

Why more horses die at Cheltenham than at any other British Racecourse: an Animal Aid analysis



www.animalaid.org.uk

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Since March 2007, when Animal Aid launched its online Race Horse DeathWatch database, more horses have died at Cheltenham than at any other British racecourse. By examining a number of salient factors, this report seeks to establish why so many thoroughbreds come to grief at the Gloucestershire course. We look at ground conditions, the number of participating horses in a given race, the distance run, the experience of the riders, the racing ability of the horses, and even how far into a race they are most at risk.



MATUHI - KILLED AT THE 2013 CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

In examining these elements, we used Hexham racecourse for comparison purposes. The Northumberland venue stages a similar number of meetings each year. It has a similar topography and course length to Cheltenham, and is subject to equivalent climatic conditions. Despite these common factors, horses are four times more likely to die in a race at Cheltenham than at Hexham. And for Novice Chasers (inexperienced horses entered into steeplechase events), the risk is five times greater.

Our analysis is based on all 733 races held on 110 race days at Cheltenham since March 2007, and 594 races held on 90 days at Hexham during the same period. The bald fatality figures are 48 dead at Cheltenham, and seven at Hexham.¹

The disparity is all the more stark given that Cheltenham lays on a number of high-profile, prestige events that attract what

the industry rates as better quality horses than those drawn to Hexham. Yet they die in far greater numbers than the more modestly regarded Hexham mounts.

Of course, the big raceday atmosphere during events such as the Cheltenham Festival could itself be a key risk factor – the noise, the excitement and the heightened ambition of jockeys and trainers. But while all of these elements inevitably impact upon the horses to some extent, they are not readily open to objective study.

We are confident, however, that this report does identify several important risk factors, and that these can be reduced and, in some cases, eliminated.

When horses perish on racecourses, it is generally following a catastrophic injury. They suffer broken legs, a broken back, neck or pelvic bones, burst blood vessels or a heart attack. Considerable physical and mental suffering is often involved. The objective of this report is to press racing into acting to reduce the level of suffering by reducing the death toll. That means it must first stop the pretence that racecourse deaths are ‘accidents’ – unforeseen and unavoidable. Thoroughbreds die on racecourses – especially in National Hunt jump events – because the races present the horses with a challenge that is harsh and unnatural. Horses would not run at the speed they are required to in a race and jump life-threatening obstacles, unless pressed and bullied to do so by a rider on their backs, who at various times during the race, is thrashing them with a whip.

It is because thoroughbreds are forced to race under such circumstances that so many of them die each year on British racecourses, and most frequently of all at Cheltenham.

Against this background, Animal Aid makes clear its unequivocal opposition to commercial horse racing. We urge the public to offer it no support, by way of betting income or racecourse attendance fees.

But, as an interim measure, the British Horseracing Authority (BHA), stewarded by government, can take steps to minimise horse suffering. It must commission and publish genuinely independent research into risk factors relating to all 58 British racecourses. And then act swiftly upon what is concluded.

Andrew Tyler, Director, Animal Aid

‘We see this report as providing an interim rather than a definitive picture of the hazards faced by horses at Cheltenham. The racing authorities must themselves now act.’

¹ The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) was recently forced to admit, in response to a Parliamentary Question, that over the past three years, the total number of equine deaths for all racecourses in Britain was around 36 per cent higher than Animal Aid had been able to detect and record.



- The study period of this report runs from the March 2007 launch of Animal Aid's online database, Race Horse Deathwatch², until December 2013. During that time, 48 horses have died as a result of racing at Cheltenham, and seven at Hexham. The Northumberland course was chosen for comparison purposes due to it being similar in terms of length, number of meetings staged, topography and climatic conditions.
- Horses are four times more likely to die at Cheltenham than at Hexham, when calculated on the basis of deaths per runner.
- For Novice Chasers,³ the risk of dying during the study period was nearly five times greater at Cheltenham than at Hexham, when calculated on the basis of deaths per runner.
- Although horses at Hexham are generally regarded by racing insiders as being of a lesser quality than those who race at Cheltenham, their chances of surviving were greater than those of the more able horses racing on the Gloucestershire course.
- Horses ridden by amateur and conditional jockeys proved to be especially vulnerable (see page 20).
- Longer race distances (2.5 miles and further) saw a significantly higher numbers of deaths than races run over the minimum distance of 2 miles (see page 16).
- Just as longer distances were more dangerous for horses, so were races with a large number of competitors. That applied to both Hurdle⁴ and Chase events (see pages 14 -15).
- The middle section of a race, whether it was a Hurdle or a Chase event, presented the greatest risk of a horse being killed (see page 16).
- Cheltenham's Cross Country course is an atypical circuit that turns both clockwise and anti-clockwise (left and right-handed) for almost four miles, and features 32 obstacles. In just 20 races staged during the study period, two horses were destroyed (see pages 14 and 15).
- Ground condition (the 'going') is a key factor in determining the risk horses face. Whereas Hexham is prone to abandon a day's racing in response to adverse weather conditions, Cheltenham is more likely to take robust course management steps – notably, heavy, prolonged watering and the use of frost covers for both the ground and obstacles. In this way, it can more often than would otherwise be the case give the official going as 'good' (neither too firm nor too soft). This is despite there being concern within racing circles about the unevenness and therefore the risk posed to horses by a surface subjected to such heavy interventions (see page 17).

2 Race Horse Deathwatch was prompted by the deaths of 11 horses at the 2006 Cheltenham Festival.

³ A novice horse is one who has not won a race in a given discipline prior to the current season. Chase races take place over a variety of obstacles, which can include 4'6" plain fences; water jumps (which are around 3' in height and have a stretch of water on the landing side); and Open Ditch fences (which are a minimum of 4'6" in height and have a ditch on the take-off side).

⁴ Hurdle races are staged over obstacles that are made with a timber frame and are stuffed with birch bush. They are 3' high.



CHELTENHAM
RACECOURSE

HEXHAM
RACECOURSE

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NB The horses pictured in this report did not die from their falls and injuries, unless otherwise indicated.

