

## **Black-type races – the thinking behind the new Pattern in New Zealand**

This is an abridged version of the presentation given to the AGM of the NZ Thoroughbred Breeders' Association, July 2005, on the new Pattern of black-type races in New Zealand

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### **Background**

This season heralds the introduction of a new schedule or Pattern of black-type (stakes) races in New Zealand.

Acting upon a recommendation from New Zealand's Graded Stakes Committee - the committee that oversees the maintenance and integrity of our black-type system - New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing (NZTR) undertook a review of all black-type races in New Zealand. To facilitate the process, NZTR established a Review of the Pattern Committee.

The Review Committee met for the first time in May last year. They finalised their report in November 2004 after taking into consideration numerous submissions from within the racing industry, as well as a request by the Auckland Racing Club to move a number of their important races in the racing calendar.

The new Pattern results from recommendations made to the Board of NZTR by the Review Committee.

The Board endorsed the Committee's recommendations for implementation in the 2005/06 racing season and the report was subsequently circulated throughout the racing industry.

### **Key outcome**

The key outcome sought from the Review Committee was that the black-type structure should recognise and help define the strength of the New Zealand thoroughbred, particularly in the international context, which is essential to providing credibility to our black-type system.

### **Strategic criteria**

The Committee defined the following strategic criteria as the basis for the assessment and development of the Pattern:

- The black-type structure must recognise and help define the strength of the New Zealand thoroughbred, particularly in the international context
- Group 1 and 2 races are regarded as National targets, as are some Group 3 races, whereas other Group 3 races and Listed races are regarded as Regional targets
- The Pattern of racing should provide seasonal and regional highlights – e.g. Hawke's Bay Racing's spring carnival, the New Zealand Cup meeting at Riccarton in November, the new Auckland Cup week in March etc.
- The Pattern of racing must take into account the likely track conditions at various times of the year
- Fundamental to this review is that any changes in conditions of individual races will not affect the current black-type status of those races for a period of two years from the commencement of the 2005/06 season

With these criteria forming the basis of the Review, the Committee made the following eight key recommendations:

## **Key recommendations**

- That the industry takes a proactive series of steps to re-emphasise the New Zealand racing industry's strength in middle-distance and staying races and programmes races accordingly; and that NZTR notes the importance of adopting patterns, schedules and funding of races to ensure that the New Zealand industry can regain its former position of strength
- That NZTR adopts the philosophy that Group 1 and 2 races are regarded as National targets, as are some Group 3, whereas other Group 3 races and Listed races are regarded as Regional targets
- That NZTR adopts the philosophy that Easter Saturday be ignored in the Dates Calendar for clubs hosting black-type events on that day so as to provide permanency in the calendar
- That NZTR supports the Auckland March carnival and the associated repositioning of feature races as proposed by the Review Committee
- That the industry commits to an investment in track maintenance and upgrading and to research and assessment of tracks so that track surfaces are presented at their optimum
- That the Graded Stakes Committee be instructed that any changes in conditions of individual races to help develop the new Pattern will not affect the current black-type status of those races for a period of two years from the commencement of the 2005/06 season
- That NZTR establishes an independent group whose obligation it will be to keep under review the pattern of racing in New Zealand
- That NZTR adopts some criteria, in respect of early entry races, to regulate the direct cost to owners

## **Staying races – the strength of the New Zealand racing industry**

While all of the eight key recommendations are required as a collective approach to improving the Pattern, the first recommendation is possibly of greatest significance to the future of the racing industry due to the challenge it presents at both a philosophical and practical level.

Essentially this recommendation says 'lets play to our strengths'. It doesn't require excessive analysis to come to the realisation that the strength of the New Zealand breeding and racing industry has been, and is, in staying races - those races beyond 1600m.

Historically the New Zealand bloodstock industry has achieved its greatest success and greatest international recognition when NZ-bred racehorses have been successful in the prestigious Cups, Classics and middle-distance staying races in Australia, the wider Asia/Pacific region and further abroad in other countries such as South Africa.

There is a growing awareness of the declining success rate of NZ-bred horses in our critical markets and the Graded Stakes Committee would confirm a comparable decline in the quality of many of our domestic black-type races.

More and more, the credibility of our black-type races attracts scrutiny, both domestically and internationally, as our product competes in both traditional and evolving markets and as internationalisation of horse racing continues to increase.

The barometer used to measure the quality of our product remains the success our racehorses achieve at the elite level in Australia and further abroad. In the racing season of -

- 1996/97 NZ-breds won 14 Group 1 races in Australia with 13 of those winners successful at 1600m or beyond.
- In the following season, 1997/98, NZ-bred's won 13 Group 1 races in Australia, 11 of whom won at 1600m or beyond.
- In the 2002/03 and 2003/04 racing seasons in Australia NZ-bred's won 7 and 5 Group 1 races respectively, all but one of those successes being achieved at 1600m or beyond.
- Last season, fortunately, we finished with a flourish and the four NZ-bred Group 1 winners at the Brisbane winter racing carnival took our tally of Group One winners in Australia last season to seven - all but two of these successes being achieved at 1600m or beyond.

This recognisable decline is a major concern to all in the thoroughbred industry and the Review Committee points to a significant flaw in the programming of races that, in part, contributes to the reduced level of success.

### **Programming**

Nearly three-quarters of races in New Zealand are run at distances up to 1600m. Although a considerable number of these races are for 2yos or maidens, this fact serves to emphasise the requirement for change. Black-type races closely mirror this statistic with two-thirds of these races run at distances up to 1600m.

### **Breeding industry**

There has been some criticism of the breeding sector in respect of a lack of investment in attracting and securing high-quality stallions. However, it is important to note that stayers are not necessarily late-maturing. The fact that high-class staying oriented stallions are usually retired at a young age actually means that there is a selection emphasis for early-maturing stayers.

In New Zealand, the absence of an optimum programming structure for this type of horse means that these high-class staying oriented stallions may not realise their potential and gain due recognition. In other words, a self-fulfilling prophecy is created.

The Review Committee highlighted the need for a clear strategy to be developed to ensure that programming caters for the changing requirements of New Zealand's thoroughbred breeding stock. The Committee has proposed a shift in the emphasis of races programmed to arrest the decline in quality and to provide a more appropriate platform for NZ-bred horses to achieve increased success. The Committee outlined how this strategy could initially be implemented through a change in the way races are funded, prior to developing longer-term strategies.

Addressing the fundamental requirement of delivering a better programming structure will assist in providing a foundation which better serves the strengths of our breeding stock with the flow-on benefits to all sectors of the New Zealand racing industry.

This recommendation does not in any way negate the requirement for sprinting-oriented breeding stock which, as in the past, will continue to make a significant contribution. However, the strength of New Zealand's breeding industry is in producing high-class stayers that gain success in the classic and cups races in our most significant markets.

## Factors in developing the new Pattern

The Review Committee defined a number of key factors to form the basis of criteria around which the Pattern and structure of black-type racing could be assessed and a Pattern developed.

- The key Group races within each category (age groups, handicaps, WFA, F&M, jumping) and sub-category (distances, times of the year)
- Drivers that support the key Group races such as carnivals, sponsorship, turnover, on-course attendance, sequence of races, placement in the calendar, track conditions, ability to prepare horses, geographical spread of races, horse population, etc.
- Appropriate Pattern of lead-up races
- Identification of any perceived gaps within the schedule of stakes races

The Committee also took into account the necessity to ensure that New Zealand develops and maintains a strong domestic Pattern of racing, albeit one that is compatible with the Australian Group Racing Pattern, especially around their feature races and carnivals.

## The new Pattern

Thus we come to the new Pattern and the following tables illustrate some of the changes from the previous Pattern in the two and three-year-old categories.

### Two year olds

**Table 1.** The proposed pattern of 2-year-old races (UG (Ungraded) or NEW races are races which are important to the pattern, but are not black-type events).

Date (2005/06)	Club	2-year-old
22 Oct	Wellington	Wellesley S LR 1000m
12 Nov	Canterbury	CJC Welcome S LR 1000m
19 Nov	Counties	Counties Challenge S LR 1100m
24 Nov	Levin	Levin 2YO UG 1000m
30 Nov	Avondale	Avondale 2YO UG 1000/1200m
10 Dec	Waikato	Star Way 1000 LR 1000m
17 Dec	Waikato	Waikato 2YO UG 1000m
17 Dec	Manawatu	Manawatu 2YO UG 1000m
26 Dec	Auckland	ARC 2YO NEW 1100m
26 Dec	Otago	ORC Champagne S LR 1000m
1 Jan	Auckland	Eclipse S G3 1200m
21 Jan	Wellington	<b>Wakefield Challenge S G2 1200m (SERIES)</b>
4 Feb	Waikato	Super Bonus Classique RL 1200m
18 Feb	Taranaki	Taranaki 2YO Classic G3 1200m
25 Feb	Matamata	<b>Matamata Breeders' S G2 1200m (Fillies)</b>
11 Mar	Auckland	<b>Ellerslie Sires' Produce G1 1200m (SERIES)</b>
1 Apr	Manawatu	<b>Manawatu Sires' Produce G1 1400m (SERIES)</b>
8 Apr	Canterbury	CJC Champagne S LR 1200m
15 Apr	Auckland	<b>Great Northern Champagne S LR 1600m (SERIES)</b>
25 Apr	Avondale	Avondale Fillies' Classic LR 1200m
13 May	Rotorua	Matamata Slipper LR 1200/1400 (C&G)
27 May	Auckland	Great Northern Foal S LR 1200m
5 Jun	Foxton	Triton S LR 1200m
15 Jul	Whangarei	Whangarei Breeders S LR 1200m
29 Jul	Levin	Ryder S LR 1200m

No major changes here except for the recommendation from the Committee that there be a 1600m black-type 2YO race in the autumn. The Committee identified the ARC Great Northern Champagne Stakes as a race that could meet that requirement.

For this event to be a success, a substantial stake, as well as the programming of suitable lead-up races, would be required. April was regarded as the latest time that a race of this nature could be developed given the likelihood that track conditions would deteriorate thereafter. The race would fit neatly into the Pattern following on at a two-week interval from the Manawatu Sires Produce Stakes.

The Review Committee is of the opinion that to develop and strengthen staying opportunities, a foundation needs to be established with the 2YOs.

Last season no club in New Zealand programmed a 1600m 2YO race. New Zealand is the only major racing jurisdiction in the world that does not conduct Group or Listed races for 2YOs at distances of 1600m or beyond.

In Australia there are at least six 2YO 1600m stakes races, including two races at Group 1 level. One of those Group 1 races was won by NZ-bred, owned and trained Darci Brahma who, due to no 1600m stakes race opportunity for him here, had to venture offshore to achieve recognition at the elite level.

In Europe, every major racing country provides opportunities for their 2YOs to run in black-type events over 1600m or beyond. France, for example, has a Gr.1 2000m race for 2YOs.

The programming of more 1400m and 1600m 2YO races will be a starting point to providing a platform that will better assist our gene pool to achieve what it is largely designed for.

### Three year olds

The 3YO category introduces some significant changes as a result of the movement of both classic Group One target races, the New Zealand Derby and New Zealand Oaks, to the autumn. The following tables divide the racing season into three – spring, summer and autumn.

### Spring target races

**Table 2.** The proposed pattern of 3-year-old Spring races (UG (Ungraded) or NEW races are races that are important to the pattern, but are not black-type events).

