

Racing Strategy

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.” Ecclesiastes 7:14

Although prize money in Britain is very low on a day-to-day basis, we should endeavour to keep our team in competition as much as possible.

Galloping for brass, as they say, is much better than galloping for nowt. This may prove easier to achieve with two-year-olds than with older horses simply because they can compete in condition or allowance races rather than be at the mercy of the handicapper. Those horses that do run up a number of handicap wins have almost all commenced from a mark far below representing their actual ability. Despite what we may read, very few of these animals have been improved by clever training; they are simply revealing that they are not as bad as the handicapper had originally assumed, based on what had been previously exposed. The majority of well-handicapped horses have achieved that happy state through incompetence or villainy in that they have either raced when patently unwell or unfit, or they have been ‘having a run round’, as they say. Regrettably these very questionable practices find favour even at the supposed higher levels of the sport in Britain, but as they are neither sporting nor skilful, and in most cases fail to maximise the resale price of the horse, they are of little interest to us.

Although a favourable handicap rating may be regarded as essential in many quarters, the reverse is true if we hope to sell our horses for premium prices. In fact, there are one or two trainers who do set out to manufacture an artificially high rating by running horses over their heads, and they have often proved successful in doing so. Of course, the secret to making this plan really work is not to start

believing any inflated rating ourselves, as the fall in that rating and in value can be as meteoric as the rise. This policy is similar to making money on any rising market, in that it is essential to hop off the merry-go-round before it stops. A more moderate course is advisable in which we should attempt to pick up as much prize money as possible whilst keeping a strict eye on both the saleability and soundness of the stock. Particularly in small fields it is very easy for a horse to get sucked along into a placing well beyond his normal capabilities. We must be aware if this does happen and our horse should be sold on as quickly as possible on the strength of it.

A maiden race will in most cases be the first objective for all our horses as they will tend to run against similarly inexperienced opposition. However, it is often possible to find a conditions race that may be less competitive due to most trainers shying away from previous winners. Rather like children playing conkers, if we do beat a previous winner, or even run him close, we assume an added reputation, which may or may not be justified, and the scene may thereby be set for further success. There did use to be a certain advantage in always winning a maiden first, in that the American market much preferred those horses which were “nonwinners other than maiden or claiming”. They now seem increasingly to write those races for “nonwinners of two races” that now gives us a little more scope when reselling. With the American market in mind we should always consider targeting the maiden races on the all-weather surfaces, as a dirt winner will always be more desirable than a horse with the

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equivalent form on turf. It is also important to bear in mind that the American programme, because of the course layout, does not cater to any great extent for pure five furlong runners.

Horses that are expected to stand up to an arduous campaign must be fit, but it seems that they do last longer if they come to their first start just needing it. For some reason the harder training necessary to absolutely guarantee success on the debut almost equally guarantees earlier decline in performance. Obviously many horses do win first time and then go on all year, but they tend to have initially defeated opponents which subsequently prove to be considerably inferior. We should aim to produce all debutants to do their best without being hurt, and should anticipate that the race will bring them on 7lbs in condition, apart from the benefit they derive from the experience of racing. The 7lbs improvement means that if the two-year-old had previously galloped with an older teammate receiving 14lbs we should expect him to repeat the performance receiving only 7lbs. This improvement is equivalent to roughly two or three lengths. Obviously a punishing race when not dead fit will tend to take a lot out of any horse. Our jockey should be well aware of the situation as regards his mount's fitness and also that we regard this as merely the start of a horse's career. This is particularly true in soft ground in the spring as even five furlongs is at that stage a stiff task for any two-year-old. If any horse runs particularly green it is reasonable to anticipate more improvement than that based on improved fitness; this applies equally to the opposition and we should objectively watch how they perform when viewing the replay, so as to correctly anticipate the result of any rematch.

