

Chepstow

Location, Parking and Access



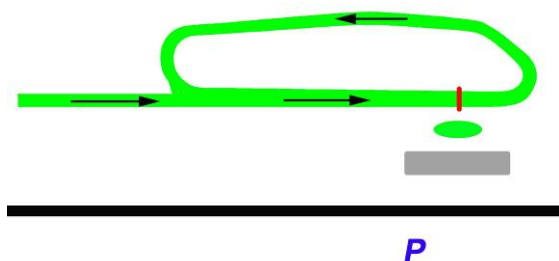
Situated on the western outskirts of the town, the track is three miles from Junction 2 of the M48. If coming across the Severn crossing and there are two or more of you in the car the racecourse will refund the toll, just ask for a receipt at the bridge and show it at the ticket office when you arrive.

Parking is across the (busy) road from the course on a hardstanding. A slight word of caution, the surface has a large number of loose stones and chippings.

For the Welsh Grand National meeting a one way traffic management system is introduced and there are long queues, arriving at the outskirts of Chepstow 1½ hours before the first race it took an hour to travel the last 1¼ miles – the lesson being make sure to arrive in plenty of time.

If travelling by public transport, Chepstow station is 1½ miles from the course. A special raceday bus service is laid on at a cost of £2.00 per trip.

Course Layout



The main circuit is an oval just under 2 miles round, there is a spur into the home straight allowing for races up to a mile to be run on the straight course. The course is very undulating.

Although an expansive track big striding horses tend not to be favoured due to the undulations. Horses with stamina should be considered.

The clay subsoil often results in some particularly sticking going and this, again, places the emphasis on stamina.

The five furlong run in gives come from behind runners an excellent opportunity if good enough.

Draw bias: Conventional wisdom is in races on the straight course, with the stalls on the stands side, high drawn runners have the advantage, in any conditions better than soft. On the round course low drawn runners have a slight edge.

Admission

A two enclosure system is in operation at Chepstow. The Premier enclosure charges between £19 and £24, whilst the Grandstand enclosure charges between £14 - £17. The main exception being Welsh Grand National day when the costs are £32 and £23 respectively.

Annual membership: £290 single, £512 double, £190 jumps only (n.b. annual membership also includes Hereford racecourse as well)

Dress Code: Vests, football and rugby shirts, ripped jeans, shorts and trainers are not permitted in the Premier Enclosure, however this rule does not seem to be that rigorously enforced. Jeans / Trainers are not allowed in the hospitality boxes or restaurant.

Discounts: Seniors Disabled Students Group

Overview

As far as I am aware there is no equine equivalent of Alton Towers, however for your average racehorse a trip to Chepstow would be a pretty good second best. The course has to be seen to be believed, watching the racing on television does not do it justice, it is a very undulating switchback.

The Premier enclosure has some benches at ground level, not suitable for viewing racing and there is no seating in the stand itself. Access to the viewing area of the stands is fine if you are relatively fit, the steepings are very steep and could well be an issue for people with mobility issues.

Viewing is generally reasonable, wherever you are in the stands your view will be obstructed at some point by some pretty hefty columns. Additionally the natural layout of the course means there are "blind spots" when the horses are in the dips. Most of the straight course is visible, however the first furlong of the straight course can only be seen from the far end of the stand.



At ground level access is reasonable, albeit on a slope. Viewing is OK although the blind spots are more accentuated than when viewing from the stands. Most of the ground level is on grass.

The comments that apply to the stand in Premier also apply to the main stand in the grandstand enclosure. Ironically some of the best viewing, especially of the round course, comes from the old silver ring stand, now part of the grandstand enclosure.

Back in the early 90's Chepstow used to be my local track and whilst I'm the first to admit it needed some repairs it was an enjoyable course to

visit. These visits were my first since Northern Racing have taken over the course and have carried out major renovations and I was looking forward to seeing the improvements.

The general layout of the enclosures is very good and great use has been made of the natural topology of the course, especially in relation to the parade ring and pre-parade ring.

As is the norm there are plenty of Green Jacketed staff on duty. Access to the enclosures is strictly controlled (well almost) with constant badge checks to ensure racegoers don't go into the wrong enclosure.

There were some instances of people sitting blocking the gangways in the stands, making access difficult and it must surely have been a safety issue. At the second inspection the single steward in the Premier stand seemed to be more concerned with keeping the public out of the owners and trainers section, rather than enforcing any safety rules.

