

## **Brief History of Point-to-Pointing**

The sport of steeplechasing was originated by hunting men who raced their hunters over natural country from "Point-to-Point" or from one steeple to the next. During the 19th century, steeplechasing became more sophisticated with enclosed courses and professionally trained horses, many of which were thoroughbreds, and the traditional sporting amateur was not able to compete at this level. Therefore attempts were made to stage races for proper hunters, from which racehorses and professional jockeys were excluded.

Local Hunts also undertook to organise amateur races with slightly more success. The Worcestershire Hunt have records of sporadic Hunt meetings from 1836, and the Atherstone claimed to be the first Hunt to stage an annual Hunt point-to-point meeting dating from the 1870s. These and other meetings were run under their own rules, and it was not until 1913 that the Master of Hounds Point-to-Point Association established a set of rules. These rules did not preclude lady riders who were regular competitors, often riding side-saddle, although from 1929 to 1967, they were only permitted to ride in races confined to lady riders.

During the first part of the 20th Century, Point-to-Points were held alongside bona fida hunt meetings and military meetings. The Rules and prize money were similar but the main difference was that, although there was no charge for admission to Point-to-Points, hunts holding bona fida fixtures were empowered by the NH Committee to hold their meetings over an enclosed course and charge a modest admission fee to each member of the public. The horses competing in these meetings were more or less the same ones and the number of Point-to-Point fixtures exceeded the bona fida meetings until they became submerged in the Point-to-Point scene.

The 1930's saw a growing difference of opinion between the Masters of Hounds Point-to-Point Association and the National Hunt Committee on how to administer Point-to-Point racing. This was concluded by the formation of a Joint Advisory Committee comprising three Members of the National Hunt Committee and three representatives of the Master of Foxhounds' Association and from the 1935 season, Point-to-Pointing came directly under the jurisdiction of the NH Committee. The main changes that the new administration brought were:

- No horse was eligible that had, since January 1st of the year in question, been in a licensed trainer's yard.
- Professional riders were banned. This included Hunt Servants, grooms, apprentices, stable lads or anyone who had "ridden for hire" in any capacity.
- Courses had to be approved by an official Inspector of Courses.

By and large, these regulations still hold good today. The date by which horses may not have been in a licensed trainer's yard has now shifted to the 1st November preceding the start of the Point-to-Point Season. Hunt staff and stable lads are now allowed to ride in Point-to-Points, although professional riders and anyone who has been paid to ride in a race are still banned. Conditionals and apprentices who have

held their licenses for less than 30 months are however exempt from this rule, and are permitted to hold a riders' qualification certificate.

There was no Point-to-Point racing during the 2nd World War, and only 91 meetings were held in 1946 although this number soon picked up in the ensuing years. By 1949, the bona-fida hunt meetings had completely disappeared from the scene. The year was also notable as the first Labour government proposed a bill to ban hunting. This was defeated, as subsequent bills have been, but the threat to hunting increases over the years, and with it, the question mark hanging over the future of Point-to-Pointing.

The 1960s saw a number of rule changes. In 1961, there was the first increase in prize money, as the National Hunt Committee raised it from £20 to £40 for the winner of an open event and up to £30 for the winner of any other race. At the same time, meetings were banned from handing out any other prizes. This was not well received, as was a rule banning all ladies under 18 years of age from riding in races, which came into effect the following year. 1967 saw a change for the better for lady riders, as they were permitted to ride against men in hunt members' races, although still precluded from riding against them in any other races. Another major rule change was that hunts were allowed to run their open races off the 12st mark, as opposed to 12st7lbs, provided that winners of an open Point-to-Point or a race under NH rules within the current and preceding seasons, carried a 7lb penalty. The decade culminated in Point-to-Point racing coming under the jurisdiction of the Jockey Club, when the National Hunt Committee merged into the Jockey Club.

The next landmark for lady riders was in 1974 when they were allowed to ride against men in adjacent hunts' races. Two years later, lady riders were at last on even terms with men. They were allowed to ride in all races, except open races confined to men (although equally, there were open races for ladies only), and a rule restricting anyone below the age of 16 from riding was also brought in, so meaning that both men and ladies could ride from this age.

The 1977 season saw the first rise in prize money since 1961, when the winner of an open event was entitled to £50, but the ceiling on first prize money in all other races remained at £30. Prize money was raised again in 1979, and arrived at its current rate in 1990. The prize money for open events is currently £250 (including win and place prize money) and £175 for other races. In 1997, one £500 feature race was sanctioned in each of the fourteen Areas. In 2003 the four 'classic' point-to-point races will also be able to award £500 prize money.

Point-to-Pointing has often led the way for National Hunt racing to follow. Two innovations occurred on the Point-to-Point field in 1990, which were later followed by racing under rules. The first was the dolling off of fences. Previously, if a fence had been obstructed due to a fallen horse or jockey, the entire race would have been abandoned, but a new rule allowed fences to be "dolloff" and for the field to go around the fence, thus allowing them to continue and complete the race. This rule proved successful in Point-to-Point racing as it reduced the number of races that had to be abandoned, and was then successfully transferred to National Hunt racing. The second innovation was Sunday racing with betting. Although not popular with bookmakers, there is no doubt that Sunday racing attracts a large attendance, although

it is predominantly a family one with less emphasis on betting and more on a family day out. Sunday racing has now become an accepted part of Point-to-Point racing and racing under rules.

A more detailed history of Point-to-Point racing can be found in Michael Williams book "Point-to-Pointing in Our Time" (published by Quiller Press)

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Taken from the BHA's Regulations for Point-to-Point Steeplechases

A Hunter Certificate is the document supplied by the BHA and signed and issued by the Master of a Hunt which is affiliated to a point-to-point area, providing that he is satisfied that the horse has been properly hunted, and which must be registered with Weatherbys before a horse is qualified to run in Point-to-Point races other than Hunt Members Races.

A Riders' Qualification Certificate is the document issued by the BHA and obtainable from the Secretary of a Hunt, providing that he is satisfied that the rider is a Master, Member, Subscriber, Farmer or their respective spouses or children, or a person who has paid to the Hunt the cap for one days hunting. This certificate is verification that the rider has paid the required premium in respect of the Point-to-Point Riders Insurance scheme for the current season.

A Hunt Members Race is for horses qualified with the Hunt or Hunts promoting the meeting.

A Maiden Race is open to any horse which has never won a race at a Point-to-Point meeting or a Flat Race, National Hunt Flat Race, Steeplechase or Hurdle Race under the Rules of any recognised Turf Authority. A maiden horse means a maiden at the time of start.

An Intermediate Race is open to any horse, which has not won any Flat Race (other than a National Hunt Flat Race), Steeplechase or Hurdle Race under the Rules of any recognised Turf Authority, or any "Mens", "Ladies", "Mixed" Open or Intermediate Race at a Point-to-Point Meeting.

A Confined Race is for horses qualified with the Hunt or Hunts promoting the Meeting and not more than 15 Hunts actually adjoining it. If insufficient Hunts adjoin, the nearest neighbouring Hunts must be included.

An Open Race is open to any horse and is either a "Mens" (to be ridden by Gentlemen), "Ladies" (to be ridden by Ladies), or "Mixed" (to be ridden by either Ladies or Gentlemen), Open Steeplechase.

A Hunters' Chase is a weight-for-age Steeple Chase under the Rules of Racing confined to horses which hold a Hunter Certificate and to amateur riders.