

Fakenham

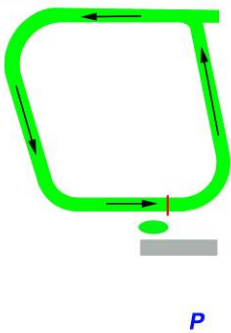
Location, Parking and Access



Unless you happen to live in Norfolk it is invariably a long journey to get to Fakenham. Coming from the south the AA recommended route says leave the A1 at St Neots, join the A14 at Cambridge, then the A11 and finally the A1065. However the A1065 it is a 43 mile single carriageway road with no real alternatives, which if it's clear is all well and good, however on this day there were roadworks at Swaffham which resulted in spending an hour in near stationary traffic. Coming back I took the A149 / A17 joining the A1 at Peterborough and found it much quicker.

Once you actually manage to reach Fakenham the course is well signposted, located on the Dereham road. As you enter the course you think you are entering a farm and that sets the scene for course which has a point to point feel about it. General parking is free and on grass although this was rather boggy on the day of the inspection. There is also a members car park, for which the sum of £8 is charged, however as parking here is also on grass I cannot see the benefit of paying, especially when there is a free car park no more than 50 yards away.

Course Layout



Fakenham is an almost square circuit about 1 mile round. The course is left handed (anti-clockwise). There are slight dips along two of the sides, otherwise the course is flat.

Due to the very tight configuration long striding gallopers do not like the course. Front runners tend to do well. The jumps are easy and the only aspect of the course that is in any way challenging is the slightly uphill run-in.

Admission

There are three enclosures at Fakenham – course (£8), grandstand (£13) and Members (£18). Prices at the Easter meeting are £10, £15 & £20 respectively. Unusually course admission gives access to the parade ring and with the racecourse being generally flat with good viewing from all enclosures.

Annual membership: £105 single, £160 double and £45 for 18-24 year olds.

Accompanied under 16's are admitted free of charge.

Overview

As already stated there are three enclosures at Fakenham.

The members enclosure is mainly grass, which is fine on a dry day, however when it has been raining it can get boggy under foot. It has 1½ Grandstands, I say 1½ because the main stand is shared with the Grandstand enclosure. The feature stand is the Prince of Wales Stand, although to use the term stand is being generous. The upper level houses the restaurant, whilst the lower level houses the members bar with some steppings in front of the stand. The steppings are quite shallow so if you end up behind somebody tall you won't see that much.



The 'main' stand is effectively a large open shed with tiered viewing but no seating. There is viewing of the entire course from the stand, which is fully under cover. There is a strict no food or drink policy in the stand, and I mean strict. Having visited all 59 racecourses I found the stewarding of the "no food and drink" policy at Fakenham the most draconian I have ever seen. OK asking a woman to leave the stand because she was eating a burger was reasonable, asking a parent to remove their child because it had an ice cream was questionable. However asking a chap to leave the stand because he was eating a Kit-Kat bar was absolutely absurd and it's that sort of reaction which will alienate racegoers.

The Grandstand enclosure contains the other half of the main stand and like the members area has tiered viewing with clear views of the entire course. Again there is a strict no food and drink policy with very strict stewarding.

The course enclosure which is on the same side of the track as the main enclosures has a small covered stand, providing some shelter and with tiered viewing.

From all three enclosures it is possible to gain access to the centre of the course.

Fakenham is one of those courses where paying the extra admission to go to the Members enclosure is of questionable value. Even the bar in the Prince of Wales stand is packed beyond comfort levels.

Due to its remote location Fakenham is unlikely to be a racecourse that you would decide to visit on the spur of the moment. Having said that it obviously has a loyal following. The course was visited on a miserable (weather wise) Friday afternoon in February yet it was very busy, indeed I have been to many quieter weekend meetings. It was also notable that I have never seen so many racegoers walking round with annual members badges, again indicating a strong local following.

Fakenham is different than most race courses in that it has a very rural feel and it very much has the feeling and ambiance of a Point to Point meeting rather than a mainstream course. That is no bad thing and many national hunt stalwarts will tell you that the Point to Point ambiance cannot be beaten. The key thing is to remember to pack your wellies and wear appropriate clothing I didn't and my shoes were almost ruined and my suit had to go straight to the cleaners.

The biggest contradiction was the stewarding. At the one extreme was the overzealous enforcement of the no food or drink rule in the members enclosure. Yet the stewarding between the enclosures was almost non-existent. Indeed by mid afternoon I had put my badge in my pocket and I was able to move freely between enclosures without being challenged ... well I was once when going from the centre course to the members enclosure.

Best Viewing Positions

Viewing is good from anywhere in the main stands. The course is relatively compact and flat and there are no obstructions in the centre of the course to block views.

Racegoers in the members enclosure have the chance to stand adjacent to one of the fences and there is even a small viewing platform to aid viewing. A chance to get really close to the action.

Catering

The main restaurant is located on the 1st floor of the Prince of Wales stand and provides a three course meal for £52.50 (cost does not include an £18 members admission badge).

However venture to the course enclosure and you will find the treasure that is the WJ Weston Seafood Restaurant. Offering such delights as Smoked Haddock Chowder for £6.45, Fresh Dressed Local Crab for £8.80, ½ dozen Oysters for a tenner, half or whole lobsters for £19.40 or £26.45 respectively. Pride of place goes to a £28 seafood platter.

There is a café in the main enclosure with very reasonable prices. Sausage Roll £1.50, Cornish Pasty £2.00, Cheese and Onion Pasty £1.80 or soup and a roll for £1.80.

The remaining food offerings revolve around the ubiquitous mobile catering units, although it has to be said some are more "upmarket" than the usual fare, this includes a burger van selling home made burgers, excellent value at £3.80 and far superior to the frozen burgers of dubious origin normally served.

Hog roasts are available for £4.50.

There was also a mobile seafood unit offering a good selection of high quality food at reasonable prices. Pots of shellfish for around £2.50, a seafood platter for £5 and next door cups of either Smoked Haddock or Crab and Lobster Chowder with a chunk of bread for £3.50.

Water was on sale for £1.20 for 500ml. I am unable to quote beer and lager prices as the price lists were on a typed sheet pinned to the wall behind the bar and even if I had 20/20 vision I think I would have struggled to see the prices.

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

There were 16 bookmakers standing in the main enclosure with a further eight in the course enclosure. Betting was to an average over round of 1.71% a runner.

Racecard

There was a good colour plan of the course inside the front cover. Two pages were dedicated to notices and rules. There were / details and colours of of the afternoons away jump fixture (though nothing for the away flat fixture)

The racecards themselves were clear and it was pleasing to see there wasn't any attempt to provide a tipping service.

The racecard was adequate, however when compared with other £2.50 racecards it wasn't one of the better ones.

Toilets

Toilets were adequate, clean and well stocked with, just about, sufficient numbers.

Parade Ring

Located in front of the stands the parade ring attracts good crowds, invariably three or four deep. There are a number of wooden steppings to aid viewing. The parade ring can best be described as small and intimate.



The winners enclosure is located at the Grandstand end of the paddock.

What is good is the fact the paddock is "shared" between the course and grandstand enclosures, making the £7 course admission very good value.

Contact Details	
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Ownership	Private
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Fixtures 2012
January 1st & 17th
February 17th
March 16th
April 9th
May 8th & 27th
October 26th
November 20th
December 10th

Inspection Dates		
Date	Weather	Type
16/02/07	Overcast some light showers	7 Jump
01/12/08	Sunny but cold	6 jump midweek
12/01/09	Overcast with some heavy showers	6 jump midweek
16/01/11	Wet and chilly	6 Jump midweek