

Harness racing at Musselburgh this weekend

✘ Harness racing's elite will be out in force at Musselburgh Racecourse this week as horses and drivers compete for the sport's most prestigious title, the Famous Musselburgh Pace.

Organised by the Musselburgh Fair Day Association, the meetings have attracted almost 200 entries from the leading UK and Irish stables and The Pace final will be the climax of a two day meeting.

On Thursday six qualifying heats, followed by three Graded races, culminates in the finale of the Hurricane Pace. On Friday all eyes will be on the final fifth qualifying heat which has the much fancied Stoneriggs Mystery drawn against Irish horse and former world champion, Doonbeg, from the Porterstown stable.

Stoneriggs is one of 19 entries from the famous Laidler stable in Bishop Auckland and will have driver William "Rocker" Laidler looking to deliver a "home" victory for Scottish owner David Morton. However, Stirling based trainer John Gilvear's Astounding, running in the third qualifying race could provide an outside challenge for the £6000 prize.

An Open Ladies Race has been reintroduced this year – a reflection of the growing number of female drivers taking part in harness racing – and a Free for All open trotting event has attracted a strong field.

Organiser Jim Kemp, chairman of the Musselburgh Fair Day Association, said: "The number of entries is up on last year and the quality is some of the best to be found in European harness racing.

"We have changed the format slightly and instead of a

Champion's Day with both finals on the same day we are reverting to the Hurricane and the Famous Musselburgh Pace being run on separate days. This should suit the trainers and drivers and ensures each day has a fitting climax, with the respective finals being contested.

"Everyone in the harness racing world looks forward to racing at Musselburgh and the Famous Musselburgh Pace, which is now in its 118th year, is without doubt the most prestigious event in the harness racing calendar.

"We hope to attract decent attendances on both days and I hope those who have not been harness racing will come along and give it a try as it's a great spectator sport."

Musselburgh Racecourse general manager, Bill Farnsworth, said: "We are all set for another excellent two days of harness racing and look forward to welcoming the sport's leading drivers, trainer and owners.

"The Musselburgh Fair Day Association have done well in attracting many of the sport's leading lights and we hope our regular race goers and local residents will add their support in making this an excellent occasion."

Gates open on both days at 11.30am with first race at 1.30pm. Tickets are priced £15, or £13.50 if booked online in advance. For more information please visit www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk

