

Great Leighs

Location, Parking and Access



The course is located just off the A131 between Chelmsford and Braintree in Essex and it occupies the former Essex Showground site.

Approaching from the M11 (J11) or Stansted take the A120 until the outskirts of Braintree, from where the A131 should be taken to the course.

From the A12, exit at J9 and follow the A130 / A131 for Sudbury, then follow the brown tourist signs.

Parking is on hard standing and is accessed directly from the Great Leighs by-pass. There were some teething problems with the parking during the preview meetings, however these appear to have been resolved.

Course Layout



Great Leighs is an all weather Polytrack course, 1 mile 1 furlong round. There are spurs off the round course for races over 7 and 8 furlongs. The course is left handed (anti-clockwise).

Being a new course it is hard to be dogmatic about how it handles. The track appears to be fair and there has been no discernable draw advantage as yet.

There do not seem to be that many "come from behind" runners so it may be a track that will favour front runners but again it is too early to take a firm view.

Admission

Three admission bands will be in operation ranging from £15 to £20, depending on the grade of the meeting.

Annual membership: £300

Discounts: Seniors Group Advance

Overview

It would be very easy to take Great Leighs at face value and write a very critical review of what I saw at the course.

However it would ignore all the pains and difficulties the course has been through to finally reach its opening.

The course is the brainchild of John Holmes who wanted to convert the Essex Showground into a racetrack.

After a Herculean battle he managed to get planning permission and approval from racing's governing body and planning was under way.

Then the problems started. Firstly there was the OFT report into the allocation of racing fixtures, opening up competition and risking the course not getting the required fixtures.

There then followed an extensive legal battle over the local by-pass which the course lost and resulted in all the plans having to be redrawn – most importantly the by-pass would run through where the grandstand was meant to be.

Building went ahead with a proposed temporary grandstand in the centre of the course. Once work was underway two winters of terrible weather caused significant delays.

To cut a long story short the first meeting was held 18 months later than originally planned. The course is up and running and the facilities are temporary, which brings us neatly to the review.

It is quite ironic that one's first view of the course will invariably come as you drive down the by-pass which has caused so much grief. The first thing that strikes you is the floodlighting – the like of which you will have never seen before at a British course. Very trendy and they have gone for smaller but many as opposed to the large and fewer at Kempton for example.

All the public facilities are located in the centre of the course. Ultimately there will be an underpass from the car park to the enclosures but until that is complete racegoers need to cross the course. (Note to Essex, or indeed any other, ladies visiting the course – Polytrack and high heels do not seem to be a marriage made in heaven)

Followers of golf will recognise the temporary stand which was last seen at the Ryder Cup when it was held at the K-Club.

This two story structure has balconies on both the ground and first floors offering viewing of the home straight.

The biggest issue at Great Leighs is visibility, there is nowhere (including the commentary box) from where the entire track can be seen. Fully aware of this shortcoming there are plenty of big screens to show the action.

Personally I found the best place for viewing is in front of the stand near the winning post. You can see the home straight, the mile start and, of course, the finish. There is a big screen where you can see the rest of the action.

The parade ring is behind the stand with an adjacent pre-parade ring, both offering good viewing of the horses.

There are plans to build a grandstand in the outside of the course, once complete this will provide excellent viewing. In the meantime racegoers will have to accept there are some shortcomings at the course.

I have now visited Great Leighs three times in the seven months since it opened and I have to say a proportionate improvement has been noticed on each visit.

Catering

Very much a reliance on mobile units, with limited choice, restricted to the usual burgers, pizza's etc.

Pizza was £3 a slice, a bacon roll £3. Burgers were also £3 (£3.50 with cheese) and chips £2.50 a portion.

There was a seafood stall with various selections from £3 through to £7.50.

Inside the stand there are an increasing number of options available was an area selling sandwiches etc. and hot snacks.

A buffet restaurant is also available offering a two course meal for £35, including admission.

The bars have also improved significantly, now offering draught beers, with lager £3.20 and bitter £3.20 a pint.

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

The number of bookmakers standing at the course has been the subject of some debate. On the day of the inspection there were six bookmakers standing, not high by most standards. However this is on a par with the numbers standing at many midweek all weather meetings.

Racecard

£2 and adequate providing all the required information, plus some editorial on the background to the course.

Indeed the amount of editorial is to be very much admired and is something other courses could well learn from.

Toilets

Portable units, but at the better end of the scale. Just about adequate to cope with the numbers.

Parade Ring

Located in the centre of the course a fair side ring with no seating or tiered viewing. Again with the numbers access was not an issue.

With the limited viewing of the track I have a feeling this will be a busy focal point – especially as there is also a big screen by the ring.

The pre-parade ring is adjacent to the main parade ring.

Commentary and PA

Very clear and the course have stated their intention for the racing to be a complete experience.

The meeting is well hosted providing interviews and plenty of information for new and regular racegoers.

Contact Details	
	www.greatleighs.com
	01245 362412
	Great Leighs Racecourse Moulsham Hall Lane Great Leighs Chelmsford Essex CM3 1QP

Ownership	Private (admin by Arena Leisure)
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Fixtures 2010

Great Leighs are in administration and are currently not racing.

No fixtures have been allocated to the course in 2010

Inspection Dates

<i>Date</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Type</i>
08/05/08	Warm and sunny	6 AW evening
17/07/08	Warm and sunny	6 AW evening
15/01/09	Chilly but dry	6 AW evening