

York

Location, Parking and Access



Located about one mile south of the city centre, the course is well signposted from the ring road, which will take you to the course avoiding the city centre. For John Smith's Saturday and the Ebor meeting a special traffic plan is implemented and it is essential that you follow the signposting for a trouble free arrival and departure. Parking is free at most meetings although for John Smith's Saturday and the Ebor meeting a £5 charge applies.

York is easily accessible by rail, being about two hours from London. There are frequent services from all over the country. The course is one mile from the station, a nice walk on a fine day, otherwise there is a shuttle bus (£2 single £3 return) or taxi.

Course Layout



York is a triangular shaped circuit of about 2 miles, with various chutes off the (new) round course. It is completely flat.

The course does not drain well, although work is currently being undertaken to improve the situation.

The course is a gruelling test of stamina and it is the courageous horse who tends to prevail.

Draw advantage: there is no clear draw advantage

Admission

York have a variable pricing policy depending on the meeting. There are three enclosures. The best enclosure is the County Stand with prices ranging from £24 - £34 for "normal" meetings to £52 for the Ebor meeting. The Grandstand and Paddock enclosure £10 - £20 (£27 for the Ebor meeting). The Course enclosure charges £5 - £8

Annual membership: Single £330, joint £570 or junior (16-25) £95

Discounts: Seniors Young Racegoers Group

Overview

I have always had a love / hate relationship with York racecourse and, ironically, the day of the inspection for this report is the first time I have visited the course and not come away vowing never to return again. Having said that and despite previous vows I always do end up going back.

Let me begin with the good. York arguably has the best facilities and infrastructure of any racecourse in the country. Offering excellent viewing of the racing and plenty of places to eat and drink. This makes the course very popular and therein lies the problem, as indeed course can be too popular. Consequently, on many racedays, the course has an overcrowded, almost I would say, intimidating feel to it. Something that was bought home during this last visit when the crowds were a much more comfortable size.

This latest visit is the first time I have been to York at what I would call a 'normal' midweek meeting, all my previous visits have been at either festival or weekend meetings. Couple the large crowds with the apparent drinking culture at the track and, to be brutally honest, the afternoon gets more and more uncomfortable as the day progresses. During this latest visit, although busy, there was space to breathe and the atmosphere was certainly less intimidating.

There are three enclosures at York. Top dog is the County enclosure and, unusually, it has three distinctly different grandstands situated in the enclosure.



The centrepiece, certainly as far as the course executive (and probably most racegoers) are concerned, is the Ebor stand. A modern, five storey building containing a combination of public areas with restaurants and private boxes. One of the striking aspects of the lower levels is how open and spacious they are, however this openness also works against it as it also has the sort of acoustics one finds in a Cathedral, as a result the noise inside the stand can almost be overpowering. There is a seating area in front of the stand, however this is not always stewarded that

effectively and the view is frequently ruined by thoughtless racegoers standing in the gangways, with the stewards making no effort to move them. It appears the role of the stewards is just to stop people taking glasses outside. Indeed throughout the course one is left with the impression the stewards only role is to prevent food and drink being taken into 'prohibited' areas.



The Melrose Stand contains the owners and trainers facilities, however it does have a first floor terraced viewing area, open to all. It is situated past the winning line and the view is slightly head on but for my money it offers some of the best views of racing and it is rarely crowded, could it be due to the fact it is the only stand without a bar?

Situated between the Ebor and Melrose stands is one of the gems of British racing, the old County Stand. Looking as though it should be situated in Venice, adorned as it is with red, white and blue striped colonnades. It looks like a relic of Edwardian Britain. In reality it is

probably totally impractical as a 21st century sporting stand but, to their eternal credit, York have decided to retain it. Inside is like something from another world with cosy alcoves in the bar. It's best treasure is the small, but intimate, Pate, Cheese and wine bar, which serves exactly what it says in the box. Outside there are a number of closely packed white garden benches with a tiered viewing area in front. Although open to all County Enclosure badge holders it is interesting this area seems to attract more annual member than the neighbouring Ebor stand.



The area in front of the stands is generally lawned with a smattering of garden benches.

Dominating the Grandstand enclosure is the Knavesmire stand. Another modern stand with all the expected facilities, it is fronted by a large tiered viewing area offering excellent views of the entire course. Beyond the Knavesmire stand is a much older stand, offering covered tiered viewing, the downside being it is a fair way from the finishing line. It is fronted by a large lawned area ideally suited for families. Two big screens are provided to enhance the viewing.

The course enclosure is situated in the centre of the course and is probably one of the best equipped course enclosures in the country. The slightly banked, main grass area offers reasonable viewing, supplemented by big screens, although this area is open to the elements. There however several buildings offering a good range of catering outlets and providing some shelter in inclement weather.