Once a two-year-old has won his maiden he should, unless he is highly regarded enough to be aimed at specific targets, be maintained in a state of constant readiness. Any open or condition races for which he is eligible should

be entered and no suitable opportunity should be missed. Obviously, to define what may be a suitable opportunity requires an accurate assessment of our own horse's capabilities. This means his current capabilities as demonstrated in his exercise. It should not be necessary repeatedly to try a horse that has established recent form, but we will use him to assess his team-mates before their debuts. The performance of these horses will give a reasonable estimate of the form and prospects of the original winner, and enable us to decide whether to retain him or sell him. There is normally a buoyant Italian market early in the season for winning two-year-olds and unless our observations lead us to believe his value can be increased, or at least not diminished by racing him on, we will sell him. In the event that we are concerned as to the true value of his form, but are unable to get him sold, there is no need to run him until an easy race does appear. One invariably does appear as long as we are prepared to wait. Oddly enough any minor race which seemed rather uncompetitive last year may well be the same this year, and this fact is worth bearing in mind. This also applies to unusually hot races; some maiden races, where the previous winners have subsequently excelled, can be very tough and should be avoided.

If the stable does have several horses of similar ability at any one time, this may occasionally pose problems as to which horse should fulfil which engagement. In practice we will normally find that due to a wide range of hopefully minor setbacks we cannot have too many useful animals for the opportunities available. Running two horses in one race for different owners can often lead to unpleasantness; even if nothing is said at the time, the ill-feeling, particularly after an important race, may remain for years. If possible it should be avoided.

The heavy ground in Britain early in the year can be devastating for two-year-olds and

Sayf El Arab (USA) scampers clear in the King's Stand Stakes under Taffy Thomas - beating favoured stable companion On Stage into third place. He always wore a neckstrap after having been withdrawn from his intended debut after getting loose.

(Photo courtesy of Leslie Sampson)



this fact must always be borne in mind when deciding on whether to run or not. A seemingly weak race should not normally be passed up with a run of the mill animal as a bird in the hand is certainly, in this business, worth at least two in the bush. We should not expect any two-year-old to recover as well from a hard race in heavy ground as from one in normal conditions. This fact seems often to be ignored, and we may sometimes anticipate a lesser effort from an opponent that has recently run on heavy ground. If we do want always to keep the percentages in our favour we will not run our own youngsters back too quickly in these conditions. Firm ground on the other hand is ideal for running sound horses regularly, particularly as the opposition is often reluctant to take part. Hard ground on the old scale is very rarely encountered nowadays, but fit animals with well-trained legs rarely take any harm on fast ground, and the small fields are an added attraction for us.

Better-class horses tend to have their

careers more formally mapped out in advance with a view to being brought to peak fitness for a particular objective. By definition it would appear that all trainers fail to judge this difficult process correctly most of the time, since all but one horse in any particular race fails in his objective. It makes sense for our operation not to embrace this policy too warmly except when we are quite sure we do have a genuine Saturday horse since, as noted, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. In fact, too rigid an adherence to the advance programme book might be similar to using the list system for purchasing yearlings, in that any attractively framed race has appeared in everyone else's book too!

It is worth bearing in mind that we should never be afraid of one horse when assessing the entries and deciding where to run. This is particularly true with two-year-olds that are ultimately to be sold, because raising their handicap ratings can be an asset rather than a disadvantage. Very often a useful horse might

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be entered at a minor track because his connections are not altogether happy with his progress, and are hoping for a virtual walkover. If our less highly regarded horse is second he can lose nothing, but should he win his record and his value are both enhanced.

With most of our the older horses, but also with the two-year-olds as the season progresses, the different distances of races eventually becomes a consideration. There are two distinct schools of thought on this matter, as some trainers never do experiment at all, whilst others never stop chopping and changing. We should aim at a balance between the two approaches. On the one hand we should not, at least without good reason, try to experiment with any horse that is competing well at some particular distance as long as he does have viable opportunities at that distance. On the other, no horse should repeatedly be asked to run against superior opposition if lesser rivals can be faced by attempting a new trip. Obviously if the horse cannot cope with inferior rivals at the new distance he must revert to Plan A.

