

ask

The Owners' Circle

All About Silks

The design of an owner's silks – a unique and personal imprimatur – is a time honored thread that weaves that owner into the rich, romantic tapestry that makes Thoroughbred racing the Sport of Kings.

Thoroughbred horseracing was first organized as a sport by King Charles II of England, who established a regular race meeting at Newmarket in 1671 for the pleasure of the nobility. The earliest known race meeting in the American colonies was in 1665 on Long Island. Although the chariot drivers of ancient Rome may have been the first to sport "racing colors," wearing identifying capes and headbands of brilliant color, the concept of using individual silks in horseracing was first introduced in Newmarket, in 1762.

At that time, the English Jockey Club was a proprietary organization populated by the most prominent racehorse owners of the day. There were, in all, seven dukes, one marquis, four earls, one viscount, three commoners, one lord, and two baronets. To distinguish at a glance which horse in the running was owned by whom, they submitted "colors." The color "straw," chosen by the Duke of Devonshire, is still used by that family's famed stable today. But by far the most celebrated of all silks was chosen 25 years later: "black with white cap," the colors adopted by Lord Derby.

Today, there are over 30,000 different silk designs worldwide that are registered with The Jockey Club. Given the number of variations permitted in jacket design, combined with sleeve design, individual silks could run into the tens of millions without repeating one another. It has happened more than once that two horses from different states racing against each other were registered, in their respective states, with the same silks. In such a case, stewards at the racing track determine who runs in those colors, and order the other jockey be attired alternatively.

Although The Jockey Club is better known as the breed registry for Thoroughbreds in North America, the rules of racing in New York State require that owners must register their stable name and jockey silks with The Jockey Club in order to run at one of the four Thoroughbred tracks in New York – Aqueduct, Belmont, Finger Lakes, or Saratoga. Owners from other states are welcome to, and often do,

register their stable name and silks with The Jockey Club so that they do not have to be concerned about their silks being in conflict, and possibly not being able to use them, when they race in New York.

The California Horse Racing Board has only a few requirements regarding silks, legally referred to as "colors." The colors for each owner must be registered with the Clerk of the Course at any track where the horse is to run, which must be done before the horse enters to run. Also, the registered colors of one owner may not be registered by another, except after five years of non-use or abandonment by the first owner.

Although nylon silks are still being made, most silks today are made of aerodynamic lycra, which conforms to the body without constricting – much like high tech bicycle clothing.

With the advent of the new, larger jockey helmets – a much safer alternative to the old "Caliente" style helmets – the jockey cap, at least, must be made of the new lycra fabric in order to stretch over the helmet.

There are several purveyors of silks located at major racetracks in California, producing silks entirely by hand. They are experts in design and color and can help an owner to effectively interpret both his/her self-

image and dreams into your own personal silks.

One's trainer can usually provide a referral, or a list of referrals can be obtained by contacting either the racing office or TOC.



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