

Trotting horses

The Reporter has a bit of a passion for horses generally, and trotting horses in particular just because they are so strong and beautiful...

The UK's top harness racers head to Musselburgh this weekend (17 and 18 July) for the country's most important fixture which culminates in a Champion's Day on Sunday.



The East Lothian racecourse is working hand in hand with the harness racing authorities to build up this weekend fixture and has succeeded in securing television coverage by TurfTV which will feed live in to selected betting shops.

With heats taking place on Saturday, the jewel in the crown is Sunday's Champion's Day which features the finals of the Famous Musselburgh Pace Cup, the Hurricane Pace and the Red Mills International Free For All Pace.

A full card of 180 entries from Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales will compete for just under £40,000 prize money and has attracted high calibre contenders, including horses from top Dublin stud Meadowbranch.

Former Irish champion drivers Geoff Dunne and John Richardson will face strong competition from leading British driver William 'Rocker' Laider and Scottish champion John Gilvear.

Recognised as probably the hardest race to win under any code, the Famous Musselburgh Pace it is the ultimate test in harness racing and only one horse in modern times has won it twice – the legendary Direct Dream. This year young pretenders Impartial and Stoneriggs Mystery will be taking on the Irish contingent of For A Few Dollars More and Earned Income for the title.

In the Free For All event every horse has the credentials to win but worth watching is Conner's Dragon, the 2008 Horse of The Year is just returned from Canada and cannot be ignored.

New British Champion Crown Manhattan will make a strong challenge while Ireland is represented by diminutive millionaire pacer Doonbeg who is really on form following a big win at Aberystwyth. Laneside Lexus was 2009 Horse of the Year and a past Famous Musselburgh Pace winner, but needs to reproduce her 2009 form to be in with a chance.

Ireland's Porterstown Jack is a tough campaigner and a course specialist but the most popular winner would be Welsh-bred Scoot Around. Owned and trained in the Yorkshire Dales he is a former multiple British Champion, the first horse to win over £50,000 in Britain and although 11 years old is running really well.

Irish raider Lyons Stephen looks a certainty in the Scottish Four Year Old Championship but the 'Midlands Maestro' Peter Addis has different ideas with Rhyds Destiny.

On Saturday the first of 10 heats gets underway at 12.30pm while Champion's Day on Sunday begins at 1.30pm with the final of the Hurricane Pace and concludes at 4.25pm with the Famous Musselburgh Pace.

Harness racing has been run at Musselburgh since 1893 under the auspices of the Musselburgh Fair Day Association. Association president Jim Kemp said: "This is the most important harness racing day in the UK calendar and we are trying to introduce the thrill of harness racing to a wider audience. Musselburgh Racecourse has been very supportive and is working hard within the industry to promote this weekend.

"In terms of the quality of entries the weekend will certainly deliver as we have the finest drivers and horses from the UK and Ireland all heading to Musselburgh. This is without doubt the best field of horses ever assembled in Great Britain."

Musselburgh Racecourse general manager, Bill Farnsworth, said: "As far as harness racing goes this is the cream of the crop we are welcoming to Musselburgh. Champion's Day is a top quality six card race which in horseracing terms would be the equivalent of the Guineas, the Derby, the King George and St Ledger, all on the same card."

Gates open on Saturday at 11am, first race is at 12.30pm while on Sunday gates open at noon with first race at 1.30pm. For more information visit www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk