

California Works & Starts, Part II

Let's face it, to make money in this business, owners must run their horses. No owner gets paid simply to work a horse. Excepting the starter fee, owners' horses must start, race, and finish in the top five to "earn a check."

However, not all horses are created equal. Some need more time between starts, have specific physical conditions that limit their ability and health, are not suited for the type of races run at a given track, are inexperienced and need a certain race or distance in which to develop confidence, are within the care of a trainer who regularly opts to wait for the "right race" rather than take a chance and run a horse where it's not the first or second choice in a race, etc.

Because of these differences, the racing inventory at any given California track can vary from meet to meet, creating unique challenges for racing offices and horsemen alike, in carding and filling races that suit inventory on hand. How well each adjusts to these challenges is often the subject of much debate, and little agreement. Racing offices are torn between the need to card races that appeal to the betting public – and thus produce more handle for track commissions and purse revenues – and the need to find creative means to give every horse type/category in the inventory an opportunity to run. As is often the case when opinions diverge on how best to accomplish these goals, the truth may lie somewhere in the middle.

With the installation of engineered surfaces has come much greater demand for on-track stall space, both in Northern and Southern California. Trainers who were previously allotted stall space simply because they had been stabled at a given track for so many years now find that they must defend their Stall Application requests based on both the performance of their individual horses and upon their own productivity in terms of a starts-per-stall ratio. This newfound demand for stall space has raised the level of accountability for nearly all trainers. Some have accepted this scrutiny as unavoidable, while others consider it an affront to their legacy.

On behalf of owners, TOC continually explores different metrics to gauge the performance of the industry: North and South; specific meets, race types and schedules; business dynamics such as signal pricing and distribution; the effectiveness of proposed and enacted legislation or industry programs; etc. As a part of those efforts, we took a closer look at some "productivity" data relating to starts, stall, purses, and field sizes at California's major Thoroughbred meets over the past two racing years, 2006 and 2007, and in many instances, both before and after the installation of engineered racing surfaces. To improve the accuracy of this effort, TOC made certain adjustments in order to "normalize" the data, taking into account variations in meet length and on-track stabling capacity, and here is what we found...

2007 Season							
Meet	Race Days	Total Starts	Avg Daily Starts/Meet	Average Starts/Stall	Est. Starts/ Race Day/Stall per 100 Race Days	#Races	Average Field Size
LATC	85	6,378	75.0	1.53	1.80	740	8.62
Hollywood Spring (engineered surf.)	63	4,424	70.2	1.03	1.64	545	8.12
Del Mar (engineered surf.)	43	3,203	74.5	0.74	1.71	371	8.63
Oak Tree (engineered surf.)	31	2,438	78.6	0.60	1.94	274	8.90
Hollywood Fall (engineered surf.)	32	2,441	76.3	0.57	1.78	283	8.63
Golden Gate Winter	31	1,965	63.4	1.13	3.65	268	7.33
Golden Gate Spring	35	2,174	62.1	1.30	3.72	302	7.20
Golden Gate Fall (engineered surf.)	32	2,293	71.7	1.73	5.39	272	8.43
Bay Meadows Spring	48	2,738	57.0	1.64	3.42	406	6.74
Bay Meadows Fall	52	2,914	56.0	2.19	4.22	439	6.64

2006 Season							
Meet	Race Days	Total Starts	Avg Daily Starts/Meet	Average Starts/Stall	Est. Starts/ Race Day/Stall per 100 Race Days	#Races	Average Field Size
LATC	86	6,320	73.5	1.45	1.68	746	8.47
Hollywood Spring (engineered surf.)	61	4,301	70.5	0.92	1.50	531	8.10
Del Mar	43	3,140	73.0	0.70	1.64	371	8.46
Oak Tree	26	1,844	70.9	0.45	1.74	226	8.16
Hollywood Fall (engineered surf.)	35	2,574	73.5	0.59	1.70	305	8.44
Golden Gate Spring	65	3,500	53.8	1.95	3.00	548	6.39
Golden Gate Fall	36	2,225	61.8	1.17	3.24	307	7.25
Bay Meadows Spring	28	1,678	59.9	0.93	3.34	241	6.96
Bay Meadows Fall	46	2,802	60.9	1.47	3.19	385	7.28
Bay Meadows Holiday	31	1,716	55.4	0.95	3.06	256	6.70

Notes:
 1. Stall statistics obtained from racing departments; statistics do not reflect stall numbers for intrastate and out of state shippers.
 2. SoCal meet stalls reflect estimated occupied stalls at live on-track and off-site facilities.
 3. Golden Gate Fields stall statistics reflect GGF and BM locations only, and exclude Pleasanton.
 4. Bay Meadows stall statistics reflect BM location only. In order to assess comparable data, BM stalls were "normalized" including the same number of stalls provided at comparable GGF meets.

- Every meet that installed an engineered surface experienced increased demand for on-track stall space.
- Every track that installed an engineered surface experienced an increase in its average field size.
- Every track that installed an engineered surface increased its average daily purse revenue generated – meaning more money was paid to owners!
- Since the installation of at least one engineered surface on each circuit, the average number of starts per stall has increased at every meet on the circuit with the exception of Hollywood Fall.
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- Generally speaking, and disregarding for the moment the type of races run, stall productivity in Northern California is substantially higher than in Southern California.
- Until the installation of the engineered surface at Golden Gate, average field size in Southern California was significantly higher than in Northern California.
- Since installation of engineered surfaces in Southern California, an increasing percentage of inventory has shifted from off-track training centers with dirt surfaces to on-track stalls.