

# Dollars and sense: that'll get punters back on track

**F**ree entry at Warwick Farm for Villiers day? Well, it has a ring to it. The ploy hasn't been a big drawcard in the past but at least the Australian Turf Club is testing the water with a reasonably strong feature race.

Racegoers once surged up Doncaster Avenue to get into Randwick racecourse like the Ord River gushes into the Timor Sea. The flow has now subsided to a trickle in a dry gutter with the exception of carnival and booze days.

Even Warwick Farm had appeal, with stacked trains taking punters to a change of scenery in the bush in an era when betting and the quality of racing were the top attractions. Perhaps Saturday could be promoted as a journey into the past.

Looking for ways to arrest or change the great withdrawal, the internet - neither Racing NSW nor the Australian Turf Club - is likely to provide most answers.

"Free entry is only just one way to attract new-blood interest," Kam said on Racenet. "However you have to start making racing a more attractive option, not use Band-Aid solutions that do nothing for long-term popularity."

"Using Hong Kong as an example gives some clues as to how they attracted people back to the races. Unfortunately this is at conflict with the old Oz guard, who have retarded new blood. It's that stale attitude that is killing any hope of popularity..."

Alas, Warwick Farm is hardly Sha Tin, and "Daddy Cool" puts it into perspective.

"It is misleading to compare Asian racing to Australia," he wrote. "I live in one of Asia's hubs and they have two meetings a week - Saturday and Sunday. Australia has a race run every five minutes. The countless number of meetings for a small country (population-wise) eventually will diminish the quality of the entertainment provided."

More than anything the track has lost betting interest. The prime attraction was always the odds. Horse players went to the races to beat the bookmakers. Now they can't afford to.

"To get punters on track and away

## MAX PRESNELL



from online is [a] different rationale than increasing racing's popularity with Joe Average." AJ wrote. "But again authorities need to drop the 1960s mentality. Racing needs to think 'why' they are not coming..."

In the good old days when racegoers stood shoulder to shoulder to watch the action they whinged about warm beer and cold pies. No doubt the racecourse palate has become more refined.

Restaurateur "Charley", an ATC member and renowned at the bridge table, recently wailed about the standard of food on Sydney tracks. I find ATC tucker better than the SCG or Homebush. It beats Caulfield and Moonee Valley but trails Flemington, which rates with the best in the world.

"Race clubs need the entry dollar, food and drink and nomination fees to ultimately survive," DB reckons.

"However, as most have stated, working to a business model that says less people coming so charge more is ridiculous. Under 18s free, they can't gamble or drink technically anyway, get some youth there, \$5 max for general public, better facilities, food and drink offerings and entertainment for kids and adults alike."

Alas booze, with more profit out of a bottle of bubbly than a \$50 bet, is a prime lure. "If race clubs in Australia need a battalion of bouncers at the front gate and patrolling the grounds to keep the drunks under control, why would you want to attend?" Sam said.

"Watt" backed up: "I'm a punter who used to go to the races on Saturdays all the time, but I'm far better off trading from home now. What would get me back on course? Perhaps a 5 per cent rebate on losing bets placed on course. Perhaps higher on-course tote dividends vs off-course."

"Trade" has come into the dia-



The way we were ... punters, jockeys and officials around the old grandstand at Warwick Farm observe a minute's silence for President John F. Kennedy the day after his assassination in 1963. Photo: Fairfax Archive

logue but the racecourse betting ring was once the stock exchange or rialto. Wise guys made a living out of noting horses laid by the Waterhouse family, Bill and later Robbie. Currently it has the vitality of watching kikuyu sprout.

Market moves now can be best assessed off-course.

"I worked at the races for over 25 years and you don't have to be Einstein to see the big three downers are entry charge, expensive crap food and warm, way overpriced drinks. Make racetracks attractive to new punters and educate them what the sport of kings is all about,"

"The Enforcer" wrote. But "Gareth" comes in with what must be the rant of a grumpy old man - an opinion that should be valued.

"I hope the price of entry and food goes higher," he said. "Nothing worse than waiting for a \$5 dollar punter fumble his pocket change and lucky numbers as the horses are about to jump."

"I'm there waiting for the fluctuations, they are there because it suddenly dawned on them that the race was about to start ... please move aside or better still DON'T COME!"

Maybe the ATC could further promote Saturday's free racing as a

flashback to the past.

After all the Farm is the ideal venue. Let's not call it derelict but old-world charm.

Offer meat pies, temperature as they come, for a zac [sixpence or five cents] while middies should be a deener [a shilling or 10 cents].

To get atmosphere back into the betting ring a good rush to get top odds, putting old ladies and pensioners in jeopardy, should be staged.

Surely Robbie Waterhouse will come to the party.

Offer two points over the existing odds for a favourite. The favourites of his choice, of course.

## Inglis Villiers Stakes Day

Free entry this Saturday at Rosehill Gardens

Experience the excitement and thrills of the Schweppes Summer Carnival this holiday season at the track.

- U Kick off the Summer holidays with a FREE family day out
- U A great day of racing featuring the G2 \$175,000 Inglis Villiers Stakes
- U Plenty of FREE family entertainment including 'reindeer' rides, a visit from santa and his elves, face painting, bungee tramps and more
- U Be on course to enter The Star SMS to WIN\* Competition for the chance to win a \$300 gift card

theraces.com.au | Gates open 11.30am | First race 1.00pm



WARWICK  
FARM



Inglis

\* Terms and conditions apply. Authorised under NSW Permit No. LTPM/12/00970.

FREE ENTRY THIS SATURDAY