It is interesting that British trainers almost invariably increase the distance of their charges, while dramatic improvement might often be made by shortening the trip for many old horses. In Australia it not uncommon for horses to run over a variety of distances and such was also the case in Britain a century ago and in America much more recently. African Chimes was claimed at ten furlongs as a back-end three-year-old; he was then rated 57. Although no world beater he subsequently won 18 races at distances down to five furlongs, and achieved a handicap mark of 96. Forty pounds is a considerable rise in the weights, but this horse was quite unsuited to running long, whether he actually stayed the trip or not. After winning eight races in 1992 he was claimed out of our stable, but he ran so poorly over two unsuccessful seasons that his rating was reduced to the original level before returning to me to win a further five races as a seven- and eight-year-old.

Milk Of The Barley was another versatile horse as regards distance, being quite effective from six furlongs to ten furlongs, as long as he



Milk Of The Barley - an attractive though temperamental horse and an able runner, albeit on his own terms. Tony Ives up.



Provideo and Tony Ives winning at Sandown Park. A blow for the homebreds! Physically unattractive and with a difficult disposition; none of his siblings were any good. (Photo courtesy of Mel Fordham)

was in the mood. He was a very funny-tempered animal and a difficult ride in a race although his owner-breeder would not accept that fact. He also performed consistently poorly after he left the stable due to his owner's displeasure with our stable jockey at the time. He soon regained his form on his return to the fold and he ran second in a Group One race.

In most cases, those horses that run regularly will do their exercise as normal with the rest of the string. Runners should be ridden out for a trot the day after the race and should resume cantering the day after that as long as they are

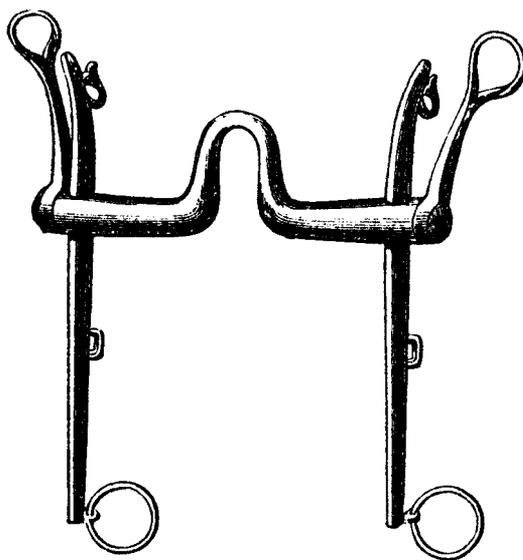
unscathed. There is a widespread perception that racehorses should do very little except enjoy themselves between races. This theory has several quite successful exponents, although two-year-old winners do not usually figure prominently in the statistics of these stables. The method probably achieves a measure of success by default, in that unfit horses tend to get well-handicapped, and then to run themselves into form from a handicap mark that they may well be capable of far exceeding. Some sore or sulky old horses may actually do more exercise loose in a paddock than they could easily be persuaded

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to do in a normal training programme. As a rule, the boxing precept that training hard makes fighting easy should always be applied at least to some degree to racehorse training.

It is interesting that Sam Chifney, in his work of almost two centuries ago, remarked, "A horse will change in his two days running very much for the worse if he has been fed and watered too plentifully...from a supposed kindness to the horse, by unskilful people...What is given him is likely to stay with him till after his second race...[and] must at times affect him very much in his second running". Any jockey who has wasted severely will observe the truth of these remarks from his personal experience. When not at his minimum weight he may be relatively unaffected, in the short term, by what he eats or drinks, but once he is already very light any intake will greatly affect his weight and sharpness. Whilst we do not wish to return to the days of severely drawing our horses before they race, we must be sure to maintain their training schedule so as to avoid their becoming stuffy. Both Timeless Times (USA) in 1990 and Provideo in 1984 did a tremendous amount of work when winning 16 races each as two-year-olds, and regularly did three-part speeds between their races. Their extreme fitness stood them in good stead on those occasions when they had to recover quickly from a severe test. Provideo was actually very coarse in his wind for a wiry type of animal, and it was always felt necessary to restrict his hay intake.

Whilst on the subject of Chifney it is worth noting that the anti-rearing bit currently named after him bears no resemblance to his original design, although it does closely resemble another bit used with drawing reins in the early 19th century. The original Chifney pattern was actually a curb bit with a swivel joint where the mouthpiece joined the side bar to attach to the cheeks of the bridle; it would probably have been quite unsuitable for racing purposes as it would have been far too severe. Samuel Sidney remarked in *The Book of the Horse* (published



Original Chifney pattern bit.

in the 1880s) that "the leverage is so powerful that if a knife were substituted for the (curb) chain it would cut clean through the lower jaw".

Another bit which seems to have lost its identity is the Rockwell snaffle which is often wrongly referred to in England as a Citation bit. This bit actually appears identical to the *Educating Bridle* advocated by Professor E.K. Crocker in his book of 1894, and which he may well have borrowed from Rockwell himself who exhibited as a horse-tamer in the 1860s. There was a tremendous amount of cross-pollination between all the various methods of taming, gentling, starting and generally dealing with the problem horse, although each exponent tended to proclaim his own method as the Holy Grail. *The Education Of The Horse* by Crocker is an excellent book on behavioural problems in the horse and is well worthy of study by anyone in everyday working contact with any animals.

A horse racing in the afternoon should be fed earlier than usual in the morning, as he has to travel, but he will receive no hay. In practice he will not eat this feed in many cases. At the track his water is removed three or four hours before the race unless the weather is hot,

although he is allowed four or five swallows when the lad gets him ready. In fact, there seems little reason to remove it in most cases as no horse is likely to drink a lot of water suddenly in the last hour or two; if he does wish to drink the full amount he will do so as soon as he is loosed. Horses should not be left with unfixed buckets for fear of accidents, and a tub with no handle should be used instead. Many horses never eat their breakfast promptly anyway, particularly at an unusual hour, and so effectively draw themselves to a certain extent. Horses leaving later in the morning for evening racing should get their breakfast as normal and will eat it as normal, but they may also get a little hay. Care must be taken to ensure inedible bedding at the track, or a muzzle should be fitted four or five hours before the race.

It is essential that any horse that may be required to complete a busy season be a good traveller, and although this is to some degree in the lap of the gods, certain steps should be taken to ensure our horses travel as well as possible. Two of the major causes of unrest are narrow stalls in the transport and erratic driving, both of which we can easily control. Big horses, as well as those that have shown any tendency to be restive, should always have an extra-wide stall, and in bad cases a double stall. Very bad travellers may be happier loose in a mare-and-foal sized section of the lorry. It is advisable if possible always to be the last pick-up on shared transport as this avoids an irritable horse becoming upset whilst waiting for others to load. We should be aware of starting stalls problems possibly leading to a horse becoming a bad traveller and vice versa. The wider the stall and the smoother the ride the less trouble will be encountered. Our lads will report any poor driving, and we can take it up with the transport company. As in the case of the feed man, we must ensure that our relationship with the firm puts us in line for their best drivers. It may be advisable to send the better horses and any very frequent runners on their own, as the

extra cost is quite justified for horses that are regular earners. A ramp should always be used for loading and unloading, to avoid upsets which can easily become the basis for bad loading and unloading habits. It is important that horses should never be allowed to get cold in transport, particularly those which initially may sweat; these should travel, particularly in cold weather, with a net cooler under their sheet.

Although they are naturally popular with lads, overnight stays should be avoided whenever possible. Horses naturally rest and eat better in their home surroundings and a very early start is much less wearing for them than a night of nervous anticipation. The extra cost of travelling solo will be justified by results. Although many stables do bandage or otherwise protect the legs for travel, this practice presents more problems than it solves, and most horses will be more comfortable, and safer, barelegged. A wide, heavy-duty tape can be wrapped around the shoe and the clenches in order to guard to a degree against stepping a shoe off.

