

## A Day at the Races

Ever wanted to go to the Horse Races but we're unsure what to expect, what to do or how accessible the racecourse might be? Well, here's all you need to know plus a guaranteed way to back the winners.

I hadn't been to Musselburgh Race Course for many years and now being a wheelchair user I wasn't sure how accessible the place would be for me. I phoned the racecourse and was assured that after a recent revamp the course was fully accessible (with the exception of one of the seven bars/restaurants). With this assurance my wife, Elizabeth, and I set off one Wednesday afternoon to make our fortunes, as well as to check how accessible the course really was.

We arrived at the course well before the first race was due to start with the idea of getting the lay of the land as well as having lunch. A car park in the racecourse complex reserved for officials etc is also open to blue badge holders free of charge. Very handy as parking anywhere near the course is almost impossible.

Also handy is an entrance to the racecourse proper next to the car park.

The admission charge is normally £15 (weekends £20) but there is a half price concession for disabled people and their Personal Assistant/Carer. Remember to collect your free Race Card which gives details of the day's racing.

Our next stop was to find somewhere to eat. Unfortunately the first two restaurants we tried were full, booking in advance therefore advisable. Ignoring the bars which offered snacks and the fast-food stalls we settled for the Pinkie Bar and their plain pub grub. We both settled for the healthy option, Cumberland sausage, chips and beans. A sumptuous feast for only £2.50.

Our appetites satisfied we began a full reconnaissance of the racecourse. As I

mentioned there are plenty of eating and drinking places offering a variety of menus and style. From start restaurant to basic pub there's something for everyone. Most have a host of televisions showing the day's racing, ideal if it's cold and raining.

Another option is to take your own food and drink and sit at one of the tables in the picnic area. Unfortunately Elizabeth spotted the champagne tent which was soon to reap the rewards of my racing knowledge (more about that later).

The paddock, where the horses and jockeys parade before their races, has been improved and you should be able to find a good vantage point to view the runners before they go to the start.

Next stop was to find a spot to watch the race. Again you have the choice of a number of viewing places. As I've said most of the bars have televisions which show each race as well as races from other courses. Much more preferable though is to watch from the track side where you can feel the full atmosphere and excitement of the races. There are two raised platforms for wheelchair users or you can find a space at the rails to watch and shout your horse home.



*Scotland's No 1 tipster awaits another winner*

Non- wheelchair users have a further option with the terraced stand. To help everyone see all the action there is a large screen in the middle of the course. This accompanied by a full commentary means you can follow your selection from start to finish.

Another choice you need to make is where to place your bet should you want to try and win some money. There is a normal bookmakers shop where you can place your bet or the Tote shop. Both accessible for wheelchair users. Each shop offers a similar service but the way the horse's odds are calculated differ slightly. Sometimes the Tote pays out slightly more than the bookmaker sometimes it's the other way around. If you want to place a bet on your horse all you need to do with either shop is to fill in a betting slip and pay your money. Don't worry if you don't know how to fill in the slip the counter staff will be happy to show you how or even fill it in for you.

However the easiest and most enjoyable way to lose win money is to pay a visit to the betting ring between the stand and the track. Again fully accessible. Here bookies are lined up with their boards showing the horses names and numbers along with their current odds. Once you have selected your horse check the boards to find the bookie offering the highest odds. As the odds go up and down constantly you need to try and place your bet when your horse's odds are that their highest. As soon as you see your odds going down you need to get your money on as quickly as possible. Elizabeth soon got the hang of this and on one race alone increased my winnings by £10.

There is no need to fill in a betting slip all you need to do is tell the bookie how much you want to put on and the number of your horse. You'll get a receipt which you need to keep to claim any winnings.

Having completed our reconnaissance the course was beginning to fill up ready for the first race. It was now time for each of us to

select our horses. There are a number of ways to do this all of which I have tried but with limited success. The race card gives you a list of runners and riders for each race as well as a brief description of each horse's previous efforts. Some people pick their horses by their name others by their previous form whilst others make their choice by picking their favourite jockey or trainer. Normally I would make my selection by carefully analysing each horse's form from a newspaper. On this occasion I decided on a different tactic and here's the guaranteed method of picking winners I mentioned at the beginning of this article. Go to the paddock as the horses are parading. Scrutinise each horse from top to tail as it passes you. After examining each of the runners pick the biggest, ugliest beast you have seen. This is the surefire winner.

All you need to do now is place your bet, watch the race, then collect your winnings.

I used this method for the first four races and won them all. Foolishly, for the remaining races, I went back to studying the form and didn't win a thing.

Elizabeth made her selections by her tried and tested method of picking horses by their names. Unfortunately no joy on this day but I have to say on a previous occasion she did manage to pick five out of six winners. However in the end she did benefit from my winning streak or should I say the champagne tent benefited from my winning streak.

All in all we both had a great afternoon enjoying the sport of kings (I have to say winning money did help). It's certainly something we would highly recommend as an alternative day out.

**By Jeff Adamson**

For further information you can contact Musselburgh Racecourse by telephoning 0131 665 2859. By post at Musselburgh Racecourse, Linkfield Road, Musselburgh, East Lothian EH21 7RG or visit [www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk](http://www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk)