



PHOTO: BERKOT & ASSOCIATES

BY WILSON SHIRLEY

**R**acetracks around the country seem to be more frequently grouping stakes into showcase days, with three, four, or more stakes clustered into a single day's race card. For major tracks, showcase days can be promoted as special events, marketable to a wider audience of potential race-goers. For smaller tracks, multiple-stakes days are a means of getting their signals into simulcast markets that do not normally carry them.

How does having more than one stakes race per day affect attendance and wagering? Does the clustering of Southern California stakes races into "event days" make a difference? How much does it increase on-track attendance? How much does it increase out-of-state wagering on the day's program? To find out, TOC reviewed the last three years of racing at Southern California racetracks, which have rich, extensive stakes programs. We looked at weekend racing in Southern California from 1994 to 1997 to see what patterns emerged when stakes are clustered.

During the period studied, there were 292 days of racing on Saturdays or Sundays (when most stakes are scheduled) at Del Mar, Hollywood Park (Spring and Fall\* Meetings), Oak Tree, and Santa Anita. As the top chart shows, 165 of these 292 days featured one stakes race, which we can consider the norm for a Southern California weekend race-day. The largest cluster of stakes races offered on any one day was nine, during the California Cup at Oak Tree.

These figures clearly show that offering more than one stakes race on a single race-day is correlated with a distinct and substantial increase in on-track attendance: on-track attendance goes up 19% if there are two stakes, 41% with three, and 86% if four stakes are offered. On-track wagering also goes up on these days, though not quite so dramatically (presumably, these are new race-goers coming to a special event). And out-of-state wagering on our simulcast signal, which is already offered in all simulcast markets, also increases with the quality of the racing program.

What about racing of the highest quality? Does a Graded stake matter? Does clustering Graded stakes together on a program have a similar effect? As the bottom chart indicates, a single Graded race does not make for a special event in Southern California: while on-track handle goes up when a Graded race is offered, attendance and out-of-state handle are actually down

Number of Stakes Per Day	Number of Days	Daily Average			% Increase Over 1 Stake Per Day		
		On-Track Attendance	On-Track Handle	Out-of-State Handle	On-Track Attendance	On-Track Handle	Out-of-State Handle
0 Stakes	1	10,469	\$1,741,832	\$3,375,928			
1 Stakes	165	14,518	\$2,344,678	\$3,359,710			
2 Stakes	86	17,329	\$2,562,936	\$3,353,714	19%	9%	6%
3 Stakes	26	20,428	\$3,033,872	\$3,806,892	41%	29%	13%
4 Stakes	8	27,058	\$4,057,498	\$4,539,490	86%	73%	35%
5 Stakes	2	18,305	\$2,984,761	\$3,697,545	26%	27%	10%
6 Stakes	1	20,122	3,033,662	\$408,689	39%	29%	31%
9 Stakes	3	31,042	\$3,576,991	\$4,702,289	114%	53%	40%

Number of Graded Stakes Per Day	Number of Days	Daily Average			% Increase over No. Graded Stakes		
		On-Track Attendance	On-Track Handle	Out-of-State Handle	On-Track Attendance	On-Track Handle	Out-of-State Handle
0 Stakes	82	15,734	\$2,315,518	\$3,455,562			
1 Stakes	165	15,182	\$2,467,906	\$3,360,536	-4%	7%	-3%
2 Stakes	30	22,484	\$3,125,078	\$4,205,512	43%	35%	22%
3 Stakes	11	19,830	\$2,914,539	\$3,609,153	26%	26%	4%
4 Stakes	4	26,458	\$4,302,984	\$5,210,685	68%	86%	51%

slightly compared to weekend days when no Graded stakes are on the program. On the other hand, two Graded stakes races can be a real kicker, with on-track attendance and handle up 43% and 35% respectively, and out-of-state wagering up 22%.

While there are doubtless other factors contributing to these striking increases, it appears evident that higher quality racing can be strongly associated with double-digit percentage increases in on-track attendance, handle, and out-of-state wagering on weekends. For Southern California racetracks, whose operators enjoy increased admission and concession revenues in addition to higher wagering commissions, scheduling three or more stakes events each weekend race-day appears to be a distinctly productive strategy. 🐾

\*Figures from the 1997 Breeders' Cup at Hollywood Park were excluded.

*Wilson Shirley serves as Director of Information Services for the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association.*