Date (2005/06)	Club	3-year-old Combined	3-year-old fillies
3 Sep	Wanganui	Wanganui Guineas LR 1320m	Trudy Thomson Memorial LR 1200m
17 Sep	Hawke's Bay		Gold Trail S G3 1200m
24 Sep	Canterbury		Canterbury Belle S LR 1200m
30 Sep	Ashburton	John Grigg S LR 1400m	
1 Oct	Hawke's Bay	Hawke's Bay Guineas G3 1400m	
8 Oct	Auckland Canterbury	Great Northern Guineas Trial LR 1400m CJC Guineas Trial UG 1400m	Soliloquy S LR 1400m
22 Oct	Wellington	Wellington Guineas G2 1500m	WRC 3YO Fillies NEW 12/1400m
23/24 Oct	North Canterbury Waikato	Canterbury S LR 1600m  Sarten Memorial UG 1400m	
5 Nov	Canterbury	CJC 3YO NEW 1400m	<b>New Zealand One Thousand Guineas G1 1600m</b>
12 Nov	Canterbury	<b>New Zealand Two Thousand Guineas G1 1600m</b>	

Following evaluation of evidence to consider moving at least one of the classic Guineas races north, due in part to the greater population of 3YO's being domiciled there, it was decided to support the status quo. The Lowland Stakes and the Waikato Guineas move to the autumn to support the Pattern of races leading up to both the New Zealand Derby and the New Zealand Oaks.

The 2000 Guineas moves to the Saturday following the 1000 Guineas, rather than it's current mid-week date.

### Summer target races

**Table 3.** The proposed pattern of 3-year-old Summer races (UG (Ungraded) or NEW races are races that are important to the pattern, but are not black-type events).

Date (2005/06)	Club	3-year-old Combined	3-year-old fillies
24 Nov	Levin	Levin Turf Classic G1 1600m	
3 Dec	Avondale	Avondale Guineas G2 1600m	
10 Dec	Manawatu		Eulogy S G3 1600m
11 Dec	Auckland	New Zealand Derby Trial LR 2000m	
26 Dec	Auckland	<b>Great Northern Guineas G2 2000m</b>	Ladies' Mile (Eight Carat) G2 1600m
1 Jan	Auckland		<b>Royal S G2 2000m</b>

With regard to the summer target races, the Review Committee supported the desire of the Auckland Racing Club to move the New Zealand Derby to March as part of a carnival week of racing. The Committee also recommended the movement of the New Zealand Oaks to the autumn. They then sought to construct a supportive schedule of lead-up races to both classic events and to the gap in the Pattern these races would leave through being moved.

The target 3YO races in the summer are now the Great Northern Guineas and the Royal Stakes run over 2000m. The Avondale Guineas will be run at 1600m providing a strong lead-up race to the target races and a high-class 1600m race in the north, which is where the largest 3YO population resides.

### Autumn target races

**Table 4.** The proposed pattern of 3-year-old Summer-Autumn races (NEW races are races that are important to the pattern, but are not black-type events).

Date (2005/06)	Club	3-year-old Combined	3-year-old fillies
26 Dec	Otago	Dunedin Guineas LR 1600m	
21 Jan	Wellington	Wellington S G3 1600m	
28 Jan	Wellington		Desert Gold S G3 1600m
2 Feb	Gore	Gore Guineas LR 1355m	
4 Feb	Waikato	Waikato Guineas G3 2000m	
11 Feb	Waikato		Sir Tristram Fillies Classic G2 2000m
18 Feb	Auckland	Great Northern Oaks G2 2000m (ex Grosvenor & Championship Stakes)	
25 Feb	Southland	Southland Guineas LR 1600m	
4 Mar	Auckland Masterton	<b>New Zealand Derby G1 2400m</b>	Lowland S G3 2000m
8 Mar	Auckland		ARC 3YO Fillies NEW 2000m
18 Mar	Wellington		<b>New Zealand Oaks G1 2400m</b>
1 Apr	Manawatu Otago	Manawatu Classic G3 2000m	ORC Breeders' S LR 1400m
17 Apr	Canterbury		Inglewood S LR 1600m
29 Apr	Cambridge Canterbury	Cambridge Breeders' S G3 1200m	Warstep S LR 2000m

The new structure provides logical lead-up races, at appropriate intervals, over suitable distances to the target classic races for both the North and South Island regions.