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Study period 13 March 2007 to 14 December 2013

All races and key variable factors and conditions pertaining to Cheltenham and Hexham were analysed. Data were obtained through published official records and other sources, as follows:

- **Cause of death**
- **Frequency of death in relation to each course**
- **Types of course layout**
 - Cheltenham Hurdle Old Course
 - Cheltenham Chase Old Course
 - Cheltenham Hurdle New Course
 - Cheltenham Chase New Course
 - Cheltenham Cross-Country Course
 - Hexham Hurdle Course
 - Hexham Chase Course
- **Race categories** (according to the official National Hunt race programme)
 - National Hunt Flat races
 - Novice Hurdle races
 - Hurdle races
 - Novice Chase races
 - Chase races
 - Hunters' Chase races
 - Cheltenham's Cross-Country Course races (unique to Cheltenham)
- **Number of runners** (these were recorded for every race during the study period but are not printed in this report due to the volume of data).
- **Ground condition (the 'going') categorised by the racing authorities**
 - Firm
 - Good to Firm
 - Good
 - Good to Soft
 - Soft
 - Heavy
- **Race distance to the nearest 2.5 furlongs**
 - 2 miles
 - 2.5 miles
 - 3 miles and further
- **Sector of the race where a fatality occurred**
 - 1) Early sector of the race – up to jumping the third obstacle (hurdles or fences)
 - 2) Mid-sector of the race – after successfully jumping the third obstacle to after jumping the fourth last obstacle
 - 3) End of the race – on approach to the third last obstacle to the finishing post
 - 4) On completion of the race – after passing the finishing post. This includes any death caused by an injury incurred at any time during the race, which proved to be fatal only after passing the finishing post. It includes horses who collapsed and died, as well as those who died from their race-day injuries after having been removed from the course.

NB In 2 mile Hurdle races each sector is reduced as there are fewer obstacles to be jumped – i.e. third becomes second, third last becomes second last.
- **Jockey ability** – categorised according to their official status as a rider:
 - Amateur
 - Conditional (trainee)
 - Professional



Hexham Racecourse

Hexham was used as the control racecourse in order to assess and cross-reference factors that may be relevant to horse fatalities.

■ Similarities with Cheltenham

- Hexham holds meetings at similar times of the year to Cheltenham, including March, April, October, November and December.
- They both have an undulating topography and horses run left-handed around each course. They are approximately a mile-and-a-half in circumference. Both courses push horses to their limits, especially on soft or heavy ground. They have uphill runs, from the last fence/hurdle to the finish line, of similar length.
- Experienced professional jockeys ride at both courses.

■ Dissimilarities with Cheltenham

- Horses entered to race at Cheltenham are rated as having great ability; they are regarded as the best of their generation. Those running at Hexham are viewed as functioning at the other end of the ability spectrum.
- The fences at Cheltenham are 'stiff' (unyielding upon impact), and use the traditional plastic guard rails. Hexham fences, by contrast, have much more 'give' or spring. And, unusually, there is high and thick hedging on either side of the obstacles.
- When the weather is not conducive to racing, Cheltenham tends to take robust measures to 'save the day'. These include watering and the use of frost covers on both the courses and jumps. Hexham, by contrast, is more likely to abandon meetings when faced with adverse weather conditions.

Cheltenham has three courses: The Old, The New and The Cross-Country

■ The Old Course

Both Chase and Hurdle events are staged on this circuit. It is undulating in its topography, oval-shaped, and about a mile-and-a-half in circumference. For certain races, it shares some of its jumps with the New Course. Equally, some of its races feature extended starts, whereby an extra section of the circuit is brought into play. Horses race in a left-handed (anti-clockwise) direction. It features nine fences (seven plain and two open ditch), and six hurdles. The fences are 'stiff', offering little give in their structure. There is an uphill run of more than 300 yards to the winning post. The course is testing on horses; they require plenty of stamina.

■ The New Course

This is about a furlong ($\frac{1}{8}$ mile) longer in circumference and it too is undulating and oval-shaped. Both Chase and Hurdle events are staged on it. As with the Old Course, horses race in a left handed, (anti-clockwise) direction, but this time there are ten fences (eight plain and two open ditch) and six hurdles. Again, the fences are 'stiff', and the testing uphill run to the post is the same stretch of ground used by the Old Course.

There are additional fences and hurdles on the extended course (outside of the oval circuits) that function for both the Old and the New. The extended course is brought into use for numerous races, including those run over four miles.

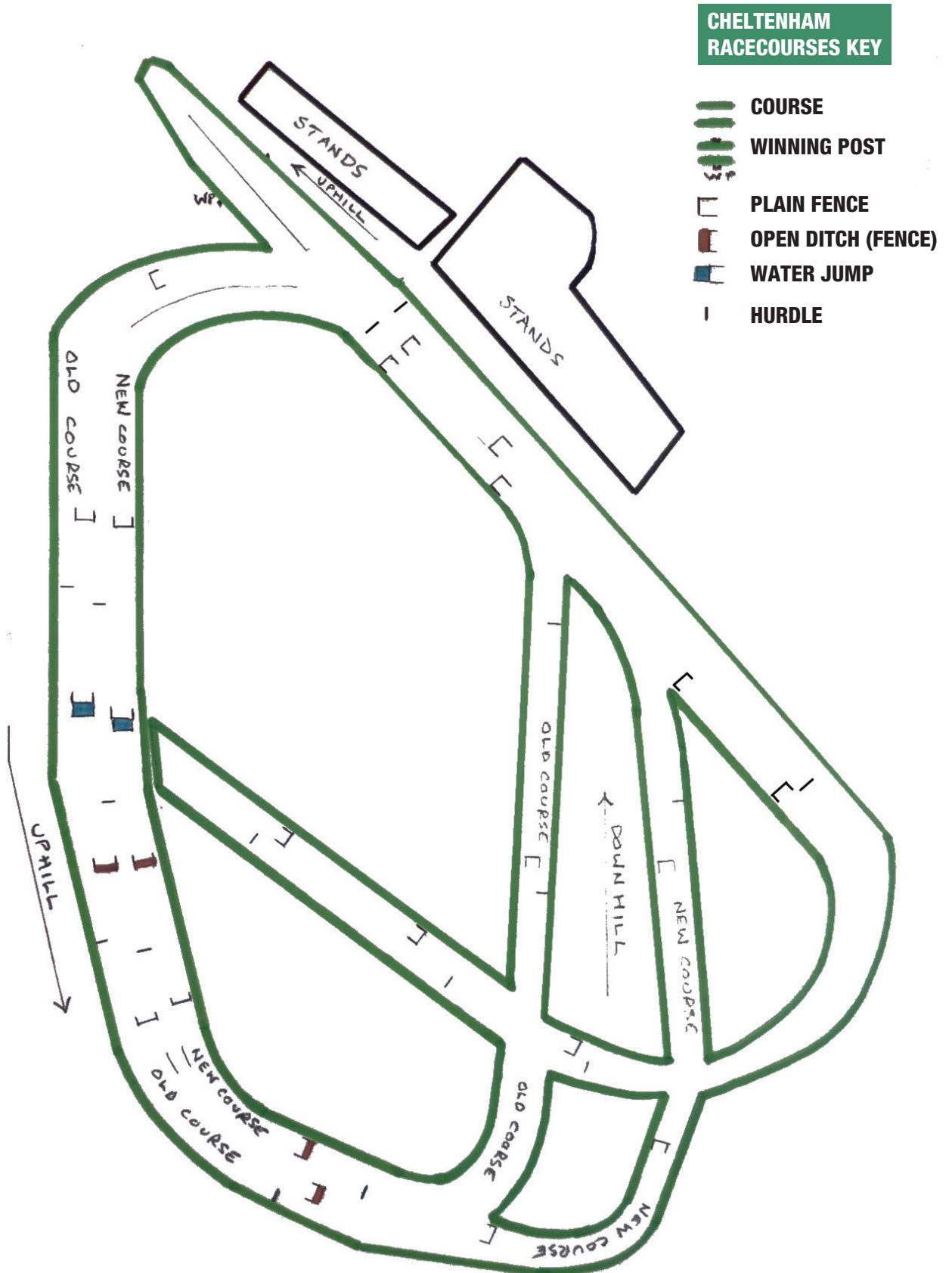
■ The Cross-Country Course

The Cross-Country Course is situated in the centre of the Old and New Courses. It turns both left and right handed for almost four miles and features 32 obstacles. The majority of them are not traditional fences or hurdles, and are generally less testing than those on the Old and New Courses. The ground or 'going' conditions on this course tend to be drier than on Cheltenham's other courses.



