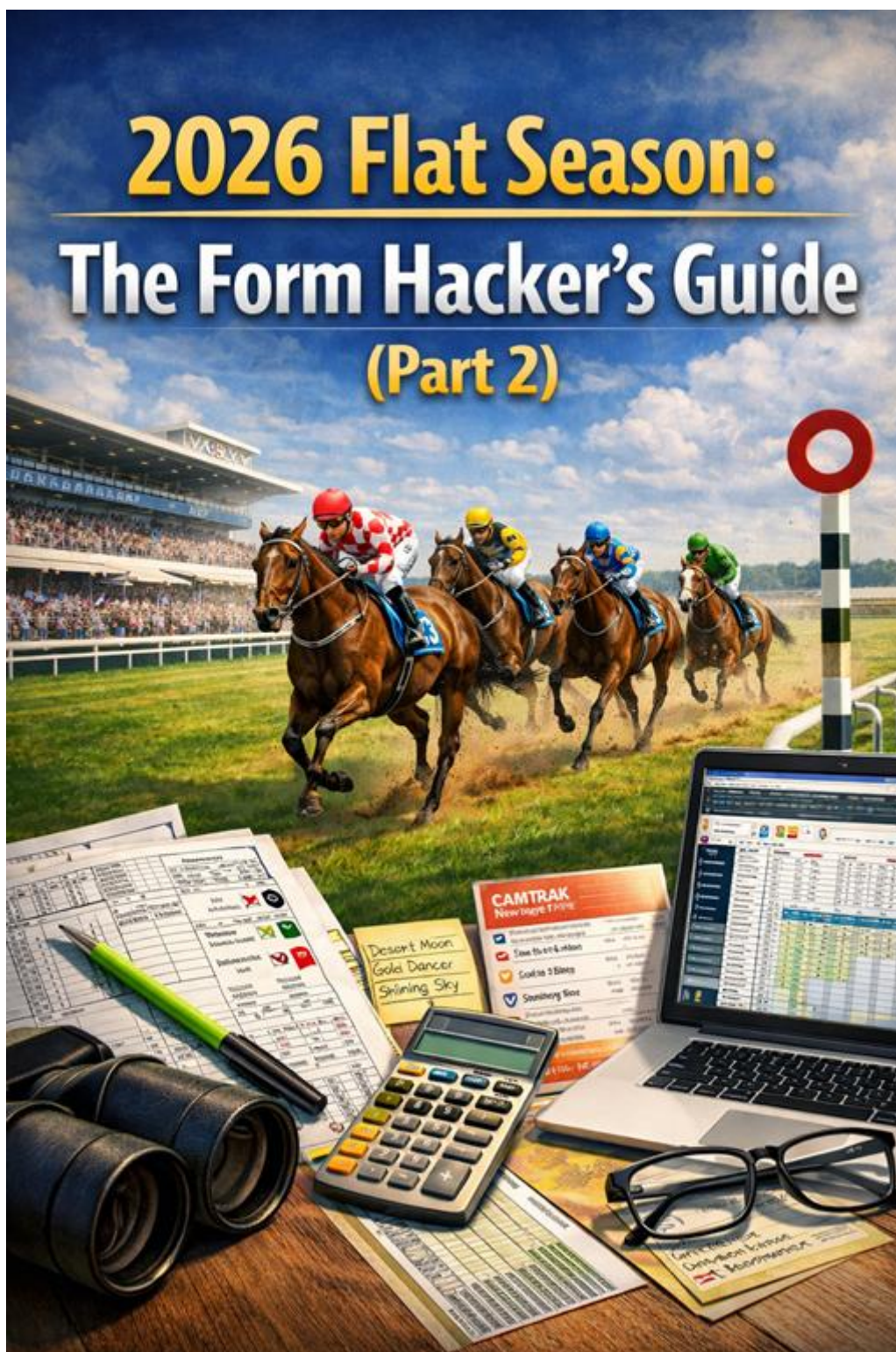


2026 Flat Season: The Form Hacker's Guide (Part 2)



DISCLAIMER

We understand that gambling can become an addiction that can cause great harm if not controlled. Despite the historical track records of the data contained herein, we respectfully remind you that you should only ever bet with an amount of money that you can comfortably afford to lose.

For help with regard to a gambling problem, or more information on the subject, please visit: <https://www.gamcare.org.uk> or <https://www.begambleaware.org/>



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Introduction

Solving racing's puzzles, with or without being financially invested in the outcome, is one of life's great pleasures; and you're reading this because you enjoy doing just that.

But in a world filled with ever more distractions and calls on our time, the myriad pieces in the form book jigsaw can seem overwhelming.

The good news is that more is not always better. And, in these reports, I'll share three 'form hacks' you can use to put yourself miles ahead of other players when it comes to solving the puzzle.

This is *not* about backing the winner of every race. We all know that's impossible. Rather, it's about assembling the clues and identifying the likeliest contenders... which might not be the ones at the top of the betting lists.

In what follows, I'll introduce an angle into the form book, explain it, and then show how you can put it work for you, for free.

Without further ado, then, let's get started.

Enjoy!

Matt Bisogno

Matt Bisogno

p.s. [part one of these Form Hacks can be found here.](#)

Form Hack #3: Shortlisting

This is an absolute favourite of mine, because it's one that is "hiding in plain sight". Most people think shortlisting means eliminating horses from a race... and of course it does. It just doesn't start there. No, the most crucial element with shortlisting is not at the runner level, but at the *race* level.

Race Shortlisting

Choosing the right races in which to bet is the single best thing you can learn to do.

Seriously. If you only take one thing from these reports, let it be that some races are more worthy of your time than others – and they are often not the ones being shown on TV.

Look, I'm sorry to break the cosy relationship between telly races and your punting, but have you noticed how they are invariably the most competitive races of the day? Worse, they often feature a bunch of horses with very little form and which have all done similar things so far in their careers: won, or nearly won, a lot.

How are you supposed to tell which of those has the best chance? Even their trainers and owners usually don't know.

The best races to bet in are the ones where we can eliminate a significant number of the field.

And those races are the ones where we know the most about the runners, and their ability in the context of today's race conditions.

Everyone will have a slightly different take on the type of race they prefer to bet in. Personally, I like older horse handicaps of a mile or less with 8-12 runners. Let me break down why.

Handicaps: usually offer reasonable odds for all runners, with ability theoretically evened out by weight.

Older horses: older horses have typically run more than younger ones and, therefore, a) are less likely to suddenly leap forward on known form, and b) have normally already revealed what their optimal conditions are.

Mile or less: shorter races are more likely to be run at a true end to end gallop, rather than being messy/tactical. I don't like hard luck stories!

8-12 runners: helps with the point above about race tempo; but also puts meat on the betting bone... and allows me to flex my shortlisting muscles!

But there is another reason to do this, and that is to **avoid overwhelm**.

Racing is overwhelming! There are just so many races, often 50+ on a busy Saturday. It's impossible to look at all of them, and so choosing a subset – before looking at any form at all – is a very calm and quick way of eliminating that overwhelm.

Let's consider a couple of examples on the following pages.

Here's a typical day of racing in the UK, and this is before evening racing gets underway. There are four meetings, with 30 races in total. How is anyone supposed to work through all of those?

Lingfield Park	Standard ▾	13:52	14:22	14:52	15:22	15:52	16:22	16:52	17:22	17:52
Hexham	Soft ▾	14:11	14:41	15:11	15:41	16:11	16:41	17:13		
Hereford	Good ▾	14:30	15:00	15:30	16:00	16:30	17:05			
Kempton Park	Std/Slow ▾	17:00	17:30	18:00	18:30	19:00	19:30	20:00	20:30	

They're not!