One thing I had never really noticed before at York (and it was only bought home to me when looking at the courses display of awards and I saw several York in bloom plaques) is the care given to the floral presentation at the course. In particular the abundance of hanging baskets and boxes, especially behind the stands where there is a veritable explosion of colour. To see this display in all its glory, get a County Stand badge and go up to the 5th floor viewing terrace – it is worth the trip.

So why do I have a problem with York - it sounds so perfect, as I have already hinted the problem is its popularity and it does get too crowded at weekends and the festival meetings. I realise that York are not a charity and are a thriving business which need to balance their books. However I cannot help but feel if they reduced their maximum capacity and increased their admission cost by a couple of pounds then they would not be much worse off financially and the true racegoer will have a more enjoyable experience.

You will note I use the term "true racegoer" and that was deliberate as another impression I am left with at York, and this certainly applies at the festivals and weekends, is it is one of those courses where, for the majority of those present, the racing is irrelevant as their aim is to pour as much alcohol down their throats as possible. I would wager that at least 50% of the Ebor stand racegoers and up to 75% of the Paddock Pavilion racegoers do not actually see a horse in the flesh during an afternoon's racing. That is a monumental pity as York stages some very high quality racing.

So my advice, if you enjoy partying then York is for you. If you go racing to watch the racing be prepared for large crowds, avoid the major stands and get yourself a pitch in the, relatively, quieter Melrose stand. Enjoy the cracking atmosphere and try to ignore the revellers.

Catering

It will be no surprise to know that at the "high end" of catering York excels itself with a number of formal restaurants offering packages. Prices start from £23.25 for a three course lunch.

There is a seafood bar with platters from £11.35.

Elsewhere York offers a reasonable cross section of food for its customers, with a large number of outlets set out behind the stands.

Unusually for a racecourse it even offers a vegetarian version of the ubiquitous burger. Most of the food outlets are operated by the courses own caterers with only a limited number of 'outside' mobile units. Again unusually for a racecourse these are at the better end of outlets.

There are also some café / bistro style outlets for semi-formal eating, for example a carvery is available for £8.60, other mains from £4.60.

There is a delightful cheese / wine & pate outlet in the County enclosure, prices starting from £5.65.

It goes without saying that drinkers are fully catered for and it is hard to find anywhere at the course more than a few yards from a drinks outlet. Whether your tippie is overpriced champers or cans of beer you will be happily catered for at this course.

Sample prices: Burgers £3.40 (£3.60 with cheese), steak baguettes £5.50, pork or beef baps £4.40 or baguettes £6.10. An excellent prime sausage bap, with two sausages, was available for £3.50. There are also a number of luxury ice cream units dotted around the place.

Pizza £5.00 - £6.50 and sandwiches from £2.20.

Bitter is £3.30

All in all a good selection of food which should suit all tastes and budgets and is an area where no fault can be found at all.

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

Not surprisingly there are plenty of bookmakers in all the enclosures and as such the betting market is generally good value, with an average over round of 1.67% per runner on the day of the inspection.

Racecard

York produces one of the best racecards on the circuit and only priced at £2.50. It was very pleasing to see the card produced for a quiet midweek meeting was to the same standard as produced for the festivals. As well as the usual 'mandatory' information there was plenty of interesting editorial and a crossword and a couple of quizzes, just in case you get bored.

Toilets

For the quieter midweek meeting the facilities were more than adequate. Clearly at weekends and the festivals the inevitable queues will appear but that is to be expected. All in all the balance is about right and the facilities are generally modern and well maintained. For a bit of grandeur visit the toilets in the old County stand, let's just say they are in keeping with the remainder of the stand.

Parade Ring

An attractive, well designed parade ring, surrounded by flower beds.



There is ample tiered viewing and button seating almost all the way around. There is also a small area of the parade ring equipped with speakers offering a paddock commentary. This is a useful service and it is a shame other courses do not offer the same. At the same time by placing the facility in one small area of the parade ring racegoers who consider such a facility a distraction can easily

ignore it. I only discovered this offering by sheer chance and could find no mention of it in the racecard, perhaps this is something more publicity should be given to.

The winners enclosure is located within the parade ring.

Non Racing Attractions

Quite easy this one – if the City of York itself steeped, as it is, in history does not have enough to entertain and amuse you. Then only a short drive away is some of the most stunning scenery in Britain.

Contact Details

	www.yorkracecourse.co.uk/
	01904 620911
	York Racecourse York YO23 1EX

Ownership	Private
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Fixtures 2012

May 16th, 17th, 18th & 26th
June 15th & 16th
July 13th, 14th, 27th (eve) & 28th
August 22nd, 23rd, 24th & 25th
September 9th
October 12th & 13th

Inspection Dates

<i>Date</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Type</i>
05/09/07	Warm and generally sunny	7 Flat midweek
13/06/09	Warm and generally sunny	7 Flat weekend
08/10/10	Overcast and muggy	6 Flat midweek

