which has been severely damaged."

Anyone who knows Pat will know it takes a lot to take the smile off his face, but he and his fellow directors are struggling to look on the brightside.

"It's heartbreaking to see the state of the facilities. We're a non-profit organisation with a good festival and we had our eyes on making improvements but that is all on hold now."

### Replacement fixture

Cork Racecourse lost a fixture (Sunday, November 24th) due to Storm Bert and a replacement card was staged yesterday (Friday, December 13th).

Eoghan O'Grady, Cork manager, said: "The ground would have been fine for the November 24th meeting but for the Blackwater River bursting its banks. The whole track was under water. The woodchip canter-down was washed away and we lost a lot of railings.

"It happens two or three times a year and is a significant cost. If we have a bit of warning we can take up the woodchip and take down railings but it takes a full day to do that and, as we were due to race the day after the storm, we couldn't take those measures this time."

Racing was cancelled at 3pm on Saturday, a day before the fixture was due to take place. "The racecards had already been printed and the caterers had begun their work," O'Grady reported. "We had to cancel all our bookings and while it was good to get a replacement meeting it is never as good the second time."

Cork Racecourse was submerged in similar circumstances in November 2020 and in January 2016. The Hilly Way fixture was cancelled in 2015 due to water-logging.



# Top award for Fairyhouse

CONGRATULATIONS to Fairyhouse on being named Racecourse of the Year at the recent Horse Racing Ireland Awards.

This was a first for Fairyhouse and what was notable is that - for the first time this year - the winner was decided by racing fans and each racecourse also had a vote. Another new component of this award was that each racecourse was judged on its sustainability awareness by a select HRI committee.

Almost 10,000 racegoers and racing fans voted in the online poll and their contribution equated to 50% of the total votes, with 25% allotted to both racecourses and the HRI 'sustainability' committee.

A delighted Fairyhouse general manager Peter Roe said: "We've never got to the last four before so to win it is a shock.

"It's all down to the team at Fairyhouse and everyone involved in racing. We're so fortunate to have the support of jockeys, trainers and owners who send us

some of the best racehorses in the world. We bring it all together at Fairyhouse, from the track team, operations, hospitality, marketing. I'm just so fortunate to have a great team and committee.

"At Fairyhouse we try to make race-days a personable day and be friends with everyone. You're judged on your most recent raceday. Our Winter Festival went great but if something goes wrong next Saturday then that goodwill is gone. We have to keep looking forward, like everyone else in this game."

Asked about Fairyhouse's commitment to sustainability, Roe said: "Our track foreman Richard Stapleton swapped tractors for grazing sheep. Sustainability is something we all have to take a part in. We have three different types of bin at Fairyhouse and it drives me mad to see people not separating their rubbish. So my message to anyone going racing is think twice before you dump your rubbish at a racecourse!"



Minister Martin Heydon presents the Racecourse of the Year Award to Fairyhouse general manager Peter Roe \ Healy Racing



Racehorse owner Paul Leech (third from left) and friends sponsored a race at Dundalk Stadium named The Three Men, Ten Years And A Dream Apprentice Handicap \ Healy Racing

## Give the gift of racing this Christmas!

EACH racecourse has a unique selection of gift ideas for the horse racing enthusiast to enjoy.

Vouchers for tickets or open tickets that are flexible to allow a choice of dates are the obvious gifts for the avid racing fan at their local track, saving them the admission fees on their next visit or two. Racecourse memberships, annual memberships or clubs are another excellent gift idea.

The names may vary from track to track but the concept differs little up and down the country. Most racecourses offer a membership-style package which includes, admission to all race meetings at that track in 2025 and added-value benefits such as racecards, reciprocal day free entry at other tracks and exclusive member access areas. Check out your favorite racecourse's website for more details.

## Three tracks in one membership

WHY not gift the Go Racing In Kildare Membership and your loved one will gain access to attend 65 world-class race days including the annual Punchestown Festival and Dubai Duty Free Irish Derby for less than €7 per race meeting for adults and less than €5.50 per meeting for a senior/under 25. They will have access to exclusive member facilities at Naas & Punchestown racecourses, free admission to other Irish and international racecourses, the opportunity to take part in various trips and more! Prices start from €350 to €475.

Web: goracinginkildare.ie.

## Race & Stay gift options

RACE and Stay packages are offered by numerous hospitality providers across the country, with multiple add-ons available also. Why not design your very own perfect racing getaway by combining some of these packages with other interesting excursions and activities available in the area while you are at it? There are so many great deals available in all four provinces. Make this year's gift the racing staycation your friend or family member has been waiting for!

## Race sponsorship for special occasion

FOR your higher-end gift requirements, a race sponsorship at the recipient's favourite racecourse could be their ultimate dream gift this Christmas. Packages vary at individual racecourses and availability varies and of course budget plays its part here too, but typically sponsorship packages include naming rights on the race, racecard advertising or a feature on the individual, tickets, parade ring access to meet the stars, the right to make a presentation to the winning connections of the race, photographs and so much more. Most of all it is an experience like no other for a real racing fan. Contact your local and/or favourite racecourse for more details.