

A Day at the Races



Suffolk Downs – A Sport of Kings for Common Enjoyment

Suffolk Downs is a Mecca for horse race lovers. Thoroughbreds love to race, and those who come to watch are thrilled by the sport. When the trumpets sound, all eyes are on the track to watch a race that is over in a little over a minute and a half. The announcer on the loudspeaker shouts the position of the horses as they round the turns and head to the finish line.

Horse racing dates back to 3000-4000BC. It is referenced in Norse mythology. Chariot races were popular in Greek and Roman times.

Today's thoroughbreds trace their lineage back to three foundation sires brought to England from the Mediterranean Middle East in the 17th Century. They were known as the Darley Arabian, Godolphin Arabian and Byerly Turk, named after their owners, Thomas Darley, Lord Godolphin, and Captain Robert Byerly. These horses were tall and slender with long legs and sturdy hind quarters. They were ideally proportioned for long distance racing.

Descendants of these three stallions were crossed with English mares, giving rise to "thoroughbreds", some of whose offspring were sent to America. There is a record of horse racing in America in 1664. Governor Samuel Ogle of Maryland inaugurated thoroughbred racing in Maryland in 1775, the same year that Paul Revere made his famous ride.

Thoroughbred racing came to Massachusetts in 1934, when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts created the State Racing Commission and legalized pari-mutual wagering. The Eastern Racing Association procured 200 acres of mudflats in East Boston and Revere and hired A.G. Tomasello & Son as the contractor to build a racing facility with a grandstand for 16,000, clubhouse for 5,000, track and paddock. It was completed in a record 62 days.

On July 10, 1935, Suffolk Downs opened its doors. In its inaugural year Suffolk Downs began its greatest tradition, the *Massachusetts Handicap*. It offered big purse money and attracted some of the biggest names, both equine and human. Hall of Fame jockey George Woolf rode *Top Row* to

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Photos:

Top, No. 7 heads to the gate. Center, The starting gate at Suffolk Downs. Bottom: Coming into the final stretch.

Photos:

Top, Horseshoe Inspector Paul C. Brooker. Center, Jockey Tammi Piermarini on her horse, Four Four Two. Bottom, A cooling spray after the race.



victory in the first *MassCap*. In 1937 the legendary *Seabiscuit* with jockey Johnny "Red" Pollard won the third running of the *MassCap* in record time before 40,000 cheering fans.

Behind every thoroughbred there is a team of professionals that includes the owner, trainer, groom, horseshoer, veterinarian, exerciser, and jockey. A typical day at the track begins at 5:00am. The groom washes and brushes down the horses on his watch and feeds them their individual rations of hay, timothy, and alfalfa, along with vitamins, electrolytes and water. Feet are checked for stones. Horseshoes are checked. The tack—bridles, saddles and girth—are cleaned and oiled. The horses are then taken to the track for an exercise routine. This is followed by a walk around the track or on an exercise machine. All of this is completed by 11:00am, following which there is a period of rest before the afternoon races.

Track visitors are a friendly group that enjoys the repartee that comes with a sharing of knowledge on horses, jockeys and their accomplishments. They all have Racing Forms and a high percentage place wagers on an individual horse or group of horses to Win, Place, or Show, with \$2.00 the minimum wager. Wagers can also be placed on races at tracks other than *Suffolk Downs*, with the races simulcast on screens throughout the clubhouse before an enthusiastic audience.

Suffolk Downs is more than a race-track. It is a cultural and community center. It has produced major fund raisers for the *Joey Fund* and *Cystic Fibrosis Foundation*. Musical concerts have included *The Beatles* in 1955, *Aerosmith* and *The Jackson Five* in the '70s. *Kool and the Gang*, a top-of-the-charts R&B group, performed there in August

this year for *East Boston Day*.

Suffolk Downs is committed to the lifetime care of its thoroughbreds. When their racing days are over, they seek to place retired animals in good homes. Some have value as potential stallions or brood mares. Others may transition to compete in dressage events or show jumping. *Suffolk Downs* works with organizations such as the *Communication Alliance to Network Thoroughbred Exercisehorses of New England (CANTER New England)* and *The Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation*.

The more one learns about the history of thoroughbred racing, the horses in the winning circle and the jockeys who ride them, the more fun it is to visit *Suffolk Downs* for a day at the races. -/-



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