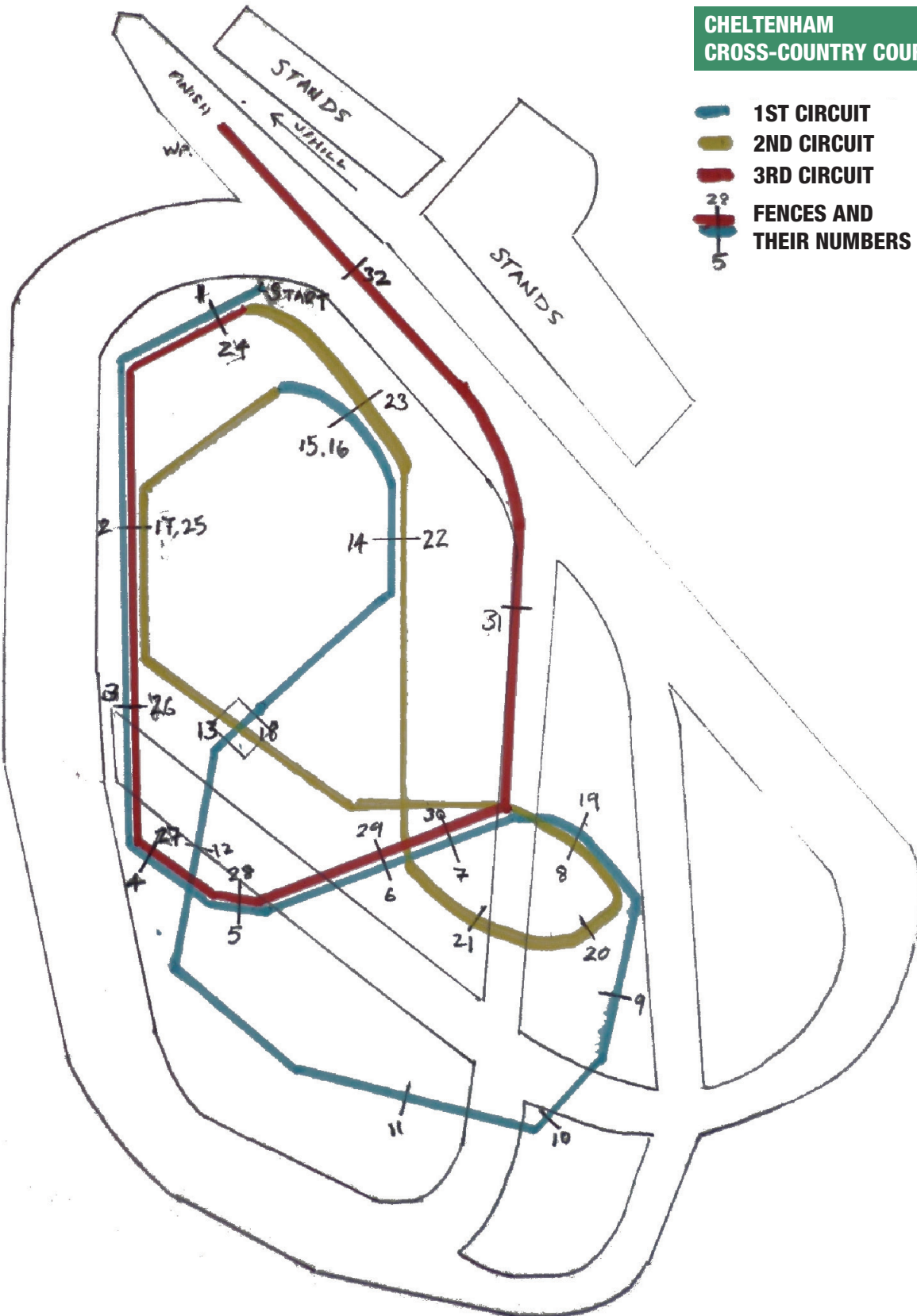
Cheltenham's Racecourses – Plan Views

Old Course and New Course



Cheltenham's Racecourses – Plan Views

Cross-Country Course

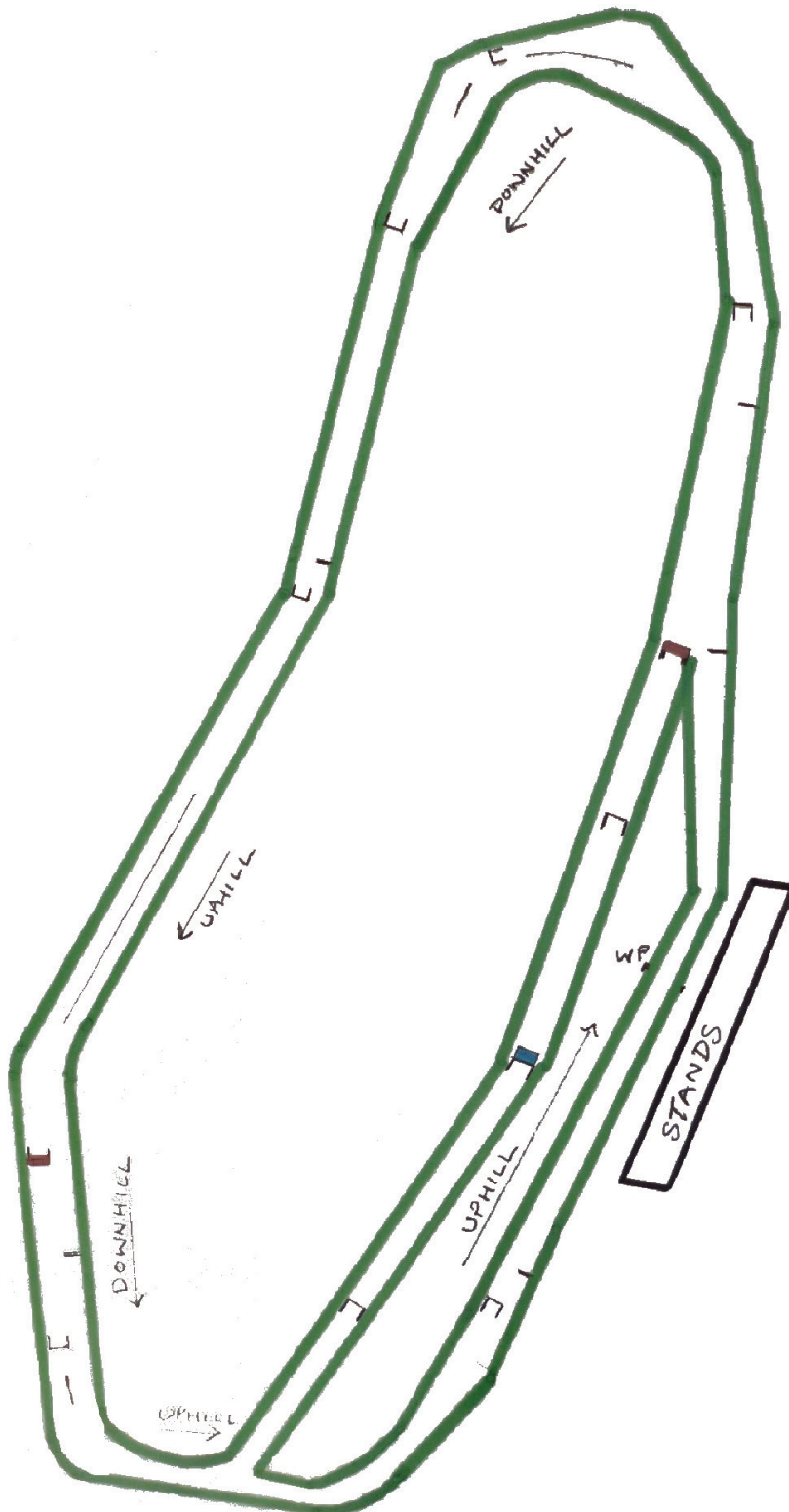


**CHEL TENHAM
CROSS-COUNTRY COURSE KEY**



- 1ST CIRCUIT
- 2ND CIRCUIT
- 3RD CIRCUIT
- 29
- 5
- FENCES AND THEIR NUMBERS

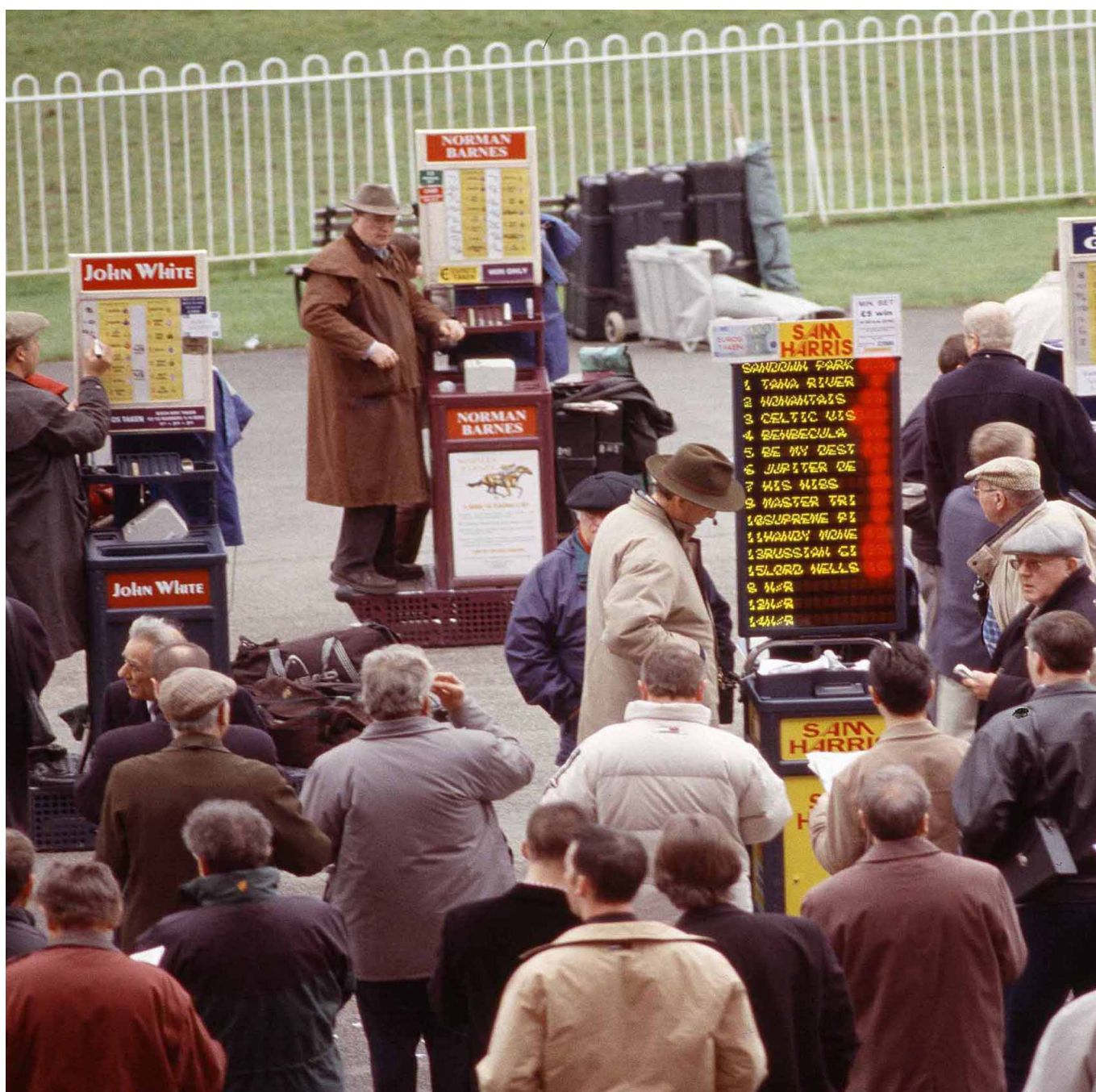
Hexham's Racecourse – Plan View

Horses race left-handed at Hexham. It is a rectangular, mile-and-a-half circuit, undulating in its nature with what could be described as easy fences with plenty of 'give' or spring in them. The 250-yard run to the winning line from the last fence is mostly uphill and, for Chasers, is on a spur to their main course. It is extremely testing when the ground conditions are soft or heavy.



HEXHAM RACECOURSE KEY

-  COURSE
-  WINNING POST
-  WP
-  PLAIN FENCE
-  OPEN DITCH (FENCE)
-  WATER JUMP
-  HURDLE



Analysis of each racecourse covers the following factors:

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Number of Days' Racing, Number of Races and Number of Runners

Table 1 and **Table 2** show the numbers of runners at each racecourse in relation to the number of races and racing days.

