

NEWS

# Plummeting attendances hit racing harder than other sports

By Jonathan Harding

BRITISH racing's average attendances have fallen more than all other major sports, according to data compiled by the Racing Post.

In the first half of this year the average racecourse attendance in Britain was 3,274, the lowest this century and down 17.6 per cent on 2019. Major meetings have generally fared better, although they have still experienced a drop, with 94,937 people attending Glorious Goodwood, down 4.83 per cent from 99,762 three years ago.

While it is difficult to draw direct comparisons, the decline in racecourse attendances can be viewed alongside other sports. The overall drop is sharper than that experienced in football, cricket, golf, tennis and Formula 1 this summer, and by a long way in some cases.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) declared a 13 per cent decline in ticket sales for the T20 Blast compared to pre-pandemic numbers, although five counties reported record crowds, including Leicestershire, who cut ticket prices during the group stages. The quarter-finals attracted a record 42,000 spectators.

Major events have performed well but there were pockets of empty seats at Wimbledon. A record 515,164 people attended the two-week tournament, but that included the 39,427 people who visited on the first Sunday, when there was previously no play. Excluding that, 475,737 people attended, a five per cent decrease on 2019.

A record crowd of more than 400,000 people attended the three-day British Grand Prix,



Newbury is one of many courses in Britain to have suffered a drop-off in general admissions

while another record was broken at The Open in July with an unprecedented 290,000 people visiting St Andrews.

A total of 449,870 people attended matches on the opening day of the English Football League (EFL), an increase of 17 per cent on last year. But the average attendance across the three leagues comprising the EFL was 10,604 last season, down 5.4 per cent from 2018-2019.

Cinema admissions have decreased from 83 million to 61m between 2019 and 2022, according to the UK Cinema Association, but The Guardian reported that in 20 of this year's first 22 weeks, West End musicals had outperformed their 2019 equivalents for attendances.

In racing, it is the smaller fixtures that have particularly struggled to get racegoers back through the gates and the challenges facing racecourses were laid bare by Pat Masterson, managing director of independent track Newton Abbot, who said he had been forced to cap attendances due to a lack of hospitality staff.

"We're having a really difficult year," Masterson said.

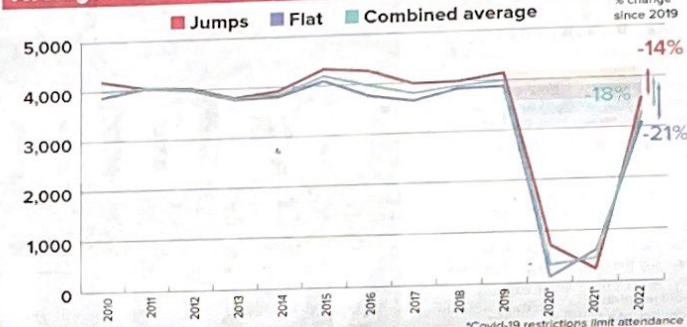
"We own our own catering business, and we're struggling with staff. Every meeting, we've had anywhere between six and 18 staff not turn up in the hour before racing and you can't shuffle everything around."

"We're doing well with our corporate bookings but our attendance has been lower than we'd hoped - it doesn't come close to the 2019 level. We have to curtail our weekend crowds at 3,500. We'd be used to 5,000 to 7,000 people on Saturdays but we haven't got the staff to service our catering and bar outlets. It's enormously frustrating."

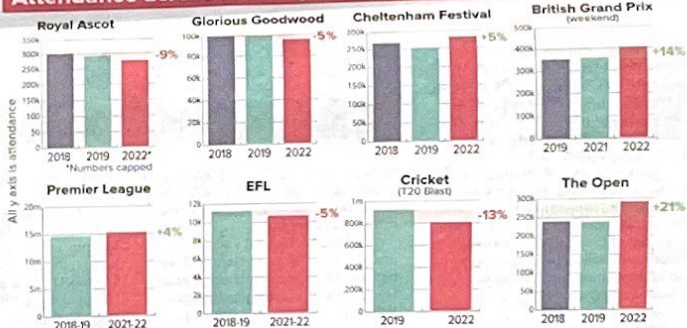
Masterson added: "The cost of living crisis has been a huge factor. We're all feeling the effects. The last thing people may want to do is go to a racecourse or a football match, because they haven't got the money. It also impacts what people spend once they come through the gate and it's a challenge for the industry. We need to make sure people feel valued when they come racing."

Many courses, including York, have experienced a high demand for hospitality and premier enclosures, but this has coincided with a drop-off

Average racecourse attendance Jan 1 - Jun 30



Attendance across wider sporting events



in cheaper enclosures and a reduced number of walk-ups.

At Newbury, sponsorship director Harriet Collins said: "We had a strong start to the year but there have been challenges since then. Like other racecourses, we've seen a drop-off in general admissions, while our hospitality and premier offerings have been fairly strong."

The Racecourse Association

(RCA) acknowledged the wider economic situation but maintained racing offered good value, with free entry for under-18s at many fixtures, discounts for people purchasing advance tickets and the chance for people to bring their own food.

"British racecourses empathise with the public in relation to the incredibly challenging economic period we all

find ourselves in," said an RCA spokesman. "This is being felt by a number of sports and leisure sectors, meaning the competition for the public's hard-earned discretionary spend is perhaps greater now than ever before."

"The sport's equine and human stars are on show every day of the week, giving the public lots of choice when planning a day out."

## GET EXTRA PLACES ON HORSE RACING

Any day this week

# DAILY REWARDS

Because we're

betfair

take timethink.co.uk

TAKE TIME TO THINK

BeGambleAware.org

Sportsbook Exclusive. Applies to Win or Each Way market only. Place part of Each Way bets settle at 1/5 odds. Minimum number of runners apply. UK&I only. T&Cs apply.