



CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL STARTS REVIEW: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. COURSE CONFIGURATION: TOPOGRAPHICAL ALTERATIONS

Recommendation

- Optimise as far as possible the physical track layouts at Cheltenham's two most problematic starting points (2m and 2 1/2 mile) to reduce natural field congestion and acceleration, within the confines of the topography of the land in these areas.

Explanation / Reasoning

- 2- Mile Start: Optimise the alignment of the bend within the physical confines of the course's topography to increase the straight-line approach to the start.
- 2 1/2 Mile Start: Optimise the chute area, to help better funnel the field before the tape.
- Increasing the ability for the field to approach the tapes in a straight line and improving the way in which horses are funnelled to the start will result in the field being able to approach the start in a more orderly fashion, reducing the inherent acceleration forced upon horses lining up on the outside of the field.

Next Steps

- Work is already underway by Cheltenham racecourse
- Alterations will be in place ahead of Cheltenham's October fixture

2. START PROCEDURE: "WALKING PACE"

Recommendation

- Transition the current wording within the rules as to the maximum pace at which a horse can approach the tapes from a "walk or jig-jog" to "walking pace" to apply to all Jump races.

Explanation / Reasoning

- Replacing the ambiguous term "jig-jog" provides greater clarity for jockeys, starters, stewards and the public.
- A walking pace baseline gives the starter more flexibility. For instance, if a horse is cantering on the spot but remaining in line with a walking field, the starter has discretion to let the race begin.
- Stewards have a clear, visual standard to enforce as any horse moving at a faster pace than others in the field will easily be identifiable.

Next Steps

- Formal finalisation of the rule change
- Proposed implementation date for new rules: Autumn for start of core 2026/27 Jump season



3. START PROCEDURE: START ZONE

Recommendation

- Explore the concept of a physical, highly visible "start zone" at starts across all racecourses

Explanation / Reasoning

- Positioning a marker or second line at a set distance approximately between 15 to 30 yards prior to the official start line to create a zone in which a starter is able to start the race.
- Riders will have certainty that the race will not be started in advance of this zone, and have certainty that their horse must be moving at walking pace within this zone
- Viewing and broadcast public will have greater clarity regarding the starting process

Next Steps

- Further consultation with PJA, jockeys, trainers, starters, stewards, racecourses and other stakeholders to talk through and finalise all aspects of the proposal prior
- Explore feasibility of this proposal at all starts at all racecourses, and identify where, if any, bespoke arrangements need to be made
- Consideration of a trial/soft implementation period ahead of formal introduction
- Proposed implementation date for new rules: Trial period to be scoped out in the autumn with formal, wider implementation to be confirmed in due course.

4. PENALTY STRUCTURE: CLASS 1 & 2 ESCALATION

Recommendation

- Consider the implementation of a tiered penalty increase specifically targeting Class 1 and Class 2 races across all courses.

Explanation / Reasoning

- The majority of feedback suggested that the current penalty structure does not provide a sufficient deterrent to offences in major races
- Alongside increases to individual offences, jockeys who repeatedly breach start rules across a rolling period facing a progressive, compounding increase in suspensions.
- This framework will mirror the BHA Whip Review structure, where breaches in elite, high-profile races carry heavier consequences.

Next Steps

- Development of proposal for penalty increases
- Formal industry consultation with PJA, jockeys, stewards and other stakeholders
- Consider 'soft implementation' process
- Proposed full implementation date for new penalties: Q1 2027



5. TECHNOLOGY: LIVE AUDIO COMMUNICATIONS

Recommendation

- Explore the introduction of a live audio recording system at the start area to capture communications and instructions given by starters to jockeys, with a direct feed to the stewards' room.

Reasoning

- A live audio feed from the start area to the stewards' room would allow stewards to hear and record the exact words and directions given by starters in real time. This would provide an objective record of communications, strengthening the evidence available during inquiries.
- There is scope to open this feed to broadcast media in the future. Better public and media understanding of start process should improve confidence in regulatory decisions.

Next Steps

- Source specialised, weather-proof directional microphones and transmitter setups suitable for racecourse start areas.
- Consider cost implications and determine feasibility for this to cover all races, or just major events/Festivals
- Proposed implementation date: 2027 Cheltenham Festival at latest