



“Are Girls Any Good?”

An analysis of gender differentials amongst British Thoroughbred horseracing jockeys

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SUMMARY

It is generally assumed that women cannot rival men in direct sporting competition; with the traditionally male-dominated sport of horseracing being no exception. This issue was brought into sharp focus by France Galop's recent introduction of a 2kg weight allowance for female jockeys.

However, very little research has been attempted to quantify female jockey performance against their male counterparts.

This study questions gender-based assumptions by examining whether there is a differential in the performance of male and female jockeys, through sophisticated analysis of fourteen years (2003-16) of racing data, made up of over 1.25 million individual rides.

In order to achieve this, female participation by licence type, class of race and quality of mount was examined along with comparative analysis of number of rides, win ratio and prize money won.

This analysis found a number of variables which could have an impact on the average performance of females versus males, such as the frequency of rides which female riders are receiving and the class of race which they are riding in. However, one variable which was identified as potentially extremely significant was the fact that within handicap races the distribution of female rides is generally skewed towards the lower end of the handicap, which indicated a higher proportion of rides on 'inferior' horses compared to those which are higher in the handicap.

Detailed statistical modelling was then applied through 'regression analysis' which allows for a direct comparison of male and female performances when carrying the same number cloth – for example, the performance of female jockeys when carrying number cloth 1 was compared against male jockeys carrying number cloth 1, and so forth with cloths 2, 3, 4 etc down to cloth 15.

Overall the study revealed a number of key observations:

- Female participation was found to be extremely low. Women account for just 5.2% of rides during the study period, despite holding 24% of jockey licences (including professionals and amateurs) and representing half of all stable staff.
- The majority of female jockeys ride on amateur licences
- A greater proportion of female rides are taken on the flat (6.5% share of rides on the flat against a 2.9% share of NH rides).
- Women are particularly underrepresented at the elite level of the sport



- When comparing females riding on the same number cloth as males in handicaps, performance was observed as identical on all number cloths except for four – namely Cloths 3, 4 and 5 on the Flat where male performance was observed as superior by less than 1/4 of a place, and Cloth 15 over Jumps where female performance was observed as superior to males by a slightly greater figure

In summary, using detailed statistical methods to control for quality of mount, female performance was seen to be equivalent to that of male jockeys. These results indicate the possibility of gender discrimination, either conscious or unconscious, or at the very least an inherent hiring-bias towards selecting male riders.

These observations have significant implications for prize money, and therefore economic equality for female jockeys.

The findings of this research have both academic significance – horseracing being one of the few sports in which men and women compete on equal terms – and potential relevance to horseracing policy decisions concerning gender equality programmes.

Please note: The full study has not yet been published. All of the studies from the Thoroughbred Horseracing Industries MBA will be published in due course.