

Brief History of Point-to-Point Racing

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 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 1870’s. 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 choose 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. Former Conditionals and Apprentices who have ridden less than 25 winners whilst having held such licences, may now 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 the 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 any other race. At the same time, meetings were banned from handing over 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 other races. Another major rule change was that hunts were allowed to run their open races off the 12st mark, as opposed to 12st 7lbs, provided that winners of an Open Point-to-Point or a race under NH rules within the current or 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 these days, and since 2006, is at bands of £275-500 for all Open races, and £200-300 for all other races. Since 2003, there have been a number of 'Classic' Point-to-Point races for which prize money of up to £500 may be given. In 2010, there are 4 nationally recognised Classic races – the Heythrop's Lord Ashton of Hyde's Cup at Dunthorp, the Coronation Gold Cup at Larkhill, the Middleton's Grimthorpe Gold Cup at Whitwell, and the Worcestershire Hunt's Lady Dudley Cup at Chaddesley Corbett – as well as a number of Area Classic races all with up to £1000 in cumulative 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 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 "dolloffed" 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.

At the turn of new millennium, Point-to-Pointing was to face 2 major challenges in the space of 4 years. The first was the outbreak of foot & mouth disease in February 2001, which brought the sport to a swift halt and rendered the remainder of the season as all but over, following the running of only 31 meetings up to that point. Whilst strict controls were placed on racecourses and licensed trainers, allowing the resumption of racing under Rules, the requirements and spot checks laid down by MAFF in order to allow the continuation of Point-to-Pointing in Britain were too onerous on courses and yards to make the staging of Point-to-Point meetings viable. Some Point-to-Pointers were deployed to race under Rules at courses able to operate, whilst others went to pro yards before even having had a chance to compete between the flags. Another consequence of the stoppage was a huge upsurge in entries for Hunter chases. Totals of 150 and more for races with safety factors of 20 or less became almost common place as the Point-to-Point fraternity clawed at any opportunity they could to find races for their horses.

Secondly, the Hunting bill and eventual introduction of the Hunting ban that came in February 2005 cast major doubts over the future of the sport in its current guise, whilst so strongly affiliated with hunting. Fortunately Point-to-Pointing coped remarkably well, with little discernible effect, maintaining a fixture list of over 200 meetings in the seasons that followed and retaining the good support that it had always previously enjoyed.

Up until 2005, Point-to-Point racing was run under the control of the Jockey Club. However, following an interim period in which the sport was run under the Horseracing Regulatory Authority (HRA) jurisdiction, a merger between the HRA and BHB (British Horseracing Board) created the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) in July 2007 as racing's, and thus Point-to-Pointing's, regulatory authority.

One notable change in 2006 was the formation of a new Point-to-Point Board which replaced the Point-to-Point Liaison Committee as the sport's controlling body. In early 2006, one of the first acts of the Board was to commission a working party under the chairmanship of Richard Russell to carry out a "root and branch" review of the sport of Point-to-Point racing since 1986. The working party was deliberately drawn from those directly involved in the sport i.e. owners, riders, trainers, organisers etc. throughout the geographical regions but without direct representation from the Associations.

The review was well publicised and written submissions were sought from as wide an audience as possible. It soon became clear that the main themes revolved around governance and administration, the respective roles of the main Associations and

increasing costs and the importance of finance. Key secondary themes included the length of the season, race planning and promotion.

One of the recommendations to come out of the Russell Review, was for the formation of a new body to look after the administration and governance of Point-to-Pointing. The Point-to-Point Authority (PPA) was therefore established in October 2008 to undertake these duties, whilst the regulation of the sport remained under the BHA's control. Part of the PPA's remit was to further promote the sport and allow Point-to-Pointing to take control of its own destiny in becoming a commercial entity dedicated to the furtherance of the sport.

Since the PPA's creation, many of the proposals arising from the Russell Review have been implemented. For example, since the 2006/7 season there have been fixtures staged before the New Year, and now with the earliest meeting staged in the last weekend of November. These meetings have proved popular with participants, offering an extension to the season, a wider window for owners to run their horses at a time of year in which they are more likely to get better ground, and greater opportunities in Point-to-Points before Hunter Chases begin in February.

Races with eligibility for four year olds were re-introduced in 2006. Initially, a number of restrictions were put in place in order to alleviate welfare concerns and ensure a fair trial, meaning that four year olds could only race in Maiden races over 2 ½ miles. The following season, some restrictions were lifted allowing the winners of such races to progress into races held over 3 miles. Now, in 2010, four year olds can compete in any race for which they are eligible in the same way as any other age group are able to. Four year old numbers have gradually increased, from 15 registered in 2006 (providing 1 winner) to 84 registered to run in Point-to-Points in 2009/10, and accounting for 18 winners over the course of the season. It is hoped that following trials in the 2010/11 season, that there will be scope to have more four and five year old Maiden races to bring greater emphasis on creating further opportunities for young horses and develop a better shop window for Point-to-Point vendors of promising horses before they progress to run under Rules.

Another change to Point-to-Pointing was the advent of sponsorship and advertising for participants and on horses. Up until 2008 advertising had not been permitted on horse or rider in Point-to-Point racing. However under proposals drawn up by the PPA, the controlled sponsorship and advertising through registration under their sponsorship schemes were permitted in order to help owners and riders offset the increasing costs associated with competing in an amateur sport. Such a move could only help Point-to-Pointing keep abreast with other equine sports in maintaining participant support levels and also providing much needed income for the PPA to re-invest into helping the sport's proliferation.

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

A **Hunter Certificate** is the document supplied by the Point-to-Point Authority and signed by the Master of a Hunt which is affiliated to a Point-to-Point Area, providing that the Master 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 those restricted to the Hunt or Hunts promoting the meeting..

A **Riders' Qualification Certificate** is the document issued by and obtainable from the Point-to-Point Authority, and signed by a nominated Master or Hunt Secretary. The applicant must be a Master, Member, Subscriber, Farmer or their respective spouses or children, or a person who has paid to the Hunt the cap for one day's hunting. This certificate is verification that the ride 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 authorised to stage the meeting, and if so desired, additional Hunt(s) up to an overall total of three or a race held under the provisions of sub-Regulation 72(xiv).

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 Racing Authority. A maiden horse means a maiden at the time of starting.

An **Intermediate Race** is open to any horse, which has not won any Flat Race (other than a National Hunt Flat Race or French AQPS Flat Race), Steeplechase or Hurdle Race under the Rules of any Recognised Racing 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 authorised to stage the meeting and not more than fifteen Hunts actually adjoining it. If insufficient Hunts adjoin, the nearest neighbouring Hunts must be included.

A **Club** (or Association, Service, or Society) **Race** is a race for horses owned by members of the Club, Association, Service, or Society. Where such conditions are added to Maiden, or Restricted, or Intermediate races, these races would remain by definition, Maiden, Restricted or Intermediate races.

An **Open Race** is open to any horse and is termed 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 certified by a Master of Hounds to have been hunted and to amateur riders.

