

Inside Track: Insider's Guide to Horse Racing, by Donna Barton Brothers

Reviewed by Nicole Mattei-Lince

Lately there's been a lot of talk of the many "fix-its" the Thoroughbred industry has ahead of itself along with a laundry list of suggestions that may mend the sport. Mainly comprised of an older generation of fans and handicappers, racing is losing some 4% of fans each year and one reason cited is that the industry's marketing experts simply can't seem to find innovative ways to promote the sport or attract new fans. Our beloved sport of horse racing has been labeled as complicated and difficult for the newcomer to break into.

Enter Donna Barton Brothers. Former jockey and current racing reporter for NBC Sports and select TVG racing events, Donna Barton Brothers brings us *Inside Track: Insider's Guide to Horse Racing* (Blood-Horse Publications, 111 pages, \$16.95). As a true racing insider, Brothers is well aware of the looming intimidation factor that those who are unfamiliar with horse racing are confronted with after passing through the racetrack turnstiles. Where do I go first? Who do I bet on? Wait, how do I bet? Or even the questions people have before arriving at the racetrack; am I really supposed to wear an imposing fancy hat? For starters, no, there is no prerequisite to wear a large fancy hat for a day at the races, unless it's Derby Day, of course, to which Brothers devotes an entire chapter to conquering the prestigious event, mint juleps and all.

Writing with a friendly no-nonsense attitude, Brothers gives the horse racing freshman a tour of the track and its diverse environment (from grandstand to Turf Club, and everywhere in between), a glimpse at the type of atmosphere you're likely to find (\$1 Sundays and Family Fun Days, anyone?), and enough insider lingo to give the novice racetracker a more confident swagger. While racetracks generally lack an information kiosk with free race information and guidance, aside from the daily program and past performances, Brothers's book provides readers with a hand-held primer of the essentials of the horse racing world. Exactas, trifecta boxes, the \$.10 superfecta, Brothers covers the common betting terminology with simplicity and the accompanying disclaimer that "You can beat the race, but you can't beat the races" so bet accordingly. And which horse to bet? The former jockey points out key markers when judging horse flesh to help narrow your selection, then even provides you with a list of reasonable excuses to tell your friends when your carefully chosen horse turns in a disappointing effort ("Did you see how badly my horse got away from the gate?!")

Two insider tips that Brothers strongly advocates are quite simple and tremendously overlooked: 1) if you don't know, ask; and 2) you've got to see it/try it/hear it/bet it/etc. in person; nothing can beat the personal racing experience. While racetracks may currently lack the amusement park-like booths with self-guiding maps and "must see" attractions, making a phone call to the appropriate department at the track never hurts. If you were lucky enough to obtain a pair of tickets to the Kentucky Derby, but you are clueless if you're sitting indoors or out and thus are left unprepared to shop for that critical Derby outfit, why not call Churchill? A quick answer will end your Derby outfit

doubts and will allow for a much more enjoyable racing experience. The horse racing industry is making efforts to be more transparent and is encouraging fans to reach out to them.

What may be a marketing team's most imposing challenge when promoting the racing product is that Thoroughbred horse racing is one of those events you have to experience first-hand; attempting to re-create the thrill of watching "our" horse thread its way through traffic en route to a victory by a nose is a hardsell in writing. Even hearing the race call alone still lacks true color, by and large. For this, Brothers can't offer much more advice than "You just have to be there", the very crux of the sport. Nothing can beat the first-hand horse racing experience and Donna Barton Brothers helps acclimate new racetrackers to the thrill. So get out there. As they say, "Go baby, go!"