An issue the industry must address is the lack of opportunity for 3YO sprinters in both the summer and autumn. 3YO sprinters have no black-type sprint race programmed for their age group in the summer and only one in the autumn, namely the Cambridge Breeder's Stakes run over 1200m in late April. The responsibility to address this issue remains with regional programming committees who are required to identify and develop appropriate races. Open sprints are attractive to 3YO's in the autumn and often provide excellent targets.

Other categories with a summary of their changes are as follows -

## **Handicaps**

The main outcomes in the Handicap category revolve around the relocation of the Auckland Cup and some recommendations regarding the sprinting races.

## **Sprints**

The proposal is to develop both a Spring-Summer Sprint Series (Railway Handicap 1200m, Telegraph Handicap 1200m and Waikato Sprint 1400m) and an autumn series of races (the relocated King's Plate, WFA 1200m, Lightning Handicap 1200m and Flying Handicap 1400m at Awapuni in late March).

This concept would create national interest and could provide an excellent vehicle for a major sponsor. The balance of races in both spring and summer provide opportunities on left and right-hand tracks.

The King's Plate and Lightning Handicap could evolve into the autumn equivalents of the Railway and Telegraph handicaps.

This series would also provide a pattern for 3-year-olds in the autumn while addressing the current lack of a defined sprinting path in this period of the season for the older horses.

## **Middle-distance and stayers**

The major issue for this category of horses is to ensure that opportunities are available for the ongoing development of the New Zealand middle-distance/staying horse.

With the introduction of the new Auckland carnival in early March, the Auckland Cup has been relocated to the late Summer/early Autumn period.

The Summer Pattern now includes the dual summer targets of the 2400m City of Auckland Cup (formerly the Queen Elizabeth Handicap) on New Year's Day preceding the 3200m Wellington Cup.

A number of existing or new opportunities have been scheduled to provide appropriate lead-in opportunities to the relocated Auckland Cup in early March.

The proposal is to develop a Spring-Summer-Autumn Middle-Distance and Stayers Series of ten Group status handicaps commencing with the Metropolitan Handicap on the first day of the CJC Cup Carnival in November and concluding with the Auckland Cup in early March.

Again, a concept such as this would create national interest and could provide an excellent vehicle for a major sponsor. The balance of races in this series would provide opportunities on left and right-hand tracks.

## **Fillies and mares**

The Committee believes there is a strong case to provide more Fillies and Mares races, especially over distances beyond 1600m. At the moment there is only one black-type F&M race run over a distance beyond 1600m.

Given the flexibility that has arisen with the Review, there is an opportunity for Clubs to increase the distance of one or more of the existing stakes races; hence the recommendation to increase the distance of the Dulcie Stakes to 2000m.

## **Weight For Age**

No major changes to the Pattern of WFA races are proposed. This category is reasonably well catered for with WFA races invariably acting as lead-up races to significant handicap races.

However the distance of the Otaki-Maori WFA race is altered to 1600m, to address the current less-than-ideal programming of these two races two weeks apart over the same distance.

Also, the Committee endorsed the movement of the King's Plate to the autumn with a change in distance to 1200m. This now provides a second WFA opportunity for sprinters at 1200m.

## **Jumping**

The Jumping Advisory Committee reviewed and addressed issues within the Pattern and programming of feature jumping races.

The main outcome from this review supported the move of the Great Northern Steeplechase and Great Northern Hurdles to September.

## **Conclusion**

The new Pattern of black-type races can be viewed on, or downloaded from, the New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing website [www.nzracing.co.nz](http://www.nzracing.co.nz). A copy of the Review of the Pattern Committee's Report can be obtained by contacting Alan Cole at New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing.