

Engineered Surfaces Expected to Improve California Racing

Establishing a Basis: Works and Starts by California Thoroughbreds

At the dawn of this new era of California racing – the era of engineered surfaces – TOC thought it would be helpful to establish some basis from which the industry might objectively assess their impact. We begin this effort by taking a look at the most recent data available, that pertaining to the average number of starts and works nationally, in California, and within other states of interest.

There is a common perception that racehorses training in California average more workouts per year and per race than in any other major state. From an owner’s point of view, we obviously want our horses to run when healthy and fit, but we also seek to balance that objective against the desire to compete in more races, as the latter presents the greatest thrill of ownership, and our best opportunity to realize a return on investment.

Does the following data support that perception? At first glance, it does. However, we would caution against drawing any definitive conclusions based solely on this data. Instead, TOC recommends it be viewed simply as a starting point for this and future assessments.

Looking at the year 2006, according to statistics issued by The Jockey Club, nationally Thoroughbreds made an average of 6.37 starts. In California, during that same period of time, our horses averaged 4.5 starts/year, nearly two full starts fewer. Since The Jockey Club did not identify the total number of works recorded for those starters or all horses in training, TOC requested The Jockey Club Information Service (“TJIS”) provide such 2006 data for three other key racing states: Florida, Kentucky, and New York. In an effort to determine if there were any material differences between the Northern and Southern California circuits, we broke each out separately. The results are shown in Figure 1.

What is immediately apparent is that California had the greatest number of starters (7,904), making the most starts (35,818), producing the 4.5 starts per horse average. Looking next at the total

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number of horses in training in California (11,212), the data revealed that they averaged 11.3 workouts/year, for a total of 127,144 works. While TOC felt that information alone quite useful, we were curious how those averages compared to the other key states, which is also shown in Figure 1.

The data provides an interesting insight into the relative percentage of workers making starts in each of these states. Based on the data, it appears that California has the lowest percentage of starters from workers, at 71%, with Kentucky and New York enjoying the highest, at 96% and 83% respectively. Similarly, California also

averaged the highest number of works per start ratio at 3.5 works/start.

Again, there are obviously many other factors that may influence these numbers, such that we are cautious in drawing any definitive conclusions from the data. However, we believe that these correlations suggest further review and study is warranted, particularly in light of our new racing surfaces. With Hollywood Park, Del Mar, Santa Anita, and Golden Gate Fields each having installed an engineered surface, preliminary anecdotal evidence suggests horses are coming back from workouts and races at a faster rate than previously observed, and are sounder overall.

As the industry gains more experience with these new surfaces, one might expect to see an increase in the number of starts relative to workouts. But, perhaps more importantly, TOC is hopeful that the data accumulated will confirm that the total number of training/racing-related injuries on these new surfaces as compared to our old dirt tracks are in fact declining, and that we can expect to have healthier horses running longer, and making more starts.

TOC will continue to monitor these and other key indicators as part of an ongoing effort to assess the impact of engineered surfaces on our horse population.

FIGURE 1: Racing & Workouts Statistics for CA, FL, KY & NY in 2006

Race Area	Race Year	Starters	Starts	Avg Per Horse	Workouts	Horses Working	Avg Workouts per Horse	Avg Workouts per Start
CA	2006	7,904	35,818	4.5	127,144	11,212	11.3	3.5
N CA	2006	3,984	16,161	4.1	40,296	4,292	9.4	2.5
S CA	2006	5,342	19,657	3.7	86,848	7,990	10.9	4.4
FL	2006	7,745	30,889	4.0	51,435	9,764	5.3	1.7
KY	2006	7,194	22,873	3.2	41,651	7,487	5.6	1.8
NY	2006	5,148	18,549	3.6	51,281	6,219	8.2	2.8

NOTE: Total CA statistics do not necessarily reflect the sum of the combination of N CA plus S CA, as numerous horses made starts and recorded workouts in both the north and the south, in the same year.