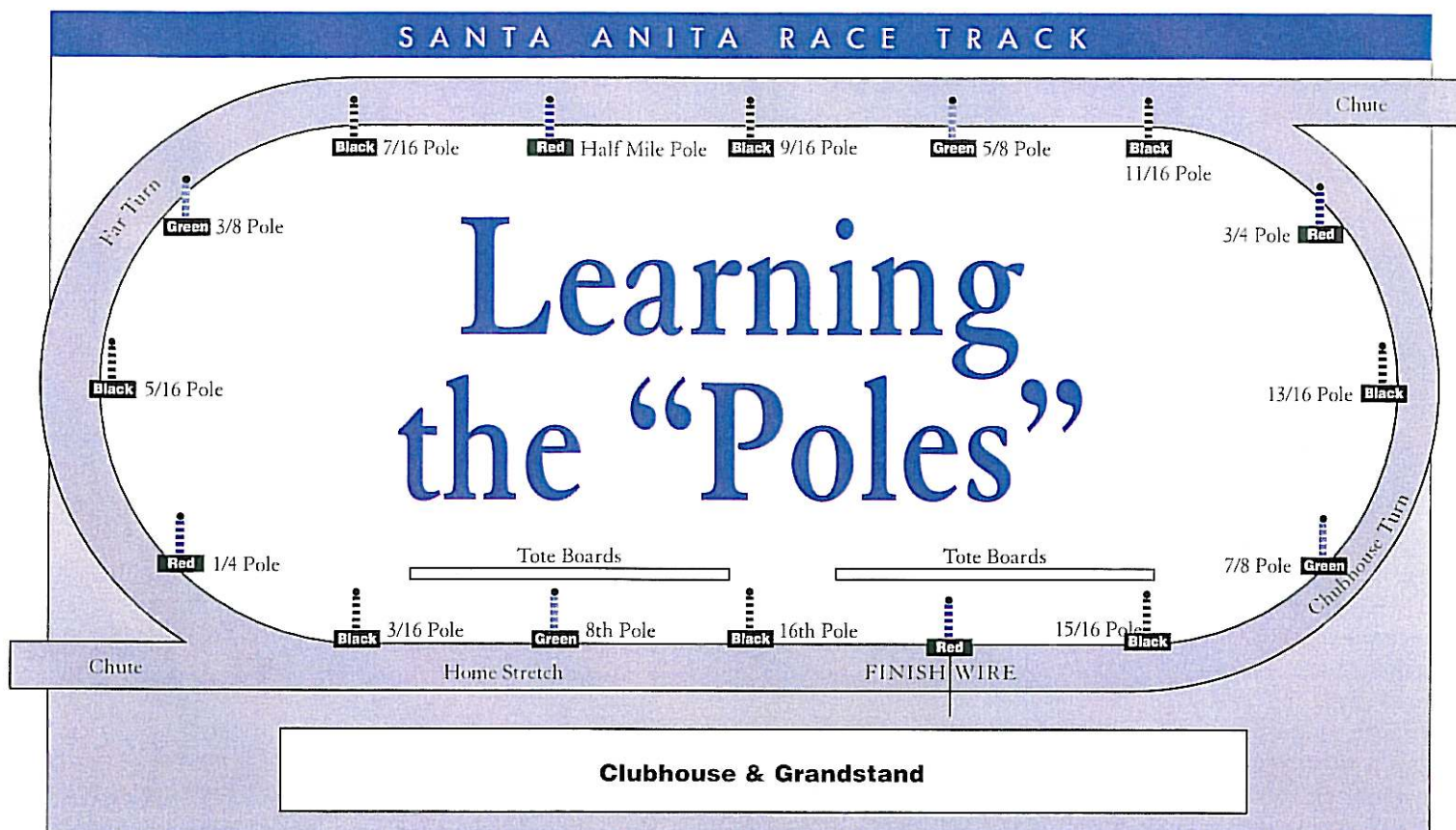


## SANTA ANITA RACE TRACK

# Learning the "Poles"



## What are they, Where are they, and Why are they Different Colors?

By Lucinda Lovitt

It's a beautiful Saturday morning in Los Angeles. You decide to enjoy it by watching your horse go through its morning workout at Santa Anita. So you jump in your car, drive to the track, and after getting your first cup of coffee at Clockers' Corner, find your trainer.

As you watch the sea of horses galloping by, you ask yourself "How will I be able to time my horse, and how will I know how far it has worked?" To answer this question, and have a better understanding of morning workouts, it's important to know the poles, or mile-fraction markers on the racetrack.

The placement of poles on the racetrack is crucial to those involved in training and racing Thoroughbreds. Jockeys, trainers, and owners use the poles to measure how far a horse has traveled, and how far they have to go.

The easiest way to acquaint yourself with the poles is to start at the finish line, or "wire", and count the poles backward, or clockwise. In North America, the distance between two poles is 1/16th of a mile. Black poles represent 1/16th of a mile, green poles 1/8th of a mile, and red poles indicate 1/4 mile fractions.

For example, let's look at Santa Anita's mile track (see diagram). Start at the wire, and begin to count the poles backwards. The first pole (black) you reach is the 1/16th mile marker, the second pole (green) is the 1/8th (or 2/16th) mile marker, the third pole (black) is the 3/16th mile marker, and the fourth

pole (red) is the quarter-mile marker. As you continue to work your way backward around the track, add 1/16th of a mile to every pole you reach. Doing this, you will pass the 5/16th pole (black), 3/8th pole (green), 7/16th pole (black), and the 1/2 mile pole (red). Continue to count your way around, passing the 3/4 pole (red) and finally back to the finish line, which would be the fourth and final 1/4 mile marker. If you are having trouble, try remembering the order of the colors of the poles with this acronym, B.G.B.R. (Black, Green, Black, Red).

However, not all tracks in North America are the same size. Here in California, Santa Anita, Del Mar, Bay Meadows, and Golden Gate Fields are all mile tracks, while Hollywood Park has a 1 1/8th mile oval. So before you begin counting poles, determine the size of a racetrack to make sure your pole count comes out correct.

Armed with this knowledge, you'll now know when to start and stop your stopwatch when your trainer informs you your horse is going to work seven furlongs from the 3/4 pole. 🐾



*Lucinda Lovitt serves as TOC's owners' liaison. She is always available to answer, or find an answer to, questions surrounding racehorse ownership.*