

Musselburgh Flat Season gets underway this Friday



Musselburgh Racecourse is preparing to welcome a near capacity crowd as it kicks off its Flat season on Friday 1 April 2011.

The gate will be buoyed with a free entry offer which saw 6000 tickets being snapped up under the Racing for Change initiative, which is promoting free racing in April at 25 UK racecourses.

While general manager Bill Farnsworth is delighted at the prospect of a busy Musselburgh he is under no illusion that it masks a worrying decline in the revenues being received from the betting industry.

A dramatic slashing of income from the major betting firms, provided through the Levy Board, – down by £12,000 per flat fixture on 2010 – has left Musselburgh, like every other course, picking up the pieces.

The pain is dulled slightly with a £72,000 contribution from Betfair, as part of their Scottish Flat Racing Series, while a BHA development race grant adds another £10,500 to the pot.

Musselburgh has managed to boost its own contribution to each race day prize fund to £27,000, an average of £7,000 per meeting extra, and average prize money for Musselburgh's 15 flat racing fixtures is being maintained at £50,000 per fixture. As a consequence all of Musselburgh's flat races will meet or exceed the recently introduced Horsemen's Group prize money tariffs from April 1.

Bill Farnsworth said: "Income from the betting industry has declined, and as a result, prize money in Britain is in danger

of sliding below an acceptable level. We realise that this situation is not sustainable and so have committed to increasing our own contributions to prize money, which results in Musselburgh matching or exceeding the Horsemen's Group tariffs in all of our flat races for 2011.

"With prudent management and supportive sponsors, we have increased our own contribution to each race day in 2011 to more than £27,000, an increase of £7,000 on last year, and we know owners and trainers value the effort we make at Musselburgh to make it an attractive proposition when choosing where to race."

However, Farnsworth issued this stark warning: "We cannot continue to contribute this level of money to prize money beyond the short-term, because we are now only working to a break-even position. In addition to shoring up prize money funding we are also making up for a shortfall in Levy Board funding elsewhere within the sport, including the sport's regulation and integrity.

"We are therefore currently not generating profits to invest in the infrastructure of the racecourse. The funding model for British racing must change so that the major betting firms pay a fair and reasonable price for British horseracing.

"It doesn't take a maths genius to see we are operating in very difficult circumstances. Any small business faced with a £200,000 hole in their budget (flat fixtures only) has difficult decisions to make but on the plus side we will continue to introduce new initiatives, such as improvements to the race day experience and Friday's free race day, to make racing attractive and exciting to the wider public.

"We are trying to do our bit for the sport but the betting industry needs to play its part, otherwise British racing will face a rapid decline."

Highlights of the East Lothian course's flat season include an

Easter Weekend double header featuring the Musselburgh Gold Cup and Easter Sunday Family Day (Saturday April 23-24); the £80,000 Edinburgh Cup (Saturday June 4); the ever popular Ladies Day which has sold out the last five years (Friday June 17); and the Betfair Scottish Champion's Day, on Saturday September 3.

- All the free tickets from Musselburgh's Friday meeting have been allocated but a limited number of tickets at the special price of £10 will be on sale at the gate on the day.