Let's first strip out the two jump meetings at Hexham and Hereford. We now have 17 races. Still way too many.

Next, we'll remove non-handicaps and races beyond a mile in distance. We now have nine races left. To be honest, that's still too many for me...

Lingfield Park	Standard ▾	13:52	14:22	15:22	16:52	
Hexham	Soft ▾					
Hereford	Good ▾					
Kempton Park	Std/Slow ▾	17:00	17:30	18:00	19:00	20:30

So I'm going to add my '8-12 runners' criterion. Hmm, I still have seven races. What to do? I can either narrow the runner band to, say, 9-11, or 8-10. But my preference on this occasion is to remove the Class 6 handicaps.

Incredibly, from 30 races, I now have just two races to focus on:

Lingfield Park	Standard ▾	16:52
Hexham	Soft ▾	
Hereford	Good ▾	
Kempton Park	Std/Slow ▾	19:00

I know before I even start that these two races fit my preferred shape... which is not to say that I'll necessarily like them from a betting perspective when I start to dig. But it's taken me literally less than a minute to go from 30 overwhelming options to two easy-to-consider ones.

Of course, you might enjoy different race types, distances, field sizes and so on. That's absolutely fine, and beside the point.

The only point here is that, if you know what you like, or where you seem to get your best results, that's the place to focus. Don't be corralled by, erm, Coral (and all the others) to bet in races that are not in your wheelhouse.

Extra place races

One of the exceptions to my own race shortlisting criteria is when I think the extra place concession with a certain bookmaker is favourable. Now, I still need to have an opinion in the race – and I need to be able to shortlist the field as well, as we'll come on to shortly – but if I can get the best price *and* an extra place, I'm interested in potentially playing each way.

The downside to extra place races is that they're normally at a less appealing fractional payout for the place part of the each-way bet – usually 1/5 the odds rather than 1/4 odds. So that naturally needs to be considered.

The excellent Russell Clarke, formerly of Odds On magazine (for readers of a certain vintage), wrote a fantastic eight part series on geegeez.co.uk, one episode of which was on this specific topic. You can – and should! – [read that here](#).

Field Shortlisting: Contenders and Pretenders

OK, now let's get to work. We've chosen a race or a few races that sit well with our own style, and we're happy to ignore the vast majority of the other races on any given day. We now need to shortlist the field into those with credible chances, and the rest.

To do this, when it makes sense, we're going to start with the two hacks I flagged in my first report: draw and pace/run style. As I showed you in that guide, they are two very powerful eliminators in many races.

Now, before I go on, it's important to reiterate that we obviously can't get things right every time. That means there will be occasions when we confidently eliminate a horse that goes on to win the race. So what?

We know that we're after profit more than winners, and that means we can't win them all. Crucially, we have a solid process that will remove plenty of fancied runners whose chance seems less clear cut than the market implies. Sometimes one of them will win. No dramas.

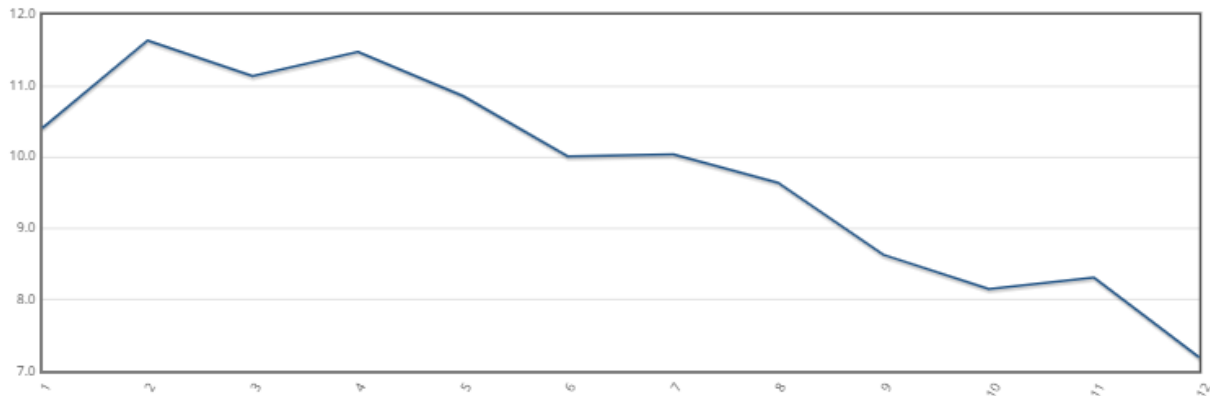
OK, let's get to it.

Draw (and Run Style) Pretenders

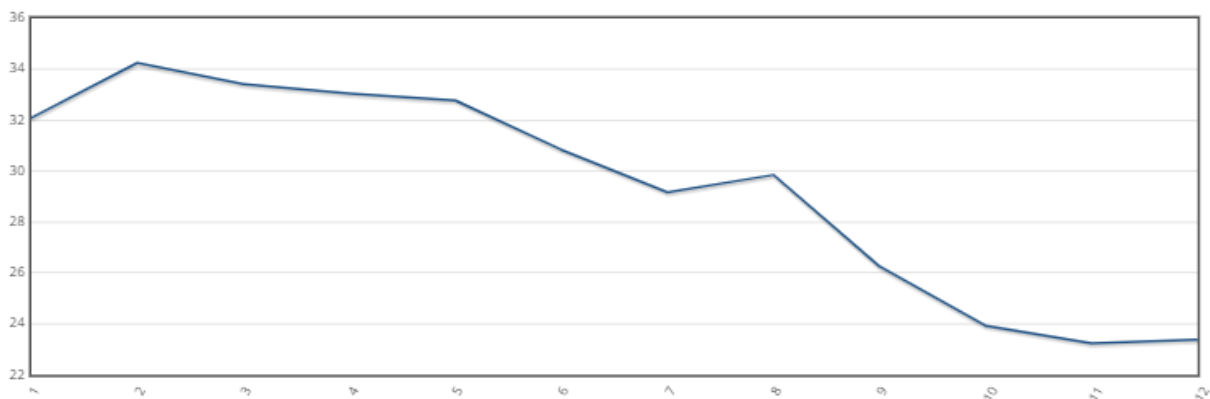
Outside stalls

OK, specifics. Draw first. In races around a bend, I want to be against shorter-priced (say, 5/1 or shorter) horses drawn in the widest few stalls at up to a mile. Let's remind ourselves of the impact of the inside draw or an outside one.

These are the **win strike rates** in 8-12 runner handicaps *around a bend* at up to a mile in distance.



And these are the each-way (win and place) strike rates:



And here is the percentage of rivals beaten (PRB) view of the same dataset:

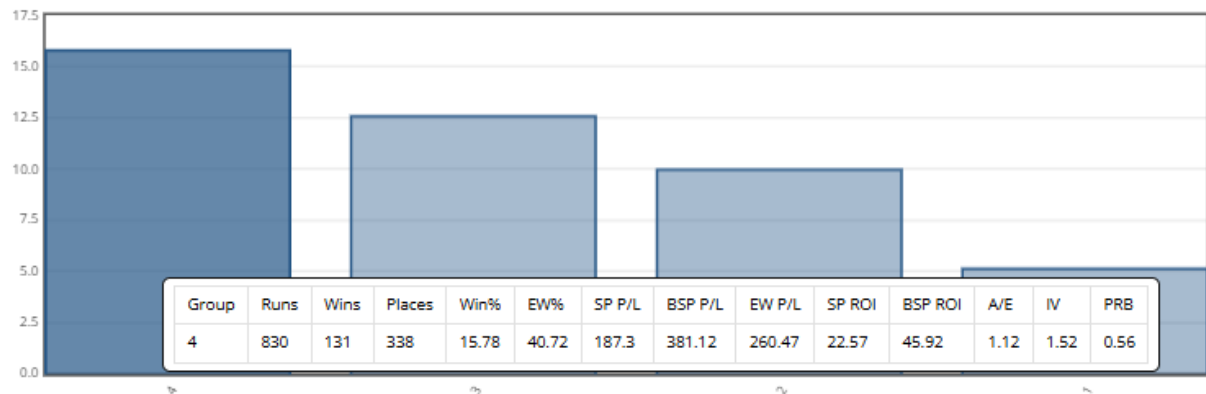


These charts represent more than 54,000 runners taken from over 5,500 (5,526 to be exact!) UK handicaps over the previous five years... and the chart lines are *almost exactly the same!*

Wide drawn horses at short prices are ones to be wary of, unless they look to have a good chance of clearing their field to get on, or close to, the lead without using too much fuel and without being trapped three, four or five horses wide around the turn.

Stall 1: The Coffin Box?

When it comes to the inside stall, it's all about whether the horse looks likely to be able to get a prominent position. This next chart shows how stall 1 runners have performed, based on their run style.



If you recall, 4 means 'led', 3 is 'prominent', 2 is 'midfield', and 1 is 'held up'. See the sloping nature of the blocks: horses that led from stall 1 actually did really well; so too, though not so well, those racing prominently.

But those stall 1 horses that were held up won just 5% of the time and lost almost 59% of stakes at Betfair SP.

This table also looks at those stall 1 horses by run style, but only when their SP was 5/1 or shorter:

Run Style	Runs	Wins	Places	Win %	EW %	SP P/L	BSP P/L	EW P/L	SP ROI	BSP ROI	A/E	IV	PRB
4 (Led)	296	77	175	26.01	59.12	8.80	34.60	-1.21	2.97	11.69	1.02	2.44	0.69
3 (Prominent)	514	124	289	24.12	56.23	-33.05	13.58	-76.38	-6.43	2.64	0.95	2.3	0.69
2 (Midfield)	583	112	292	19.21	50.09	-132.84	-82.79	-235.25	-22.79	-14.20	0.78	1.87	0.66
1 (Held up)	282	33	109	11.7	38.65	-147.64	-129.98	-249.55	-52.35	-46.09	0.48	1.1	0.57

Those held up from stall 1, even when fancied in the betting, won just once in every nine starts (11%) and lost a whopping 46% of stakes at Betfair SP. That's on a reliable sample size of nearly 300 horses.

While we don't know what early position a horse will adopt in a race, recent history is a pretty good guide normally.

So be against stall 1 when the horse tends to be slowly away.

Form Profiling

Now we've potentially eliminated some pretenders at the margins of the field, it's time to move on to form in the book. In the races I like to look at, where there is a lot of previous evidence to support or refute each horse's claims, I want to profile each one against five 'suitability' criteria:

- Going
- Class
- Course
- Distance
- Field size

I will also consider where a horse is in the handicap today compared to the pick of its recentish (last two years) form.

To do this I'll draw up a grid, like so, and order the runners by stall position:

Horse	Draw	Going	Course	Distance	Course	Class	Field Size	OR?
Winchurch	1							
Blackjack	2							
Ramon Di Loria	3							
Good Earth	4							
Dragon God	5							
Non-Runner	6							
Ziggy's Angel	7							
Insuspense	8							
Travel Agent	9							
Rock Of England	10							

In this example, you can see stall 6 is a non-runner.

First, I'm going to check whether stall 1 looks like he has the pace to overcome that draw. He's raced midfield or held up in his last seven races, so I'm going to put a knock against him.

Horse	Draw	Knock
Winchurch	1	

Next, I'll review stalls 9 and 10 in the same way. My natural instinct is to place them in the 'pretenders' pile. Travel Agent raced midfield last time but was held up on his three prior starts; Rock Of England has raced in the second half of the field on his last twelve starts! Both get a knock from me.

