



Bringing Experienced Owners Together - Joining Forces to Buy Better Horses - Campaigning for Change

**BEST OF  
THE BLOG**

#13 FEBRUARY 2020

# A Whinge on Racecourse Access Roads, Car Parks and Car Park Attendants – The Power of the First Impression

*“Psychologists know that the power of the first and last impressions have significantly higher impact than what goes on between them. Some racecourses create a magnificent first impression. Others, however, are most unimpressive.”*

Over the years since I started *The Owner's Opinion* blog, the pendulum has swung between quite robust, strategic articles and highly practical and more tactical offerings. Today's blog is firmly in the latter category.

Psychologists know that the power of the first and last impressions have significantly higher impact than what goes on between them. I'm sure that this applies equally to racecourses, and we all know that there are a number of racecourses in the country that create a magnificent first impression but, alas, there are others that fail miserably. Racecourses I am particularly impressed by include Newbury, the Rowley Mile course at Newmarket and my favourite track in the country, York, as far as large tracks are concerned, whereas unfortunately many of the smaller tracks are somewhat challenged, although that is not an excuse for some of the unimpressive incidents that are all too frequent. I'm not going to mention any specific courses, but you may be able to recognise some of them. Here is my whinge.

- **Lack of signage:** the locals may know the area but visiting owners often do not. Navigating your way through towns is never easy, and with many racecourses located out in the countryside it is often difficult to work out the correct way to approach them. When you eventually locate them, often the signage for Owners & Trainers car parks are too small and badly positioned.
- **Racecourse access roads:** why are so many too narrow, potholed and with rough, inadequate surfacing? That isn't just the minor tracks – it is the case at some of the biggest courses in the country. It is sometimes unclear whether they are two-lane roads, so it is left to drivers to decide. Sometimes you find that two-lane roads become one-way only at various times, though nothing explains what triggers that.
- **Entrance to the car park:** how many times have you encountered the custodian of the car park glaring at you for some unknown and unintended breach of procedure? While a few breezily wave you through on display of your O&T car park badge or ROA PASS card, others seem determined to block the entrance and keep you out, regardless of your entitlement to be there. It is not much of a first impression if the verbals / non-verbals are "You can't come in", or "You can't park here", or "You can come in, but can only park in that big puddle over there", or, of course, "Anywhere you like, in the mud".
- **The car park surface:** if I was going for a normal distribution of surfacing, I would say that 20% is lamentably bad; 20% a combination of grass, gravel and mud; 20% Ok apart from when it's raining (which is hardly uncommon in this country, particularly this winter); 20% quite acceptable and you can park on it and walk over it without getting covered in mud; and 20% superb, as it is hard standing and properly laid out.
- **Signage to Owners & Trainers:** sometimes good but often non-existent. My worst experience was going to a minor NH course when I followed the signs to the racecourse car park, only to be told that I'd come to the wrong car park and should have gone to another one, which of course hadn't been signed at all. The wrong car park did however have an O&T entrance, but when I went there, they wouldn't allow me in, as apparently I needed to go to the "other one" across the course. They wouldn't let me through to go to the unsigned, correct one. I had to go back to the car, drive round and find the unsigned correct one and go through the whole process again. They then wouldn't accept my wife as an owner at the O&T entrance, and the usual embarrassment started of proving who you were. The staff at O&T had obviously been through the same charm school as the car park attendants. The training had certainly been effective – it was consistently dreadful, rude behaviour.

The famous bloodstock agent, David Redvers, on his web site, has something called *Redvers' Rant*. I'm obviously launching a new series to rival that called *Hughes's Horrors*. Maybe I've just reached the age of Victor Meldrew in *One Foot in the Grave*. If you hear someone ambling round the course muttering, "I just don't believe it", you'll know it's either David, Victor or me.