Elastic girths are to be preferred for racing, although they are rather heavy. Narrow-waisted animals should always wear a breast-girth as we do not want to worry about slipping saddles. As long as a horse looks well in his coat, his being light in his middle is no disgrace.

There is some argument in favour of two-year-olds, and indeed any badly behaved older animals, wearing neckstraps in order, hopefully, to avoid the occasional horse getting loose. It may actually be good policy always to use one, so as not to highlight any bad actors and thus alarm the rider. Any promising horse that has shown signs of excitability at the start, or that seems likely to get loose, should always have one of our lads sent to the start with him. Those horses that do behave badly either loading or when installed can often be rehabilitated by a qualified exponent of Monty Roberts's methods, and this solution should always be considered before the situation becomes desperate. Horses which do wear the so-called Roberts rug in order to prevent their feeling

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On Stage was dependent on blinkers but was a talented and versatile performer. He would have been well able to emulate the exploits of Provideo and Timeless Times (USA) had he been asked to do so. Tony Ives up.
(Photo courtesy of Leslie Sampson)

the sides of the stalls cannot obviously be expected to break quite as smartly (even though it is pulled off as the gate opens) as do their unencumbered rivals, although they should do much better than they did previously.

Blinkers, Bits, and Nosebands

"All the armour wherein the trusted." St. Luke 11:21

Blinkers are an extremely important part of our armoury, although their correct use seems to be little understood in England today. There is a strong impression, at least in Newmarket, that their use implies a 'winding up' and that therefore any improvement in performance is

likely to occur on the first occasion that a horse wears them in public. Any improvement wrought by this method relies on the adrenalin rush of fear, and is not a basis for sustained improvement. In many cases the procedure is counter-productive due to the animal having exhausted itself mentally before the race takes place. Those rare horses that are dramatically improved by this method may well have benefited equally had the winding up been administered with or without the blinkers fitted. Happily, this practice is on the wane and at any rate it forms no part of our policy. However, should the raceday use of the whip ever be banned, there is likely to be a resurgence in

these very traumatic training procedures.

The majority of working and driving horses wear blinkers of some description as a matter of course and these are not fitted with a view to making these animals excited or keen. Their object is purely to focus a horse's attention on the business in hand by shutting out most distractions and by giving him almost tunnel vision. Far from making horses more apprehensive, blinkers are best employed to settle them down when they are already excited by their surroundings or their regime. The term 'excited' may in this context include nervous, resentful, rebellious and even headstrong behaviour, all of which must benefit from any long-lasting sedative effect we might employ. For long-term success it is important to introduce the blinkers in a sensible manner, and for the horse to become as confident in them as a poor swimmer is in a lifejacket, or a child in a security blanket. If possible he should always associate the blinkers with going quietly and efficiently about his business. When we do achieve this, many sweating maniacs and downright hooligans will greatly improve.

For some reason blinkers are regarded in England as the rogue's badge and many stables neglect to make proper use of them. Although difficult to fit with his blinkers, which was done out on the track at the same moment that Tony Ives mounted, Provideo behaved well once he reached the start. He would have won 17 races at two years had the blinkers been employed one race earlier in his career. His busy schedule forced him to lose once after blinkers were obviously necessary to prevent him waiting for the opposition, as we had no chance to school him in them before declaration time for his next race. Graded stakes winner On Stage had to wear blinkers even to be clipped, and Proud And Keen, a useful but very washy horse, actually wore his blinkers between the racecourse stables and the paddock in order to keep him calm. Irregularities in the vision of horses may be a subject that would repay some

careful study. Unbelievably there were some quite famous Harness racehorses that were completely blind, including Sleepy Tom, one-time holder of the world record for pacers. Such animals must have been extremely well schooled and driven.