Now comes a slightly more time-consuming part: working through the six conditions and noting 'form fit'. Once you get the hang of it, it takes maybe 90 seconds per horse, perhaps a little less. Here's how my completed grid looks:

Horse	Draw	Going	Class	Course	Distance	Field Size	OR?
Winchurch	1						
Blackjack	2						
Ramon Di Loria	3						
Good Earth	4						
Dragon God	5						
Non-Runner	6						
Ziggy's Angel	7						
Insuspense	8						
Travel Agent	9						
Rock Of England	10						

*White boxes indicate no form against that condition, and/or no prior winning OR

In truth, this was a pretty unconvincing race! The horse with the best 'fit' to conditions was Travel Agent, but he was drawn wide and is usually slowly away.

The two which appealed very slightly were Ramon Di Loria and Good Earth.

Ramon, 9/1, is normally held up but has run on into the frame on a few occasions at this track.

Good Earth, 7/1, won over course and distance a couple of runs back and is a 14-time previous winner, albeit from 96 starts!

Both were well drawn to avoid travelling extra distance. Here is the result:

Pos	Dr	Dist	RS	Horse	Trainer	Age	Wgt	Jockey	SP	BSP	PI BSP	Hi/Lo	OR
1st	4	-	M	6 GOOD EARTH (IRE)	M Herrington	9	9-4	Connor Planas (3)	7/1	10.39	2.85	12.00/-	63
taken down early, took keen hold, soon midfield on inner, headway over 2f out, ridden to lead over 1f out, comfortably													
2nd	8	1½	H	3 INSUSPENSE	O Cole	4	9-9 t	Hollie Doyle	11/4f	3.81	1.65	-/4.00	65
held up in rear, switched left over 2f out, headway towards far side over 1f out, went second inside final 110yds, no match for winner													
3rd	1	1	P	7 WINCHURCH (IRE)	M Appleby	4	9-7	Harry Davies	6/1	7.63	2.62	-/5.60	63
prominent, edged right inside final furlong, lost second when no extra inside final 110yds													
4th	9	1¼	H	1 TRAVEL AGENT (IRE)	A Kirby	4	9-4	Miss Taryn Langley (5)	7/1	12.41	3.29	-/8.40	65
held up in rear, headway over 1f out, went fourth inside final furlong, no extra inside final 110yds													
5th	7	¾	M	2 ZIGGY'S ANGEL (FR)	R & P Fahey	4	9-9	Jack Garritty	100/30	4.79	1.99	-/2.08	65
6th	3	hd	M	9 RAMON DI LORIA (IRE)	Ewan Whillans	8	9-2	Greg Fairley	9/1	12.73	2.71	-/12.00	58
7th	2	2¾	L	4 BLACKJACK	Alan Brown	9	9-8 BL	Sean Kirrane	10/1	16.23	3.40	-/11.50	64
8th	5	1¾	M	8 DRAGON GOD	A Carroll	4	9-6	Kevin Stott	25/1	40.57	7.75	-/29	62
9th	10	1½	L	5 ROCK OF ENGLAND (IRE)	P Midgley	6	9-8	Jason Hart	18/1	27.68	5.82	-/20	64

Good Earth travelled well and won well, while Ramon Di Loria could not get involved this time. Travel Agent again ran a nice race under optimal form conditions but could not overcome the combination of a wide draw and being held up.