There can sometimes be an underlying atmosphere at the course which isn't enjoyable. At one of the inspections, even before racing started, there were some groups in the enclosures who had clearly already been drinking for a couple of hours. This atmosphere seems to be more pronounced at the weekend meetings.

At the Welsh National the crowds were heaving, with queues everywhere, ironically however this actually reduced the issues with drinking, presumably because the queues at the bars were so long.

A disadvantage at the mid-week meetings is the lack of a big screen, an essential at most courses, especially where naked eye viewing is restricted by the course topology. I would hope that Chepstow consider providing a big screen at all meetings, especially when six of the seven races take place on the straight course.

Chepstow do stage some very good high quality racing, unfortunately they cannot control who turns up at the course. Like a number of courses they are impacted by a small minority of racegoers who aren't really interested in the racing. The solution is not easy and adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach to anti-social behaviour is easy to implement in theory but more difficult to enforce in reality.

Catering

In my earlier reviews of Chepstow I was very critical of the catering at Chepstow, it is very pleasing to report that the situation has improved beyond recognition.

The quality of food in the mobile catering units was so poor the food was virtually inedible. New mobile caterers have been bought in and the food is very much at an acceptable level.

Other units were offering burgers (£3.80, £4 with cheese), hot dogs (£3.80), hot roast baguettes (£5) or fish and chips (£5.95).

The eating area in the Grandstand used to look a bit like a works canteen, but even that has improved. The food is good quality and, compared with some other courses, reasonable value for money with main meals for £5.95

As happens at most courses there seem to be insufficient tables for diners at busy periods. There are signs on the tables saying they are reserved for diners but I would say most people sitting there were not eating.

There are restaurant packages available. Packages are available at £70 for a window seat and £60 for an inside seat. (£140 and £130 for the Welsh National day)

Jacket potatoes were available for £3.50, with one filling. Extra fillings available at 50p a go. Chips available at £1.50 and sandwiches from £2.90.

Bitter and lager are priced at £3.40.

(December 2011 prices)

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

A reasonable number of layers with many offering a minimum stake of £1. Betting was at an over round of 1.6% per runner.

Racecard

A typical Northern Racing racecard, practical with no editorial but questionable if it is worth £3, especially compared with what is available elsewhere.

At the Welsh National meeting the cost of the racecard was increased to £4. I was expecting something special for this money, in reality it was a standard racecard with a couple of extra pages listing past winners of the Welsh National.

Toilets

At the weekend meeting the gentlemen's facilities in the Grandstand were dull and dingy. Once racing started and the beer had been flowing there were constant queues to use the facilities. Although cleaner the same queuing issues arose in the Premier enclosure facilities as well.

At the Welsh National meeting there were massive queues for the toilets throughout the afternoon, although for the 2010 renewal extra portable units were available.

At the midweek meeting the issues were not the same and there were no queues at any time.

Parade Ring



The best part of the revamp of Chepstow. The parade ring is situated in front of the stands and to make viewing even easier the enclosures slope towards the parade ring giving a good view from most of the enclosure. There are some seats around the perimeter and plenty of tiered viewing.

Another excellent innovation is a walkway / viewing area above the pre-parade ring and saddling boxes. The winners enclosure is situated in the parade ring.

Non Racing Attractions

Just across the Welsh border Chepstow is a town with a great deal of history and some quaint old shops. Continue past the course towards Monmouth and you are in the beautiful Wye valley with the lovely town of Tintern with its Abbey a few miles down the road.

Cardiff with countless attractions is half an hour away.

Contact Details	
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	Chepstow Racecourse Chepstow Monmouthshire NP16 6BE

Ownership	Northern Racing
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Fixtures 2012

Jump:

January 6th & 20th
February 3rd & 25th
March 10th & 22nd
April 9th , 14th & 27th (eve)
October 13th & 27th
November 7th
December 8th & 27th (Welsh National)

Flat:

May 4th , 23rd & 29th
June 4th , 15th (eve) & 25th
July 4th (eve) , 13th (eve) & 27th (eve)
August 9th (eve) , 16th(eve) & 27th
September 7th & 13th

Inspection Dates		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Type</i>
07/10/06	Sunny	7 Jump weekend
13/09/07	Generally sunny	7 flat midweek
27/12/07	Overcast but mild	7 jump Welsh National
05/08/08	Wet and dank	7 flat midweek
12/02/09	Cloudy but dry	7 jump midweek
27/02/10	Overcast	7 jump weekend
08/01/11	Broken cloud	7 jump Welsh National
27/12/11	Overcast	7 jump Welsh National