

Harness Racing Terminologies

STANDARD BRED

Harness racing horses are Standardbreds. They are slightly smaller than thoroughbreds, but are more versatile and generally have a quieter temperament. They race more often than thoroughbreds, but require more training to bring them to peak fitness than their galloping cousins.

PACER

A horse which moves both legs on the same side forward in unison. Almost 100% do so through the aid of hobbles (refer below). Approximately 80% of all harness races in Australia are conducted for pacers. In North America it is more like 60-70%, whilst in Europe there are no pacers, only trotters.



TROTTER/SQUAREGAITER

The natural gait of the Standardbred. A trotter is a horse which moves its left front and right rear legs forward almost simultaneously, then follows suit with right front and left rear leg in a diagonal motion.



STAND START -

Harness racing's only form of enforcing metric handicaps which are allocated in increments of 10 metres. Horses stand stationary behind elastic tapes which are released to start the race.



MOBILE START - A moving start. A race where horses score up behind a vehicle with two protruding arms. The mobile is travelling at approximately 45kmh upon release.



BROKE/GALLOPED - When a horse 'breaks stride', it stops pacing or trotting and starts galloping. This is forbidden in a race and drivers must ease their horse back into a pace or trot before continuing to race.

DRIVER - The person steering the horse in harness racing is called a driver, not a jockey. There are no weight or gender restrictions in harness racing. The minimum age at which drivers are licensed is 16, whilst there is no maximum age limit. Brian Gath, the driver of Safari, is 63-years old.

SULKY/CART/BIKE - The correct term for the 'cart' carrying the driver. It is not a reference to the emotional state of a beaten trainer/driver! The average weight of a sulky is 30 kgs and many feature high-tech carbon fibre wheels.

HOPPLES - Leather straps connecting front and rear legs on the same side of the horse to help it 'pace' correctly. The size of the hobbles is dictated by the length of a horse's stride. The average length is around 57-58". Blacks A Fake's hobbles are 62" long, whilst Safari's are 59". Hobbles are only worn by pacers, although some trotters were half hobbles on their front legs only.



LEAD TIME - The time it takes the leader to reach a point one mile from the finish. A quick lead time will often aid horses at the rear of the field, whilst a slow lead time assists the frontrunners.

LAST HALF AND LAST QUARTER - The final 800m and 400m respectively of the race. Used by punters to assess a horse's performance. On average a horse will run its last half in 58-59 seconds and its last quarter in 28-29 seconds. Elite horses can cover their last half mile in 55 seconds and their last quarter in 27 seconds.

MILE RATE - The measuring stick of a horse's ability. It is the time the winner of the race would have covered one mile (1609m) in based on the total time it took them to complete the distance of a race. A good mile rate is considered to be anything better than 2 minutes. The world race record is 1min 47.6sec! On average pacers post a mile rate 3-4 seconds faster than trotters for a race of the same distance.

RUNNING LINE - Horses racing two wide are deemed to be in the "running line". It is a favourable position because the driver can decide when to make his move, unlike the horses that are trapped on the pegs

THE ONE-ONE - The position one wide and one back (directly behind The Death Seat). Often considered the best place to position in a race – with cover, but handy to the lead.

THREE WIDE - Refers to horses three off the pegs. Horses travelling three wide are forced to cover extra ground than those closer to the pegs, so drivers back in the field wait until the last 1000m before making their runs "three wide" to get into the contest.

THE PEGS - Rubber marker pegs are used on the inside of the track replacing what used to be a running rail. A horse racing on the inside is never 'on the fence', it is 'on the pegs'.

THE DEATH SEAT/DEATH CHAIR/CHAIR - The position outside the leader, so named because it often brings the undoing of horse's chances. You have to be tough and an above average performer to win from 'the death'.

PULL THE PLUGS/DEAFENERS - Ear plugs or deafeners are used to block out sounds from a horse. When the driver "pulls the plugs", more often than not in the concluding stages of a race, the horse can instantly hear noises and will often finish strongly.



UNDER THE STICK/PULL

THE PURSUADER - Is when the driver has pulled the whip to his or her horse.

C AND M - The class of a horse. C stands for Country Assessment; M stands for Metropolitan Assessment. A C11 M6 pacer has won an equivalent of 11 country class races and 6 metropolitan class races.