

Chester

Location, Parking and Access



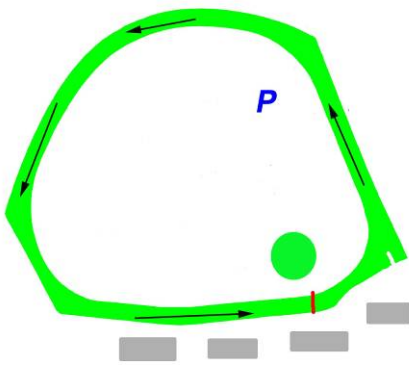
Situated just south of the city centre the official parking is in the centre of the course and expensive (£7 for cars £10 for mini-buses). It was interesting to note that the number of cars actually parked in the centre of the course was no way reflective of the number of racegoers. One is left with the impression that most racegoers arrive by public transport or they park in one of the many multi story car parks in the City and walk the rest of the way.

The centre course parking also has the disadvantage that the only access road crosses the section of the racecourse where the losing horses are unsaddled.

Therefore access from the car park will be denied from the time the horses start going down until at least 10 minutes after the end of the last race. Therefore it is very questionable whether it is worth paying such an extortionate parking cost.

The railway station is about a 20 – 30 minute walk from the racetrack. Rail access from London is limited for direct trains, most trips involve changing at Crew. Approximate journey time from London 2.5 hours. There are direct services from North Wales and Liverpool.

Course Layout



Chester is a very tight racecourse, only a mile round. It's so compact that horses are virtually on the turn the entire race. The track is completely flat and is left handed (anti clockwise). Horses drawn in low stall numbers have a significant advantage, especially in races less than 7 furlongs and Chester tends to throw up a lot of course specialists, so it's worth following horses who have won here before, especially if drawn low.

Small and medium size horses who are speedy with a sharp action are greatly favoured at the course, conversely large long striding horses tend not to find the course to their liking at all.

Draw Advantage: A low draw is great advantage especially in races up to 7 furlongs.

Admission

There are several enclosures at Chester and, even then, there are also sub-divisions. The top enclosure is the County Stand, which is divided into two levels The Concourse (£32 - £40) and The Long Room (£34 - £42). The main grandstand and paddock enclosure (£25 - £28) is set inside and outside of the track. The Dee Stand (£11 - £13) is on the outside of the course and the Open Course (£7 - £10) is inside the course.

Annual membership costs £380

Dress Code: The County Stand has a strict dress code, Gentlemen are required to wear a suit or suit jacket, collar and tie. Ladies are required to wear smart dress. Persons wearing denim or trainers will be refused entry to the County Stand and all hospitality areas.

(2011 prices)

Discounts: Seniors Disabled Students Group

Overview

It is said there was chariot racing on the Roodee back in Roman Times, I wonder if those drawn low had the same advantage they do nowadays?

Racing as we know it has taken place on the same site since the middle ages, making it the longest continuously operational course in the country.

Situated just outside the City Walls, the course is constrained by being surrounded by the city, a river and railway viaduct, notwithstanding these constraints a great deal has been squeezed into the confined space.

There are a number of enclosures at Chester with the County Stand being the top of the tree. This stand is divided into two sub-enclosures, the County Concourse and the County Long Room, with a substantial price differential.

It appears the Chester Executive resist the temptation to cram as many people as possible into the enclosures, unlike some other 'top class' courses. This meant the County Long Room is actually quite comfortable, crowded yes, but not to the extent that it wasn't possible to move around easily. Also there appeared to be adequate seating for anybody who wanted to use it. Viewing from the Long Room seating is good with most of the course visible. Although not cheap the Long Room is probably worth the extra expense.

It is a pity the same cannot be said of the County Concourse, in my view overpriced, with poor viewing and if the weather is inclement you have the choice of either watching the racing indoors in the bar or get wet and watch, what you can, live.



County Stand and Enclosure

In the Grandstand enclosure there is no seating but tiered viewing is provided. There are some facilities in the outside enclosure although most facilities are in the centre of the course and admission to this enclosure does provide access to the paddock area in the centre of the course. As already stated there is no seating and viewing is varied. From the ground level, unless you happen to be at least 6' 6" tall you will need to make use of one of the big screens. Viewing from the lower levels of the tiered standings is adequate although the view of some of the course is restricted by tents and buildings in the centre course. Viewing from the upper tiers is reasonable, however it appears these prime spots are reserved early on and are guarded jealously.



Grandstand

The Dee Stand is adjacent to the main enclosures, near the furlong marker. It has very little cover so if the weather is inclement you will get wet, unless in the lower section of the stand. However viewing is good.

There are three parts to the centre course. The Paddock area, the Hospitality area and the Course itself.

The paddock area, as its name implies houses the paddock and unsaddling enclosure and is accessible to racegoers holding badges for the Grandstand, either of the County Stand areas and hospitality badges.

The Hospitality area is for pre-booked parties with dining areas, whilst the Course itself is the cheapest enclosure and actually has a very relaxed, fun atmosphere, not dissimilar to The Hill at Epsom's Derby meeting.

One common factor though is if you are in the centre of the course then you will see little 'live' racing, just a fleeting glance of the horses flashing by wherever you happen to be standing. To see a race in full you would need to resort to watching it on TV.

The course itself is very tight with horses running on the turn most of the time. Due to its tightness horses drawn low tend to have an advantage in most races, more so over sprint distances.

The first inspection also happened to be first visit to Chester and my preconception was it would be a compact, overcrowded course with no room to swing a cat.

I'm more than happy to admit my fears were not fully realised. Yes it is very bijou and cosy and in some areas you will get very close to your fellow racegoers. However the management have done an amazing job in making the most of the limited space that is available to them.

Chester's management are also very savvy when it comes to awareness of market forces. Chester has the highest general admission prices of any British racecourse. However they also know that despite these prices they invariably have to put up the full house notices, if you want to go into any of the main enclosures you really do have to book well in advance. For the County Longroom I would say advanced booking is essential.

Once inside prices are also on the high side compared with other courses.

The bottom line is a day out at Chester is not going to be cheap and one is left with the impression that the executive want to squeeze as much money out of their patrons as possible. This approach makes good business sense but it does not necessarily make for a pleasant racing experience. I don't like leaving a racecourse feeling I have been mugged.

I would certainly advise thinking twice about spending any money on a County Concourse admission, especially if you are more interested in the racing than social aspect of the day out – it just is not worth the money. You can see more of the racing from the Grandstand or even the Dee enclosure.

The Chester executive will not thank me for this, however I would suggest the absolute best view of the racing can be had for free, as long as you are happy to bet "off course". The city wall provides an excellent, free, view of the racing.

As mentioned in the food section the course does tend to concentrate on selling alcohol rather than food and this is evident by the number of stag and hen parties in evidence at the meeting. This does also, occasionally,

add something of an edge, having said that the stewarding is very overt and potential flashpoints (of which I saw a couple) were quickly and efficiently addressed. It cannot be denied though that as the afternoon progresses the atmosphere can become less enjoyable.

Chester is always popular, whether it is with "real" racegoers is questionable, I am left with the view, after many visits, that most are there to pour as much alcohol down their throats as possible and any interest in racing is secondary.

Best Viewing Positions

The County Long Room seating provides good viewing, although part of the turn out of the home straight is not visible (only a problem in races over 7f).

The upper levels of the Tattersalls and Dee Stands, however these are open to the elements so enjoyment will be weather dependent.

Outside the course along the City walls, offers good viewing for free.

Poor viewing from the County Concourse, ground levels in Tattersalls and Dee Stands or in the centre course.

Catering

Food doesn't seem to be Chester's strongest point, although they do have celebrity chefs at some meetings, albeit at a price (about £130 a head). There is plenty of formal dining available but casual dining is at a premium especially when taking into consideration the numbers who attend. There is a pie shop and a pizza and pasta outlet as well as a few vans.

It has to be said the pizzas looked good and the pasta, which was sampled, was very good and filling, however the queues, especially before racing, are almost unbearable. Pizza was £7.50 - £8.50 and pasta dishes £6.50.

However Chester does seem to be very drink oriented and it seems to assume that all racegoers want to spend the afternoon pouring alcohol down their throats, something most punters seem happy to do. There are large signs at the bars encouraging people to avoid the queues and order their beer in two pint glasses.

Sample Prices:

County Stand: Sandwich bar – various fillings from £5 - £6

Restaurant package £92 per person (includes admission to County Concourse)

Roodee Bar and Grill from £30 per person (excluding admission)

Main Enclosure: Steak Baguette £7.00, Pizza £7.50 - £8.50, Pasta dishes £6.50. Burgers £3.50 single, £4.00 with cheese and £5 double.

Noodles £6 and Pies £5.

Seafood Restaurant: various prices ranging from £5 for ½ pint of prawns, through to £48 for a lobster.

Lager was £3.40 - £3.60 depending on which bar you use and bitter £3.30

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

A fair number of bookmakers with around 40 in the main enclosure and another 30 in the course enclosure. Despite the numbers the over round is an appalling average of 2.11% per runner (in one race this topped 3.2%).

Racecard

One area where Chester does redeem itself. An excellent card full of interesting editorial as well as all the information required to enjoy the racing and only £2.50.

Toilets

Excellent in the county stand, adequate elsewhere although there was also a dependency on temporary mobile toilets, especially in the centre of the course.

Toilets were kept clean and there were no discernable queues, even outside the ladies.

Parade Ring



Not the largest of paddocks and views of the 'opposite' side obscured by various items of shrubbery, so viewing both sides of a horse was tricky.

However viewing was possible almost all the way round the paddock.

There is some limited button seating plus some tiered viewing.

The paddock can be viewed from the County stand with a reasonable pair of binoculars, whilst not ideal it does beat the crush crossing the course before the race begins.

Commentary and PA

Chester has its own CCTV presentation which is shown on most TV's and is relayed over the PA inside the buildings, although for some reason on the day of the first inspection priority in the County Stand, at least before racing when the previews are taking place, was broadcasting Sky coverage of the Everton / Liverpool football match.

Disappointingly the clarity of the PA system was very poor in the County Stand seats most, if not all, of the speakers point towards the centre of the course. Indeed the sound quality in the County Stand seating was so poor that the commentary was unintelligible and I had to resort to reading the race myself. Elsewhere in the course the sound was very good, especially in the centre of the course.

Non Racing Attractions

The City of Chester, steeped in history and with some pretty good shopping as well.

Contact Details

	www.chester-races.co.uk
	01244 304600
	Chester Racecourse Company The Racecourse Chester CH1 2LY

Ownership	Private
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Fixtures 2012

May 9th , 10th & 11th (May Festival)
May 26th
June 9th , 29th (eve) & 30th
July 13th (eve) & 14th
August 5th & 18th
September 1st , 14th , 15th & 29th

Inspection Dates		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Type</i>
09/09/06	Overcast but hot	7 flat weekend
31/08/07	Overcast with some showers	6 flat midweek
21/08/09	Overcast becoming sunny	6 flat midweek
26/06/10	Sunny and hot	7 flat weekend