Table 1	
Cheltenham	
Race-days	110
Races	733
Runners	9421

Table 2	
Hexham	
Race-days	90
Races	594
Runners	5560

The mean (average) number of runners per race at Cheltenham was 13 (to the nearest runner) and at Hexham it was 9 (to the nearest runner).

Our analysis shows that more deaths occurred in races with an above-average number of runners. This applies to both courses, as seen in **Table 3** and **Table 4**.

Table 3	
Cheltenham	
Mean no. runners/race	12.85
Mean no. runners/death	15.66
Total no. horses killed	48

Table 4	
Hexham	
Mean no. runners/race	9.34
Mean no. runners/death	11.29
Total no. horses killed	7



Cause of Death

- **Falls, and what followed from them, easily caused the most deaths at Cheltenham.** They broke horses' necks, backs, pelvic bones and legs. These fall-related deaths far exceeded those that occurred at Hexham (**Table 6**). A number of factors are responsible but an important major cause is the more dense structure of fences at Cheltenham. Even though Cheltenham horses were generally of greater ability than those racing at Hexham, many at the Gloucestershire course still failed to cope with the obstacles.
- **Some horses received an injury that did not immediately kill them.** These caused damage to either a limb or the pelvis and may have been incurred as a result of hitting an obstacle then running on until breaking down between fences. Other injuries that did not prove immediately fatal may have been caused by running through an inconsistent patch of ground ('bad ground') and suffering limb damage.
- At both Cheltenham and Hexham there was an equivalent number of horses (calculated in relation to the number of runners) who **collapsed and died due to exhaustion or heart problems**. Both courses have a demanding topography and require horses to run uphill and downhill. In addition, both feature an uphill run to the finishing post.

Table 5

Cheltenham		
Cause of Death	Deaths	% of Total
Fell or brought down by faller	26	54.15
Injured during race	18	37.5
Collapsed and died during race or afterwards	3	6.25
Slipped up and fatally injured	1	2.1
Total	48	100

Table 6

Hexham		
Cause of Death	Deaths	% of Total
Fell	3	42.85
Collapsed and died during race or afterwards	2	28.57
Injured during race	1	14.29
Slipped up and fatally injured	1	14.29
Total	7	100

Types of Races and Numbers of Runners

Race Categories (according to the official National Hunt race programme):

- National Hunt Flat races
- Novice Hurdle races
- Hurdle races
- Novice Chase races
- Chase races
- Hunters' Chase races
- Cheltenham's Cross-Country Course races (unique to Cheltenham)

Deaths occurred in all seven race categories at Cheltenham, while Hexham saw deaths in three of its six categories. See **Table 7** and **Table 8**.

Table 7

Cheltenham					
Race Type	Deaths	Races	Deaths to Races	Runners	Deaths per Runner
National Hunt Flat	1	35	2.86%	553	0.18%
Novice Hurdle	3	138	2.17%	1737	0.17%
Hurdle	13	185	7.03%	2670	0.49%
Novice Chase	8	101	7.92%	952	0.84%
Chase	17	198	8.59%	2474	0.69%
Hunters' Chase	4	56	3.57%	739	0.54%
Cross-Country Course	2	20	10.00%	296	0.68%
Total	48	733	6.55%	9421	0.51%

Table 8

Hexham					
Race Type	Deaths	Races	Deaths to Races	Runners	Deaths per Runner
National Hunt Flat	0	44	0.00%	463	0.00%
Novice Hurdle	0	158	0.00%	1460	0.00%
Hurdle	4	150	2.66%	1461	0.27%
Novice Chase	1	76	1.32%	594	0.17%
Chase	2	146	1.37%	1392	0.14%
Hunters' Chase	0	20	0.00%	190	0.00%
Total	7	594	1.18%	5560	0.13%

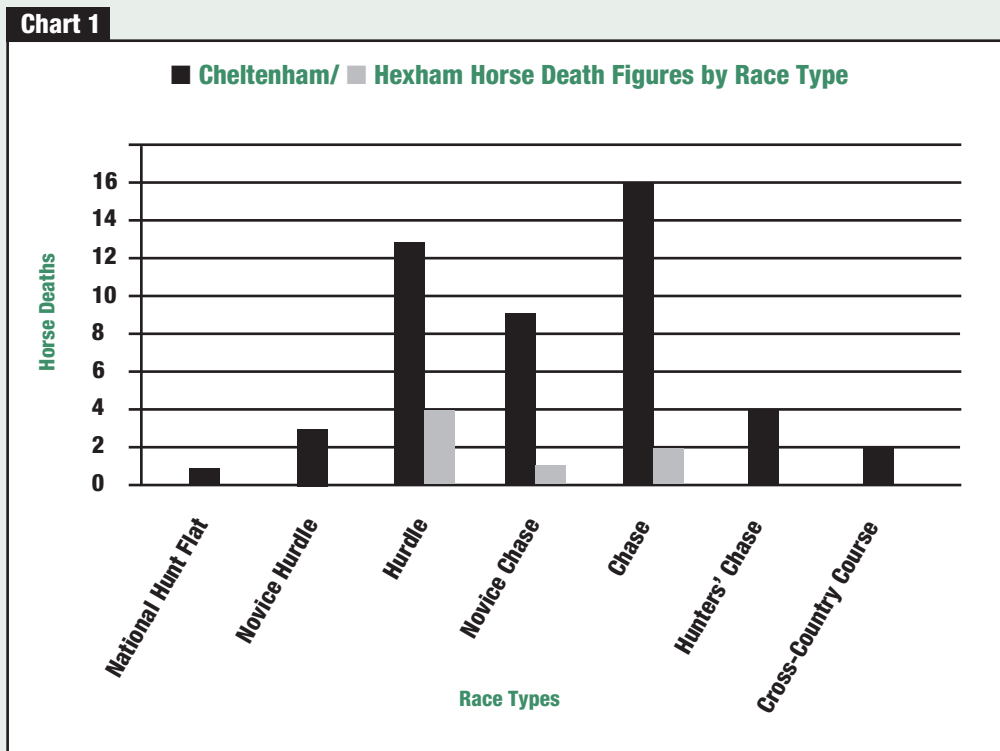
Horses entered into Chase races at Cheltenham suffered the highest number of fatalities (17), with Novice Chasers being most at risk. Eight novices died but with far fewer runners involved, their percentage of deaths per runner came out highest of all categories.

Types of Races and Numbers of Runners cont.

Overall, horses were four times more likely to die at Cheltenham than they were at Hexham, when deaths per runner are taken into account. In Novice Chases, the increased risk was nearly five times (see Tables 7 and 8).

While Cheltenham's Chase races posed the greatest danger to horses, Hurdle events also claimed a significant number of victims. While Hexham staged more Novice Hurdle races than Cheltenham, it saw no fatalities in these events, whereas Cheltenham saw three deaths in Novice Hurdle races. In events featuring the more experienced hurdlers, there was an equally stark differential. Thirteen died at Cheltenham compared with four at Hexham – two of whom collapsed and died during 3-mile events.

