

Hot Fun In The Summertime

With only the Fresno Fair remaining for the 2005 Northern California summer circuit, the Fairs have put on an outstanding performance. Thoroughbred purse generation has been very strong, up approximately 5.5% over last year. Purses paid were up over \$100,000, with each fair except Ferndale coming in underpaid. The hero in these large gains was Advance Deposit Wagering; revenues generated by ADW were up a hefty 33%, and one purse dollar out of every eight came from Internet bettors.

The first stop, the San Joaquin County Fair (Stockton), had probably its best meet ever. There were only two days of overlap this year with Golden Gate Fields, and purse revenues were up a whopping 16%. In fact, Stockton, which has always depended on subsidies to balance its purse account, came in underpaid for the first time in recent history.

The Alameda County Fair (Pleasanton) followed with an excellent meeting featuring strong gains in on-track attendance and handle, and an increase in overall purse generation of approximately 6%. A substantial overpayment it had carried for two years was erased and replaced by an underpayment exceeding \$70,000.

The Sonoma County Fair (Santa Rosa) was really the crown jewel of the circuit this year. The quality and durability of the new turf course was superb. A hearty "congratulations" should go out to the Fair Board, the County Board of Supervisors and Director of Racing, Jim Moore. It will always be one of my fondest racing memories to have witnessed the first turf race when a jammed grandstand came to its feet with rousing cheers as the horses were loaded into the gate. Santa Rosa showed modest gains in all financial categories, with outstanding on-track crowds and a "fun quotient" that was over the top!

With Cal Expo running a harness meeting during the State Fair, the thoroughbred population was not divided between there and Bay Meadows – resulting in much-improved racing

at the San Mateo County Fair. Instead of running two 6-day weeks, the fair ran two 5-day weeks and took its two additional days on the next Wednesday and Thursday (which would have been Cal Expo's opening dates). The increased inventory allowed San Mateo to run 11 more thoroughbred races with a field size of 7.31 – an increase of approximately one horse per race. In addition, the fair was able to offer wagering on both dark Mondays, resulting in a combined handle of over \$1.6 million for those two days and greatly spurring purse generation, which increased 11.5%.

Can Fair racing be improved? Absolutely!! For the first time, all of the fairs (except Ferndale) paid association purses, meaning that they paid the same purse for like categories at the recently concluded Golden Gate Fields meeting. However, the fairs still do not generate what the associations do, so they must offer more low-end races to make things balance. Horsemen were frankly disappointed in the Stockton and Pleasanton condition books, because the races did not encompass enough of the middle to higher end, leaving owners with the option of not running or moving their horses elsewhere.

TOC will be assisting these Fairs next year to develop a strategy that includes the entire inventory of NorCal horses. A very modest sprinkling of higher claiming races at Stockton and Pleasanton would improve things greatly for our circuit. The advent of turf racing at Santa Rosa should also help immensely.

Bay Meadows is beginning its Fall Meeting with an almost 5% purse increase over last Spring's purses, which were retroactively raised 5% toward the end of the meeting. A stepped-up marketing plan includes events or promotions on every day of the meeting. At press time, with only the first two days of the meet in the books, NorCal wagering is increased well into double figures. Maybe the magic has begun!

Tracking Trends

DAILY ATTENDANCE & WAGERING through Wednesday, September 7, 2005

	Racedays	Reported Attendance		Pari-mutuel Wagering		Pari-mutuel Purse Revenues	
2005 Del Mar Thoroughbred Club - Final	43	27,565	-3.9%	\$12,720,226	+5.0%	\$514,963	+5.2%
On-Track		17,007	-0.3%	\$2,532,740	+6.5%	\$190,921	+6.4%
Off-Track		10,558	-9.1%	\$3,568,265	-1.8%	\$163,394	-2.0%
CA ADW				\$1,154,554	+33.4%	\$56,204	+32.7%
Out-of-State (Reg. & ADW)				\$5,464,666	-4.3%	\$104,443	+3.7%
2005 Hollywood Park - Final	64	16,927	-8.1%	\$10,247,697	-0.6%	\$395,627	+0.6%
On-Track		7,761	-8.0%	\$1,719,142	-2.9%	\$117,811	-2.8%
Off-Track		9,166	-8.2%	\$3,206,219	-3.3%	\$146,616	-2.0%
CA ADW				\$1,099,441	+16.5%	\$52,255	+19.8%
Out-of-State (Reg. & ADW)				\$4,222,895	-1.2%	\$78,944	+0.3%