The occasional wearing of blinkers is very different to their constant use, and possibly results in some slight disorientation that puts the uncooperative or overconfident horse at a disadvantage. This may account for the improvement in performance of many lazy runners when fitted with blinds on racedays only. Once the blinkers are fitted, horses are obviously unable to anticipate precisely any use of the whip and may also feel inclined to head for what is effectively the light at the end of the tunnel ahead of them. Perhaps, in bull-fighting terms, we take blinkered horses out of their own territory and into ours where, like the bull, they are easier to work with. A blinker with slots in the cup is referred to in Europe as a visor and this can also be useful on idle horses, as they cannot really see what is going on, although they are aware of movement around them. Sometimes, a horse that must wear blinkers to show his form will be helped by regularly changing the type of cup in order to give him something to think about.

It is vital that all blinkered horses do go forward, but an initial tendency to sit back must be regarded in the same way as we those yearlings that won't initially follow the pony. A few minutes extra time will usually ensure good results. If it does not, blinkers will not prove helpful in a race. It may be advisable to do some stalls practice in blinkers as many horses will dwell on their first start as they wait to see the other horses, but we must remember to build confidence and not apprehension.

We should have different kinds of blinkers for various situations as individual horses may have different requirements in this department. Half cups or open blinkers are normally fitted to young horses to race as they allow better vision

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of the track ahead and will allow the horse to see a challenger before it has passed. Full blinkers restrict vision very much and can be alarming to a young horse in close quarters, particularly in a big field of runners, with unpredictable results.

One-eyed, or extension blinkers, can transform those horses that hang badly to one side or the other. Whether the horse lugs in or bears out, the big cup is fitted on the side he goes toward. Any horse will want to keep away from the unknown and will tend towards the side he can see best, so he usually proves much easier to steer. Fayruz was a decent horse,

winning six races within 26 days at two, but as he was much stronger and hung severely he needed to wear this blinker at three years old. He was then much easier to keep straight, but if he did happen to get a bump on the blind side he would overreact and hang the other way. This tendency is actually quite logical and should always be remembered.

There are bits available for every situation, but unfortunately many prove less than effective in practice. In most cases we should try to address the underlying problem rather than expect a change of equipment to work a miracle. The majority of racehorses will resent a severe bit and



Fayruz as a 3-year-old. The one-eyed blinker is keeping him straight under pressure. Although he was narrowly beaten, this ride (Pat Eddery up) was one of the finest that we ever had.
(Photo courtesy of Leslie Sampson)



All photos of bits/nosebands courtesy of 'Titch' D. Coombes

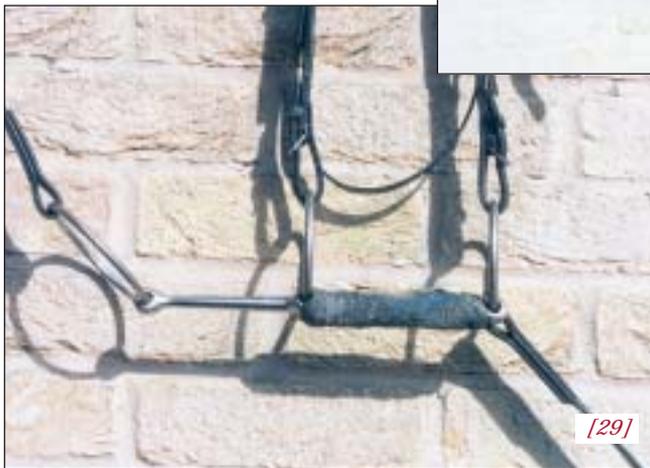
whilst they may be more controllable in one there is a great danger that they may become jibbers, and at best they are unlikely to leave the gate well in their races. In many cases pulling is associated with having the tongue over the bit, and this habit must be guarded against. In America a tongue tie made of crêpe bandage is used, which is simple and effective, but British horses tend to be out at exercise for an hour or more which makes this method unsuitable for daily use. A figure of eight, or cross, noseband is effective in keeping the mouth shut, which discourages the habit, and is also useful to prevent pulling. Care should be taken to fit the noseband correctly so that the horse breathes normally. An even easier method to control this habit before it becomes confirmed is an ordinary nose band with a flash, a thin strap attached by a loop to the front of the nose band and secured beneath the chin [26].