Chart 1 shows, in visual terms, a comparison between Cheltenham and Hexham regarding horse death numbers in each racing category.



The number of runners entered into a race was a critical factor. At Cheltenham, 33 of the 48 deaths occurred in races where the number was above the mean average (see table 3 page 11). Large fields contested both Chase and Hurdle events at the Gloucestershire course. Unsurprisingly, in seven 28-runner Hurdle races, three horses died. Two more died in Hurdle events featuring 24 runners, and one was killed in a 23-runner race. In Chase events, one horse was killed in a 24-runner event, and a further two died in races featuring 23 runners.

The reasons for deaths in crowded races are likely to include: the horse and jockey not being able to get a good view of the obstacles; and horses being bumped off balance or being 'struck into' (whereby the hooves of another horse strike legs with fatal consequences).

Deaths in Relation to Distance Raced

Whatever the race category, both Cheltenham and Hexham held races over distances ranging from 2 to 4 miles.

Tables 9 and 10 show deaths in relation to the distance of the races (start to finish) in which the horses were taking part.

Table 9

Hexham	
Race Distance	Deaths
2 miles	0
2.5 miles	1
3 or more miles	6

Table 10

Cheltenham	
Race Distance	Deaths
2 miles	5
2.5 miles	22
3 or more miles	21

At Hexham, no horses were fatally injured at the minimum distance of 2 miles, whereas five horses succumbed to fatal injuries at the premier racecourse.

The shorter races are generally considered to be faster events and, therefore, more dangerous. However, the death numbers do not support that assumption.

In fact, deaths quite clearly began to occur more frequently in longer races. At 2 miles 4.5 furlongs (approx. 2.5 miles), Hexham saw one victim.

Cheltenham, by comparison, saw 22 horses die during events of around this distance. As the length of races increased, so the death rate at the Gloucestershire course remained consistently high. At Hexham, six horses died in races of three or more miles.

Sector of the Race in which the Fatal Injury Occurred

Table 11

Cheltenham	
Sector of the Race	Deaths
Early stage of the race	7
Mid-race	19
End of the race	18
On completion of the race	4

Table 12

Hexham	
Sector of the Race	Deaths
Early stage of the race	1
Mid-race	3
End of the race	2
On completion of the race	1

At both racecourses, most horses suffered a fatal injury during the mid-section of a race. Many will find this surprising, and more research is required.

Racing Conditions – the Racing Ground or ‘Going’

In Britain there are six categories of ‘Going’ in National Hunt (jump) racing:

- Heavy
- Soft
- Good to Soft
- Good
- Good to Firm
- Firm

The state of the ground, or ‘going’, is a critical factor for horses. Some are suited to a particular condition. Others are able to cope with a wider range of surfaces. Races are no longer run on ground categorised as ‘hard’ and there is a growing consensus that, for the majority of horses, firm ground is unsuitable. This is because lack of ‘give’ in the surface can jar or cause trauma to the limbs. Racing horses on ‘going’ not suited to their needs can lead to injury.

National Hunt racecourses endeavour to run races on ‘Good’ or ‘Good to Soft’ going, as this suits the needs of most horses.

In this study – and there is no reason to believe the findings would not apply across most NH racecourses – **only one third of race meetings had consistent ‘Going’** around the whole of the racing area. For example, ground might be described as ‘Good’ and ‘Good to Soft’ in places.

To prevent extremes in ‘going’ and consequent abandonment of meetings – due to courses that are heavy, firm, or have frost in the ground – artificial means of ensuring a useable surface are increasingly applied.

Cheltenham has made a considerable investment to ensure racing goes ahead whatever the weather. This may be good for spectators and bookmakers but not for the horses. While meetings are generally abandoned when the ground is classed as too heavy, the same should apply when the ground is rated Firm. This is a more rational option than flushing millions of gallons of water onto a racecourse.

The deluge may give the required ‘Good Going’ but it leaves an underlying false sense of security. Differentiating between natural Good Going and watered Good Going is increasingly difficult, because uneven, inconsistent sections can be concealed by watering. The consequences of a galloping half-ton race horse striking a false patch of ground can be a snapped leg.

As previously indicated, Hexham will tend to run races only when the ground and conditions allow. Meetings are abandoned quite frequently when the going gets too heavy.

Tables 13 and 14 and Charts 2 and 3 show the number of days’ racing held at each course in relation to the respective ground conditions – and deaths that occurred whilst racing on that ground. These should not be taken as an indication that the ground was responsible for all of the deaths, but it is likely to have caused some of them. Further research could yield more precise answers to the relationship between ground and fatal injuries.

