

Horse Racing

Horse racing is a popular spectator sport, and people have almost surely been racing horses since we began riding them. Many breeds participate in racing. The most common types of races are flat racing, harness racing, and jump races.

Flat Racing

Flat racing is racing with the horse ridden by a jockey, and over a flat racetrack. The length of the race can vary from 300 yards to over 2 miles. Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds are the two primary flat racing breeds in the United States, although many breeds participate in racing around the world. Quarter Horses are best known for racing short distances, 1/4 mile or less; while Thoroughbreds are best known for racing longer distances. The three most famous Thoroughbred races for 3 year olds in the United States are the Kentucky Derby, which is 1 1/4 miles long, the Preakness Stakes, which is 1 3/16 of a mile long, and the Belmont Stakes, which is 1 1/2 miles long. For more information, check out the National Thoroughbred Racing Association.



Harness Racing

Harness racing is a sport where horses are hooked to a two wheeled cart, known as a sulky, and race at a trot or a pace. In the United States, Standardbred horses are most often used for harness racing.



Standardbreds are so named because horses needed to be able to trot a mile in a standard time to be eligible for registration. Most Standardbred horses in the United States are descendents of a horse named Hambletonian, and one of the most prestigious Standardbred races, the Hambletonian Stakes, is named for him. Most harness races are still competed over the one mile distance. When Standardbreds were first developed, racing was done either under saddle, or in harness. Although in harness with the sulky is still the most common form of Standardbred racing in the United States, occasionally races will occur under saddle.

For more information, visit the United States Trotting Association website!

Jump Racing

Jump racing is a term to describe a variety of types of horse racing that occur over jumps.

Steeplechasing is the best known, but hurdle racing is also a popular sport. Steeplechase races are longer, sometimes over 4 miles, than hurdle races, and the jumps are large and more solidly built. Hurdle races are over a shorter distance, and the jumps may be more flexible, and collapse or fall if a horse hits them while jumping. One of the most famous steeplechase races in the world is the Aintree Grand National, which is raced in England every April.

For more information about steeplechasing, check out the National Steeplechase Association.

Endurance Racing

In endurance racing mounted horses are raced cross-country over long distances (25 to 100 miles) in which the horse's speed and fitness are tested. Any breed of horse can participate in an endurance race, however, breeds such as the Arabian are most successful. More information about endurance racing is available from the American Endurance Ride Conference.