

Totepool's New Year Bonanza at Musselburgh



Musselburgh Racecourse
Totepool New Year's Day
Race Meeting.

A gamble to bring in the New Year by launching Scotland's only horseracing meeting has paid off handsomely for Musselburgh Racecourse.

Building steadily since the New Year's Day race meeting was first held in 2011, the East Lothian track has broken the 5,000 attendance barrier for the first time, with crowds up by 30% on last year. The six card race meeting, which carried prize money of more than £120,000, also features the world's oldest professional athletics race, the New Year Sprint, and 2016 saw a 147 year old record smashed with the first female sprinter claiming the coveted title.

More than 5,400 horseracing and athletics fans were on their feet to roar home 18-year-old Jedburgh sprinter Jazmine (correct) Tomlinson as she triumphed in the handicap race to win the £4000 prize and crystal trophy.

Bill Farnsworth, general manager at Musselburgh Racecourse, said he was delighted years of hard work by his staff had paid off in establishing New Year's Day as a premier sporting event.

He said: "It was quite a gamble to launch the New Year's Day meeting back in 2011 and we got off to the worst possible start when in the first two years we had to abandon the meetings because of poor weather. It was not a great start and

attendances after this in 2013 and 2014 were pretty disappointing, which left us wondering if we'd made the correct decision, but with hindsight the slow start was understandable."

Mr Farnsworth said a spike in attendance in 2015 finally showed the New Year's Day meeting might fulfil its potential and laid the foundation for this week's record attendance on 1 January.

He added: "This year we were blessed with good weather again and the day truly came of age. The crowd was nearly 5500 (up almost 30%), the racing was high class, the track looked fantastic, and the production on CCTV/Racing UK/Ch4 was top class and professional.

"The marquees, bars and restaurants coped very well under a lot of pressure, the New Year Sprint was dramatic and we watched history in the making as the race welcomed its first female winner in 147 years.

"It was all carried out in a great atmosphere and just the perfect day to showcase the excitement of jump racing. It was a great team effort and I am very proud of the entire team for a very well executed raceday."

The featured race was the Totepool Hogmaneigh Hurdle (see what they did there?) worth nearly £20,000 to the winner and which was won by the 5/2 favourite Aristo Du Plessis ridden by Diarmuid O'Regan and trained by James Ewart. My tip, Pearl Castle was second with Zaidiyn third.

It was a good afternoon for the favourites with Sir Chauvelin (10/11) winning the opening race the toteplacepot First Foot Juvenile Hurdle at 12.25 and Away For Slates (3/1) winning the Totepool Happy New Year Handicap Hurdle at 1.00. My wife took great delight in backing the winner of the totequadpot Scottish Premier Chase (handicap) at 1.35, Indian Temple romping home at 17/2.

By the time the final two races were due, this reporter was assessing his losses. A quick post on social media pleading for assistance paid immediate dividends. I backed the favourite Wakhan (11/4) who duly won the Scoop6 Soccer The £1 Million Football Bet Novices Handicap Chase at 2.45 and I was at the break-even stage for the afternoon.

This left the final race of the afternoon – the Win A Football With Scoop6 Soccer Handicap Hurdle at 3.20. To my delight, Donna's Diamond held off the attention of Harry Hunt to win at 6/1 and return a rare profit for this punter.

It was a great afternoon, as it always is at Musselburgh Races. A huge crowd lapped up the action and it was a cracking way to start the New Year.

For further information visit www.musselburgh-racecourse.co.uk.

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