

Punchestown

Location, Parking and Access



Situated 37km from Dublin via the N7, the course is situated 5km outside the town of Naas.

The nearest station is Newbridge, 14km away, from where a taxi can be caught to the course.

During the festival a special bus service operates from Dublin.

Parking is plentiful and generally on grass. The parking is well marshalled and at the festival traffic flows surprisingly well.

Course Layout

There are three distinct courses at Punchestown. A right handed, two mile steeplechase course, a one mile six furlong hurdle course and a meandering cross country circuit, which really does seem to disappear out into the country.

Admission

Admission to the non-festival meetings is €15 - €18.

Annual membership: €210.00

For the festival there are two enclosures, the general enclosure is €30 and the reserved enclosure €40, with reserved car parking available at €12, although the general parking is perfectly adequate.

Overview

As you enter the course you will enter a large courtyard behind the stands, dominated by the large parade ring.

There are two main stands, the largest is dominated by a tiered viewing area, which generally offers excellent viewing of the course. There are a couple of "blind spots" where parts of the track are obscured by TV camera positions etc., but these are few and far between.

There is a second, smaller, stand located beyond the finishing line. The upper levels of this stand are given over to hospitality boxes and a restaurant. There is a lower level tiered viewing area, offering reasonable viewing of the racing.

At the Festival meeting there is a, more expensive, reserved enclosure. Unusually this enclosure is situated some way short of the finishing post – indeed it is more in line with the final fence. The enclosure does offer the only seating from which racing can be viewed, however this is in a temporary open facility, fully exposed to the elements. To be honest I would question the value of paying an additional €10 to use the reserved enclosure.

As I said viewing is generally very good, there is a dip on the side of the chase course where the runners disappear from view briefly.

In addition the cross country course literally does disappear into the country and you need to know where the horses are going to be able to keep tabs. There are, however a couple of big screens in front of the stands, in addition to one in the courtyard, which means the action can be followed when briefly out of sight. Notwithstanding the couple of blind spots, if you have a half decent pair of binoculars then following the action will not be a problem.

Punchestown is a very spacious course, both in terms of the track itself and in the public areas. Yes the stands get packed at the festival but it is much easier to get around than at either the Cheltenham or Aintree festivals.

At the festival meeting there are plenty of other activities fitted in around the racing. The Irish version of the Morning Line is broadcast from the course and is relayed over the PA. As are previews and some interviews during the afternoon.

The odd aspect for the UK visitor and this is common of all Irish courses, is there is no description of the runners colours as they go to post.

There were also some glitches in the betting shows on the big screens, the most confusing being it showed the prices of the top three in the betting as 5/1 , 5/1 & 6/1 – it then showed 9/2 bar.

Punchestown is clearly one of the top courses and is perfectly geared to staging the big meetings.

I have to confess I have only been to Punchestown during the festival where the decent size crowds add to the buzz. Indeed I have to confess that Punchestown is my favourite amongst the big NH festivals either side of the Irish Sea.

It would be interesting to see what the atmosphere is like at a non-festival meeting, when the crowds will not be as big. I do wonder if the Aintree syndrome would come into play, where when the crowds are not large the place feels empty and deserted.

Catering

Clearly at the festival there were numerous options catering for all tastes.

From formal dining options, through to burger vans.

One outlet that did interest me was the self-service cafeteria situated in one of the buildings alongside the courtyard. This offered main meals at prices ranging from €10.50 to €14.50 – the big oddity being there is nowhere to sit to eat your food. There are a number of bar high tables where you are expected to stand and eat your meal. This design is presumably to deter people from lingering once they have finished eating – however it still looks and feels odd.

From the more informal eating outlets, one that looked particularly good was an outlet selling hot beef rolls for €10, which may sound expensive. These rolls were, to put it mildly, very generously filled with very tasty beef – well worth the money and definitely more of a meal than a snack.

It will be no surprise to know that bars abound and most of them emphasising a particular black coloured drink. Stout and Bitter were both €5 a pint whilst lager was €5.20.

All in all a good selection, reasonably priced bearing in mind this was a festival meeting. Again it will be interesting to see what range of food is available at a non-festival meeting.

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

Clearly being a festival meeting there were plenty of bookmakers standing, around 80 in total. The range of prices available seemed to have a greater spread than in the UK.

The Tote operation is huge with a large number of automated terminals available, which I found to be very useful and they certainly had fewer queues. Having said that even at the manned points the queues were not that bad.

One aspect I really liked is payout was 1,2,3,4 of ***all*** races over 16 runners, whether they were handicaps or not.

Racecard

Costing €3 there is certainly a great deal of advertising in the cards. It can be difficult to find the actual race details.

Once found though the detail is excellent, although with the large field sizes the details of a particular race could be spread over as many as five pages.

Toilets

I have to say very impressive, I was expecting the usual festival queues but was surprised to find no queues at all. There were numerous facilities and more than sufficient to cope with the numbers attending.

Parade Ring

Certainly the focal point of the courtyard area behind the stands. The parade ring is a large rectangle.

It is surrounded by tiered viewing, which is just as well as it is very popular. There is also a balcony at the first floor level of the main stand which gives an excellent view of the parade ring. The only disadvantage of this vantage point is it tends to be the refuge of smokers from the adjacent bar.

Contact Details	
	www.punchestown.com 
	(045) 897704
	Punchestown Racecourse Naas County Kildare

Fixtures 2012

January 14th
February 5th & 22nd
April 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th & 29th
May 9th & 30th
October 17th, 18th & 31st
November 17th & 18th
December 9th & 31st

Inspection Dates

<i>Date</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Type</i>
22/04/08	Sunny with a stiff breeze	7 jump festival