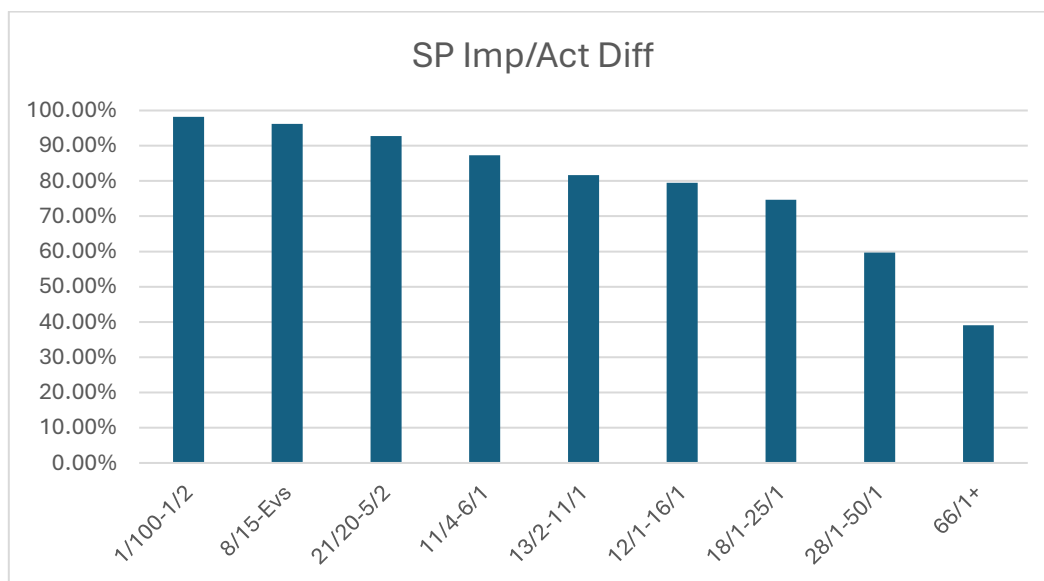
And Winchurch was caught on heels from his inside draw, unable to quicken at the business end.

Pretenders are Not Always Longshots...

...but they often are!

In this last part, let's take a look at how often horses win based on their odds. In this example, a horse at even money has an implied chance of 50%. We won't bother with the maths but basically the chart and table below show the discrepancy between the available odds for a horse and the frequency with which horses at those odds *actually* win.

Odds (SP)	Bets	Wins	Av Imp W%	Act W%	Imp/Act Diff
1/100-1/2	994	714	85.16%	83.61%	98.18%
8/15-Evs	2923	1555	57.89%	55.71%	96.23%
21/20-5/2	15614	5056	37.77%	35.05%	92.79%
11/4-6/1	43217	7367	20.17%	17.61%	87.30%
13/2-10/1	32141	2937	11.19%	9.22%	82.42%
11/1-16/1	26397	1478	7.14%	5.57%	78.03%
18/1-25/1	18723	636	4.55%	3.40%	74.65%
28/1-50/1	19878	328	2.70%	1.61%	59.70%
66/1+	15444	65	0.69%	0.27%	39.09%



This is essentially a comparison of 'actual results' against 'expected results'. Put simply, if we had 100 horses sent off at even money, we might expect 50 of them to win. That's the expected number. What we'd probably see is something closer to 45 of those 100 winning.

This, of course, is because bookmakers build in a profit margin, so we should be prepared for horses in all odds brackets to win slightly less often than the implied odds. But note how the difference between what might be expected and what actually happens grows as the odds get bigger.

So what are the takeaways here? Am I saying don't back longshots?

Well, yes and no. My point is that, *generally speaking*, the further away from the top end of the market we stray the poorer the value is.

But there are exceptions. There are always exceptions! None of the boxes in the table above showed 0%. Every horse in every race has some sort of chance, but for many that chance is close to zero... but never zero!

My take is that, if you like a horse at, say, 16/1 or bigger you probably need to think it has at least a 50% better chance than the market implies to bet it.

To be clear, I bet plenty of horses in the 16/1-25/1 range, and it is usually because I believe that conditions are in their favour – where recently they have not been – and where I feel they have a preferential draw and/or run style in today's race.

In other words, I do think the horse should be considerably shorter than the available odds.

But even if I think a runner should be a 9/1 shot rather than 25/1, and if I'm right about that (not a given, of course!), it still has only a 10% chance to win... and a 90% chance to lose.