This more moderate version works well and is acceptable to most horses. A tongue tie can be used for racing if necessary; again the horse should be schooled in the tongue tie before he runs. The tongue tie should be wrapped two or three times around the tongue rather than tied round it before securing the ends below the jaw.

Dental problems can often be implicated in the case of hard pullers, horses that hang and those which appear to be afraid of the bit and this aspect should be fully investigated at an early stage of any attempt to resolve the issue. A regular dental check-up should take place. It is normally best to remove all wolf teeth as a matter of course.

Hanging to one side or the other is likely to result from a cut on the inside of the cheek caused by the edges of the molars, and this possibility should be investigated; however, a likely cause of this very undesirable habit (and of the cuts!) is that the exercise rider has been accustomed to hold the animal with its head turned round to one side because it is too keen for him, which progressively deadens that side of the mouth. Unfortunately, racehorses are much better at learning bad habits than good ones, and this one can become confirmed in a very short time. A Dexter ring snaffle [27] can be useful on those horses with a tendency to hang moderately and is inoffensive to most animals. Those horses that hang on one rein more severely should have a strong elastic band, such as a jockey's wristband, attaching the ring of the bit to the throat latch on the side they go towards [28]. This tends to keep the bit straight in the mouth and very often resolves the problem as the horse is obliged to accept gentle but inescapable pressure on the side he previously refused to use. It can be left on in the stable as a gentle but inescapable method of curing one-sidedness, although, as with any bit that is left on constantly, care must be taken to avoid a sore mouth due to hay becoming entangled in it. As mentioned elsewhere, a one-eyed blinker can prove effective. A severe case

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that fails to respond to any of these methods can wear a sideling bit in his races. In this case it might be better to reserve the special bit for racedays. This bit can be easily made by any local engineering firm from stainless steel rod by utilizing three rings cannibalised from ordinary

snaffles. It can be used for horses that hang in either direction by simply reversing the mouthpiece so that the extension bar is on the other side. If necessary the mouthpiece can be covered with leather or vetwrap [29].

Two other useful bits to have are a



combination of the mouthpiece of a regular keyed breaking bridle and the loose rings of an ordinary snaffle [30], and the mouthpiece of a standard pelham or kimblewick, again with snaffle rings [31]. These combinations are easily made up by a local engineering firm. The former can be very useful in giving an irritable or highly strung animal something to think about, and is well worth trying for a variety of mouth and behavioural problems. It has a lot more play than the unaltered version. The latter can be very useful for any animal that would normally be considered a candidate for a rubber bit, or for a horse with cuts on the inside of his cheeks. This bit does not close in on a horse like a snaffle; the port sits on top of the tongue and it seems to be almost as gentle as a rubber bit even though

most racing people would think of it as a severe mouthpiece because of its normal association with a curb chain. It can easily be covered with vetwrap. The main advantage is that although it is easy on a horse's mouth there is more control than with a rubber bit should it be needed. There is less of a problem in changing horses back into the normal steel snaffle from this bit than we often experience when using a rubber one. A curved mouthpiece, which can be covered with leather or vetwrap, is easily adapted from a regular snaffle [32].

A very hard-pulling horse is worth trying in a modification of the harness racer's lip strap. A nylon sock, or something similar, is fitted under the top lip, passed above the bit, pulled fairly tight and tied under the chin [33]. Care should

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be taken to ensure that the horse is comfortable, but the pressure of the bit will exert some pull on the nerves below the gum. In many cases this produces good results. Great care should be taken not to damage the gum and this method should only be used with a considerate rider. The strap can be easily removed without dismounting once the horse gets used to it, and can be useful in getting headstrong animals to the start but it should normally be removed before the race. If it is retained for the race, most likely on a horse racing longer distances, the rider must be fully aware of the potential severity of this equipment and ride accordingly. This strap can sometimes be useful as a short-term distraction with a particularly nervous or rebellious

animal, but its use in such situations should be undertaken with care.

The 'Australian' rubber modified overchecks are quite fashionable in England, but of little use. When tight enough to keep the bit high in the horse's mouth as intended they tend to pull the bridle forward over his ears. A more effective device can easily be made from a loop of elastic [34], stitched or taped to the centre of the bit [35], which passes around the nose and attaches to a strap running down the face. The bit is held tight to the roof of the mouth and the strap down the face may also prove a slight psychological barrier to a puller [36]. Brondesbury was very headstrong and wore this nose band when winning six out of seven at two years, including breaking the track record at Royal Ascot.

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It is as well to have a very light running martingale amongst the racing equipment as some hard pullers take advantage of its absence on race day. It can be let out at the start once the horse has arrived there quietly. Although most horses do seem to pull far less at the races than in the mornings, care should always be taken to ensure that those horses that are headstrong do go down steadily to the start, with their heads against the rail. We are not interested in trials of strength, only in the result of the race. Obviously there is no problem in America as the horses have a pony to lead them to the gate.

Sheepskin nosebands, or shadow rolls, are borrowed from harness racing, where staying on stride is vital, and are intended to prevent a horse from trying to jump minor irregularities, tracks, footprints, divots, pieces of debris, or shadows when he is racing. The most dramatic demonstration of what can happen may have been when Dayjur threw away the 1990 Breeders' Cup Sprint by hurdling the shadow of the grandstand; the situation may have been saved by fitting this noseband, particularly as he had previously demonstrated similar tendencies at Longchamp. This addition can prove effective in improving the head carriage of some animals with a tendency to stargaze. A horse that seems easily distracted by his surroundings can be tried in blinkers with a shadow roll attached to the bottom edge.

Sometimes we find a horse that, racing on dirt, repeatedly shakes his head as the kickback hits his nose. If he is basically racing well but is just too conscious of anything touching his nose it may be worth fitting a nose band with a fringe which constantly flaps against him to take his mind off the sand hitting him [37]. This problem of head shaking is occasionally noticed at exercise in heavy rain or when snow is falling, but in most cases it will be no more than a nuisance. It seems likely that the effect of the dirt hitting the eyeshields used by some

stables may be if anything more distracting than the effect of it hitting the horse's face.

British racing is famous for the variety of its courses. Unfortunately most of them do have undesirable characteristics of one sort or another, and we should give a certain amount of consideration to whether or not a particular animal is likely to handle a particular track. The greatest race in the world, the Epsom Derby, happens to be run on one of the worst courses in the world, with a severe camber throughout the straight. At Royal Ascot, the best horses in the country must actually race across a public highway covered by mats and cut grass in all races on the straight course.

Long-striding and inexperienced horses should not be expected to excel on very sharp or undulating tracks, and nonstayers cannot be guaranteed to get home on stiff, galloping tracks. However, as in the matter of distance, the strength of the opposition is a strong factor in any decision-making. Our efforts are more likely to bear fruit against weak opponents on less than ideal tracks than against better horses on more suitable ones. We must always play the percentages in order to succeed, and a sound knowledge not only of all courses, but also of our horses' preferences is essential.

The statement that a good horse goes on any ground may be simplistic, quite apart from the difficulty of finding a good horse! It is probably true to say however that a decent horse will always go on decent ground, even though he may demonstrate a preference for either top of the ground or for soft ground. Very few horses actually like either heavy ground or rock-hard ground, although some are less inconvenienced than others and so may apparently show great improvement. As mentioned elsewhere, heavy ground should be avoided with two-year-olds unless a golden opportunity presents itself. Horses that interfere are more likely to do so on very soft ground as their front feet cannot breakover quite so fast as on top of the ground.