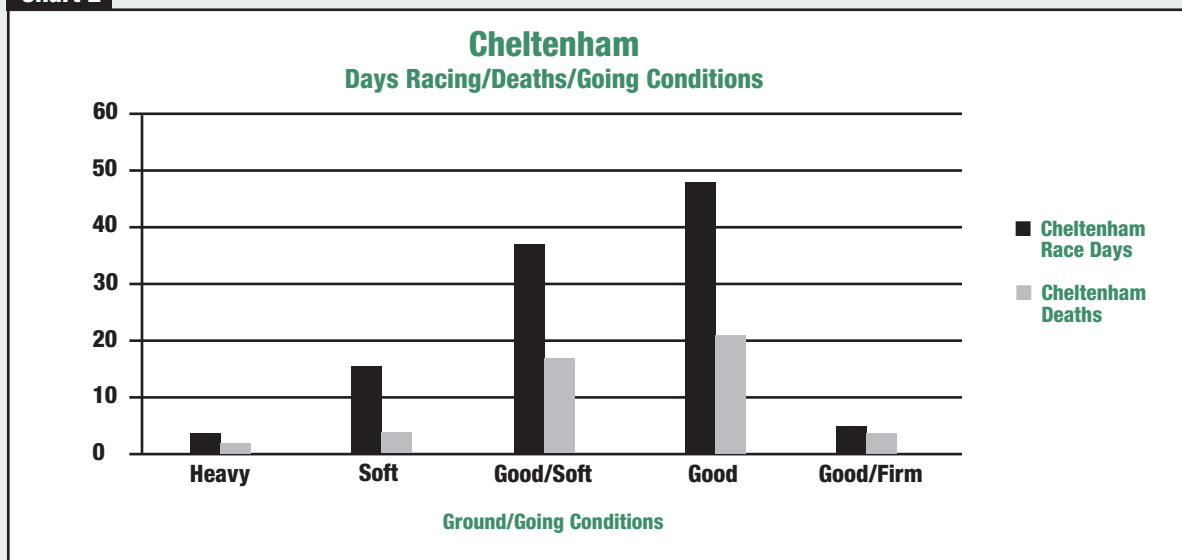
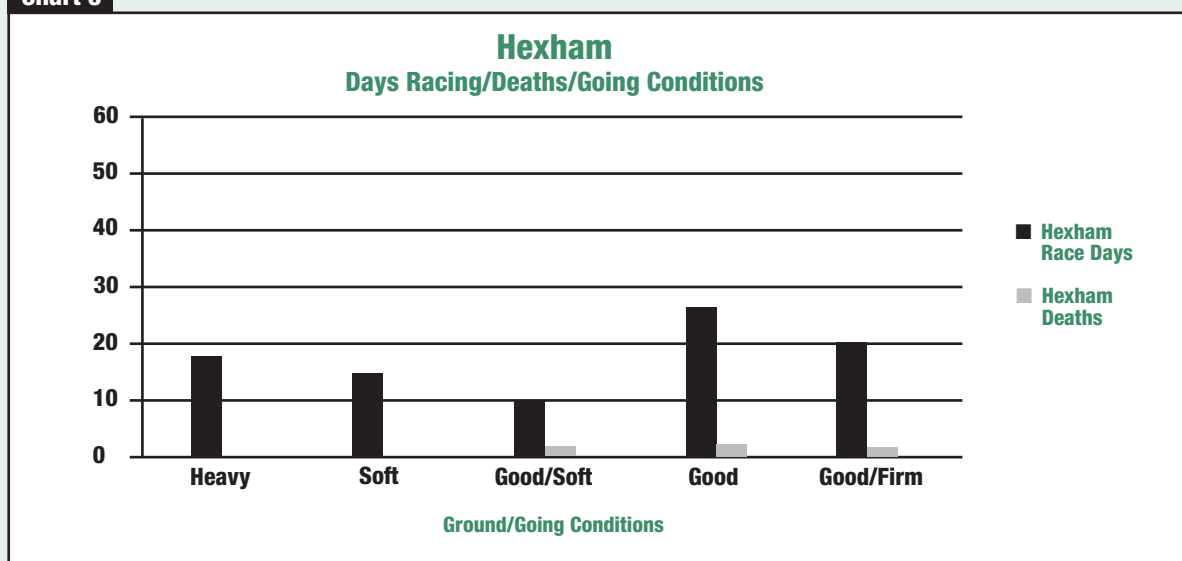
Table 13

Cheltenham		
Ground/Going	Race Days	Deaths
Heavy	4	2
Soft	16	4
Good/Soft	37	17
Good	48	21
Good/Firm	5	4

Table 14

Hexham		
Ground/Going	Race Days	Deaths
Heavy	18	0
Soft	15	0
Good/Soft	10	2
Good	27	3
Good/Firm	20	2

Racing Conditions – the Racing Ground or ‘Going’ cont.

Chart 2

Chart 3


The importance of ground conditions and horse safety was starkly brought home in the pages of the racing press before and after the running of the Glenfarclas Chase on Cheltenham's Cross-Country Course during the 2012 Festival Meeting (see Annex). Two horses – Scotsirish and Garde Champetre – broke their legs during the race. This sparked an enormous amount of debate involving Cheltenham officials and the BHA around the question of whether the ground was race-worthy.

Amateurs rode both Scotsirish and Garde Champetre, a factor that leads into this report's next section: Experience of Jockey.

Experience of Jockey

Definitions:

- **Amateur Jockey**

Non-professional. Amateurs can race-ride under a permit from the BHA. There are two Categories 'A' and 'B'. The first is confined to Amateur-only races, whilst 'B' allows amateurs to race alongside professionals.

- **Conditional Jockey**

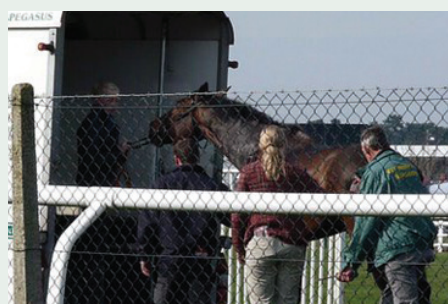
This is a trainee jump jockey aged between 17 and 25 years. To compensate for their lack of experience they claim a weight allowance when riding against professionals. This relates primarily to so-called handicap races where more highly rated horses are forced to carry more on their backs made up of the jockey's weight and additional lead weights placed under the saddle.

- **Professional Jockey**

Experienced to an industry-rated standard. As previously noted, horses face a statistically higher chance of being killed at Cheltenham than at Hexham – even though Cheltenham horses are generally more highly rated. It can equally be noted that many jockeys ride at both Cheltenham and Hexham during their careers.

See **Table 15** and **Table 16**.

Such are the greater risks posed by the Cheltenham course, that professional jockeys, as well as Amateurs and Conditionals, are more likely to see horses die under them there than at Hexham.



THE LAST MOMENTS OF LUSH LIFE, WHO WAS PULLED UP AND THEN DESTROYED AT THE 2011 CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

Amateur Jockeys

Amateur-ridden horses fared well on the Hexham course, with none killed during the study period. The easier fences enabled a safer passage for both horse and rider.

The horses ridden by amateurs at Cheltenham were not so fortunate. Eight died – four of them in just 56 Hunters' Chase races. The other four deaths occurred in notoriously tough races: the National Hunt [Novice] Chase, run over 4 miles and 27 fences (which in 2006 claimed three horses' lives); a three-mile Chase, with 19 fences and 18 runners; and the 2012 Glenfarclas Chase, run over the Cross-Country Course, covering just short of 4 miles and presenting 32 obstacles. Two of the 16 horses died.

Conditional Jockeys

Two Conditional Jockeys at Hexham rode horses who died. The first victim was 13-year-old Very Very Noble (IRE) who, based on form, age and lack of ability, should not have been raced. Prior to the fatal fall, the form for his previous eight races read: Refused to Race; Pulled-Up; Pulled-Up; Unseated Rider; 11th; 7th; Unseated Rider; Pulled-Up. It is our view that an old, poorly rated horse should never have been entered into a competitive race of 16 runners. The second Hexham victim, Ballymacduff (IRE), collapsed and died from a suspected heart attack close to the end of a 3-mile race, which was run in hot and sunny conditions.

At Cheltenham, 11 Conditional Jockeys had horses die under them.

The two most recent Conditional-ridden horse deaths were both mounts of Brendon Powell. Each horse fell; one broke his neck, the other suffered a fatal spinal injury. Ten other horses being ridden by conditional jockeys died from a variety of causes.

Table 15

Hexham	
Jockey	Horse Deaths
Amateur	0
Conditional	2
Professional	5

Table 16

Cheltenham	
Jockey	Horse Deaths
Amateur	8
Conditional	12
Professional	28

Weight Carried By Hunters' Chase Horses

The majority of horses entered into Hunters' Chase races carry close to 12 stone – some much more. Very few are burdened with less than 11 stone.

As long ago as 2005, Animal Aid identified Cheltenham Racecourse as the venue at which most horses die.