If I'm right about what the odds should be, I'm getting great value on a probable loser.

Wait, what?!

Probable losers are what we all bet if we bet at odds against (i.e. bigger than even money). Again, we cannot win every bet. We. Cannot. Win. Every. Bet.

That's not the game. The game is to get enough back on the winners to cover the cost of all the losers and, ideally, leave some money on the table.

If you're currently losing a fair bit, the challenge is first to lose less – and to enjoy the challenge more.

If you're currently losing a little, the challenge is to get to break even – and to enjoy the challenge more.

And if you're currently breaking even, the challenge is to win a little – and to enjoy the challenge more!

OK, I went a bit off piste there, but hopefully that makes sense. We have to have fun with this; and if we put a few guard rails in place, we'll bet less losers even if we don't immediately bet enough winners to cover the losses.

Bringing It All Together

In this two part report, I've shared three form hacks that we can all use to improve our betting on the racing this spring, summer and beyond.

If you're quite new to racing you might keep it simple with these hacks; if you're more experienced you should layer them into your existing approach.

Simplistic Approach

Newer bettors might choose to:

- Ignore stall 1 and the widest two stalls
- Bet only at 10/1 or shorter
- Try to avoid horses that typically race in the second half of the field (midfield or held up)

Using our examples, using only the first two rules above (avoiding stall 1 and the two widest stalls, and only betting 10/1 or shorter) in 8-runner handicaps up to a mile on turning tracks was ***a profitable angle at Betfair SP in each of the last five years!***

In fact, taking handicap races of between 8 and 11 runners under the same conditions – up to a mile, around a turn, 10/1 or shorter, not stall 1 or the widest two stalls – returned a profit at BSP of 238 points over the last five years.

And that's without trying to predict the run style of the horses!

Below is the table for 8-runner races across the last five UK turf flat seasons based on the rules above, but this time I've broken it down by run style.

RS	Runs	Wins	Places	Win %	EW %	SP P/L	BSP P/L	EW P/L	SP ROI	BSP ROI	A/E	IV	PRB
Led	284	75	172	26.41	60.56	127.24	176.87	182.30	44.80	62.28	1.4	2.11	0.66
Prom	425	81	218	19.06	51.29	9.52	64.26	4.12	2.24	15.12	0.99	1.52	0.61
Mid	511	79	233	15.46	45.6	-147.75	-100.96	-211.64	-28.91	-19.76	0.83	1.24	0.57
Held up	490	73	200	14.9	40.82	-78.28	-15.78	-164.68	-15.98	-3.22	0.85	1.19	0.54

It bears repeating that we simply cannot be sure which horses will be at the front in a race. We cannot be *sure*, but as I've shown in these two reports, we can usually identify habitual hold up and midfield types, as well as those which probably want to be as close to the front as they can get.

This is undoubtedly an inexact science – which approach in betting and racing is not?! – but the numbers I've shared highlight why it's worth taking on the challenge.

Side Note

The approach I've shared above, ignoring run style, will generally identify more than one horse in a race. Remember that our job here is not to land on the winner, but to sort the contenders from the pretenders: these are all contenders. We can then apply the form profiling method to find those best suited to today's race conditions to whittle our shortlist down to a bet.

Summary

The key to betting successfully on racing is **focus**. With the right approach it becomes, if not easy then at least possible to make a profit from something that is highly enjoyable.

Focus means not looking at every race.

Focus means having a way of eliminating unlikely winners.

Focus means knowing we cannot win every race.

I hope I've shown you a way of homing in on a handful of races each day (or when you're playing), and then a method of separating contenders and pretenders.

Next time, I'll show you how I'm able to take this approach and deploy it in a very short amount of time each day. Stay tuned!

QUICK FAVOUR?

If you enjoyed this report, or have any questions, could you [do me a favour and leave a comment here?](#)

It might help someone else and will certainly help me – thank you!

Matt

p.s. in case you missed the first report, you can [download that one here.](#)