



## WALKING THE COURSE

A collaborative effort between Aintree Racecourse, the British Horseracing Authority and the Jockey Coaching Programme saw, for the first time, the opportunity for all riders at the Grand National Meeting an opportunity to walk the course each morning with a qualified Jockey Coach.

Amateur riders particularly welcomed the chance to gain valuable pre-race preparation from Carl Llewellyn and Tim Reed.

The importance of walking the course before race riding cannot be underestimated. It is a valuable opportunity to consider the unique characteristics of each course, including the terrain, going, layout of the track and position of the fences. Philip Robinson and Colin Brown, both experienced former professional Jockeys and qualified Jockey Coaches, give an insight into what to look out for during a course walk.

### Arriving at a racecourse

The first thing to do is take a good look at the map of the racecourse in the weighing room. Make yourself aware of any rails that may have been moved, or fences and hurdles omitted. If you have any questions ask the Clerk of Course, they are always pleased to help.

### How to walk the course

Walk at a good brisk pace or jog, which will help you appreciate which parts of the course will take the most out of your horse and which it will find easier. This may help you to work out when you can give him a breather depending on the pace of the race and on how you are going. Walking the course with a Jockey Coach can help by discussing with an experienced former Jockey the variances of specific courses.

### The start

Learn the route to the start, and the holding area, then begin your course walk from the starting position of your race. Make sure you know where you're drawn so you can judge how far from the

inside rail you will be and how far you are from the first bend.

Walk up to the hurdles to inspect the ground as this helps to see a stride in the race. If any jumps are island fences or hurdles you need to be aware of the importance of keeping straight to avoid a sudden run out if you go the inside or the outside route.

### Conditions

It is a good idea to take a stick with you if the conditions are soft to push in the ground and get an idea just how testing it could be, or if the ground is on the fast side there may be a strip of better ground on the course.

As you are going around always look for any advantages, especially up the home straight. Try running on different sections of grass and feel for a difference, which will be greater the longer the grass has been cut – and even more so if it's wet. Have a look at the bends, especially if they have had a lot of racing recently, because the ground may have been repaired and could still be loose on top. Heavy rain could make parts of the track harder work, while wind strength and direction are also important as a headwind can make it harder for your horse, so you may need to ride in the slipstream of another horse.

### Different Courses

There are some tracks that need a lot of learning. Always speak to a senior Jockey on how best to ride the track – most are willing to help. It is helpful to watch plenty of races on TV when possible, and watch archive races specifically for the course and distance that you are going to be riding.

### Winning Post

Know where it is, especially when riding abroad as many tracks have more than one winning post depending on the distance of the race. Make sure you know which one is for the distance of your race.

**Any small advantage you can find could make the difference between winning and losing.**