The British Horseracing Authority, as the regulatory body charged with looking after horse welfare, should long ago have analysed and made public the reasons why so many horses have come to grief at Cheltenham. But it has not done so, or certainly not with any convincing rigour and objectivity.

It is due to that serious omission that Animal Aid carried out this detailed analysis of why so many horses die at Cheltenham. Our use of data from Hexham Racecourse for comparative purposes is intended to identify features or causes that make Cheltenham four times more deadly for horses than the Northumberland course.

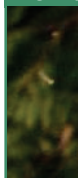
Some provisional answers are provided in this report but more research is needed. We will be pressing the racing authorities to undertake just such an analysis, and appealing to parliament and government to ensure that they do so.

Government intervention is essential, given that the regulatory authorities and racing as a whole show every sign of being content with the equine attrition rate to be found at Cheltenham and other British courses. We feel confident that Animal Aid speaks for a great many people across the country when we say such death and suffering is immoral and shameful. Business as usual is not an option.

Cheltenham's Horse Victims

	Seabreeze D'Ho (FR)	14 Dec 2013	Kenel Hill (IRE)	16 April 2010
	Taranis (FR)	1 May 2013	Fairyland (GER)	19 March 2010
	African Broadway	17 April 2013	Izita Star	19 March 2010
	Bakbenscher	17 April 2013	Citizen Vic (IRE)	17 March 2010
	Matuhi	14 March 2013	Casey Jones (IRE)	16 March 2010
	Cristal Bonus (FR)	15 Dec 2012	Hold Em (IRE)	1 Jan 2010
	Hildisvini (IRE)	14 Dec 2012	Kanpai (IRE)	12 Dec 2009
	Ambrose Princess (IRE)	16 Nov 2012	Three Mirrors	14 Nov 2009
	Abergavenny	14 March 2012	Weather Front	16 Oct 2009
	Featherbed Lane (IRE)	14 March 2012	Fier Normand (FR)	15 April 2009
	Scotsirish (IRE)	13 March 2012	Clarified (IRE)	12 March 2009
	Garde Champetre (FR)	13 March 2012	Nor Nor East (IRE)	1 Jan 2009
	Educated Evans (IRE)	13 March 2012	Simondiun	18 Oct 2008
	Mr Chow (IRE)	28 Jan 2012	Hasty Prince	16 April 2008
	Hidden Keel	1 Jan 2012	Whispered Promises (USA)	14 March 2008
	May Be Possible (IRE)	4 May 2011	Macs Joy (IRE)	15 Dec 2007
	Lush Life (IRE)	17 March 2011	Willyanwoody (IRE)	17 Nov 2007
	Joe Lively (IRE)	1 Jan 2011	Granit Jack (FR)	17 Nov 2007
	Lethal Glaze (IRE)	1 Jan 2011	Paulo Dancer (FR)	20 Oct 2007
	Robo (FR)	11 Dec 2010	Decisive	20 Oct 2007
	Acey (IRE)	16 Oct 2010	Rose Of The Shires (IRE)	19 April 2007
	Yellow Flag	16 Oct 2010	Swift Thyne (IRE)	15 March 2007
	Mad Jack Duncan (IRE)	15 Oct 2010	Little Brick (FR)	13 March 2007
	Lotta Presents (IRE)	5 May 2010		
	One Cool Knight (IRE)	5 May 2010		

Hexham's Horse Victims

	Ballymacduff (IRE)	4 June 2013	Lord Rosskit (IRE)	9 Nov 2007
	Hasper	11 June 2011	Caesars Palace (GER)	13 Oct 2007
	Old Noddy (IRE)	25 May 2010	Very Very Noble (IRE)	12 May 2007
	Michaels Dream (IRE)	10 Oct 2009		

■ **'Taps stay on as ground worries surface for the Cheltenham Festival', Chris Cook, *The Guardian* 29 February 2012**

Claisse [Clerk of the Course] has been told to expect no more than 6mm [rain] before Friday 9 March, four days before the Festival starts. He has already used 1.2m gallons, [watering the course] leaving 6.5m gallons in the reservoir, but the course remains no softer than good all round and is good to firm, firm in places on the cross-country circuit.

That last detail led to a sharp exchange of words at a media event here [Cheltenham] on Wednesday when Phil Smith, Britain's senior handicapper, accused trainers in this country of not taking the cross-country race as seriously as their colleagues in Ireland. Henrietta Knight, who trained Best Mate to win three Gold Cups, [at Cheltenham] intervened to say: "It's not surprising people won't run on that ground. They're going to ruin their good horses. The Irish might be prepared to take a chance. It's not the sort of ground that people wish to risk their horses on."

Claisse will direct his hoses toward the cross-country course this weekend but added that his "priority has to be the 450 horses that are running in Chases and Hurdles races. We watered the cross-country before and will do so again but we won't allow that to prejudice what we're doing on the Old and New courses".

<http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/feb/29/cheltenham-festival-ground-worries>

■ **After the two horses' deaths hit the headlines, weak excuses were given from Cheltenham's Claisse and the British Horseracing Authority: 'It's sad when these things happen but we have a very good record here for horse welfare,' said course clerk Simon Claisse.'**

'Cheltenham Festival: two more horses die on second day', BBC, 14 March 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/horse-racing/17360447>

■ **'Cross Country course safety concerns after two fatalities', Graham Dench, *Racing Post*, 14 March 2012**

The safety of Cheltenham's cross-country course was called into question when dual previous Glenfarclas Chase winner Garde Champetre and favourite Scotsirish were both put down after breaking legs on the flat.

However, while Tim Morris, BHA director of equine science and welfare, described the deaths as "regrettable and unfortunate" he insisted there was no reason to think there are "any undue risks in these races", and added "we must not read too much into what at present is an isolated incident".

Concern over the going had been cited recently by Henrietta Knight as the principal reason some British trainers do not support the race and yesterday's contest took place on good to firm, logistical difficulties having prevented parts of the track from receiving water.

Knight had said: "It's perhaps different for them [Irish trainers] as they are running on soft ground all winter and can maybe risk firm going once, but I wouldn't. I look at it with my three-day eventing hat on, and they are so particular in that field about the ground. I wouldn't risk one of mine on that ground."

Morris, however, said: "Our inspectorate separately inspects that course – we know it's different – and they inspected it a week ago and again this morning. We will analyse what happened but I think both happened on the flat and at least one on a watered part of the course.

"The important thing is not to draw premature conclusions following two unfortunate accidents. There were no statistical reasons for us to be unduly worried that there is a problem with the race, although that's not to say we should be complacent....

...He added: "I'm not sure we can attribute this to anything other than really bad luck. We know there are innate risks in jump racing but these are experienced horses and experienced riders. If we thought the race was unsafe we wouldn't be running it – and the course wouldn't want to be running it. It's not in Cheltenham's interests."

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Cross-countr+y+course+safety+concerns+after+two+fatalities.-a0282898677>