

# Racing NSW benchmark programming and handicapping



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## OVERVIEW

*Racing NSW* is committed to providing the racing industry with a Handicapping system that is transparent, fair and consistent, whilst at the same time making racing competitive.

Similarly *Racing NSW* is seeking to deliver programming that is inclusive as opposed to exclusive, creating greater racing opportunities for participants and producing interesting and exciting racing.

With these objectives in mind *Racing NSW* completed a review of its existing programming and handicapping policies in the first half of 2009. The aim of this review was to identify improvements beyond those of the previous Ratings system.

Following the completion of the review *Racing NSW* has adopted the Benchmark Programming and Handicapping system ("BPaH") to replace Ratings from 1st October 2009.

In the following pages we explain how the Benchmark system came into being and what it means for the racing industry in NSW.

The official policy document is available in full from the *Racing NSW* website at [www.racingnsw.com.au](http://www.racingnsw.com.au) or by telephoning Racing NSW on (02) 9551 7500.

## The Handicapping Department:

Senior Handicappers:	Brett Scelly, Damien Hay and Colin Nickson
Handicapper:	Ben Dunn
Cadet Handicapper:	Shane Cuthbert
Racing Liaison Officer:	Kerry Jordan

The above personnel report to the General Manager-Regulatory: Keith Bulloch

## The Racing Department:

Racing Manager:	Shane Meaney
Race Results Manager:	Craig Leet

The above personnel report to the General Manager-Industry: Scott Kennedy

**"IT WAS QUICKLY REALISED THAT NSW NEEDS TO PROVIDE MORE OPTIONS FOR HORSES TO START BY CREATING MORE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING"**

# INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR CHANGE

## Policy Review

In early 2009 the Board of *Racing NSW* instituted a Review of its existing programming and handicapping policies.

The Review was required to:

1. address dissatisfaction with programming, handicapping and the Ratings system in NSW racing,
2. evaluate whether handicapping at *Racing NSW* equalised the chances of all runners in handicap races,
3. assess the merits and shortcomings of the NSW Ratings system, and
4. ensure any new policy aimed to improve:
  - a. opportunities for horses to compete in suitable races,
  - b. field sizes,
  - c. betting turnover, and
  - d. returns to participants

## Industry Consultation

Three acknowledged industry experts in race form assessment were invited by *Racing NSW* to provide a unified written set of recommendations for policy change. Previously all had made various oral submissions to Racing NSW or its predecessor the TRB on handicapping and programming.

The expert's submissions and recommendations were submitted to *Racing NSW* in January 2009. After reviewing the submissions the Board of Racing NSW determined the recommendations be implemented after making any necessary amendments that emerged from industry consultation.

The three experts' recommendations were posted on the *Racing NSW* website and submissions invited from all interested parties.

50 submissions were received from industry participants by the closing date. *Racing NSW* reviewed every submission in the context of the recommendations.

As part of the industry consultation round, *Racing NSW* requested that the NSW Trainers' Association (NSWTA) systematically canvass Licensed Trainers across the State. The process was designed to seek and obtain the individual views of Trainers in writing before providing the NSWTA submission to *Racing NSW*.

NSWTA appointed Trainer delegates from within the member base in each Association to seek and collate Trainer responses. Over 175 individual NSW Trainers submitted a written response under the NSWTA process. Over 80% of Trainer responses were broadly in favour of the three experts' recommendations.

## Development of New Policies and Processes

The review and industry consultation processes confirmed that change was desired and that the three experts' recommendations, as modified, formed a sound basis for a new policy direction.

It was recognised that handicapping principles at *Racing NSW* had changed little in decades and relied on traditional manual methods. Even under the Ratings system and despite availability of some computerised records, post-race handicapping at Racing NSW applied a somewhat standardised set of weight penalties and concessions according to the finishing positions runners attained.

In contrast, private handicapping employs today's information technology to identify differences between its objective measurements of merit and the more standardised allocation of weights by regulatory bodies. Private handicapping makes mathematical assessments of numerous race variables to form a fact-based view on the current racing ability of each horse. Finishing position is just one of the race performance indicators used to assess the true worth of a performance.

**“RACING NSW WOULD MODERNISE HANDICAPPING THROUGH A FACT-BASED APPROACH TO MERIT ASSESSMENT, SUPPORTED BY THE LATEST COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY”**



By interrogating established databases containing all NSW races over a decade, races of a specific class or grade were shown to vary widely in quality between individual runnings. Some races were seen to offer low prizemoney but attract high competition, or vice versa. Many historical assumptions about rigid relationships between venue, grade, prizemoney and performance merit were shown to be invalid.

Likewise, other variables such as the form cycles of runners were shown to affect finishing positions but were best able to be properly assessed and accounted for in computerised systems such as those used by private handicapping organisations.

*Racing NSW* came to see how adapting relevant capabilities of private handicapping could introduce merit assessment of individual race performances into the public (regulatory) process, modernise regulatory handicapping and help bring the desired policy recommendations to life.

For example, the Dual Band/Template system had evolved because the Ratings system had somewhat artificially elevated country performed horses against their Metropolitan performed counterparts. A complex statistical analysis of the entire NSW horse population revealed that the Dual Band/Template system should be discarded in favour of a single state-wide ranking for every horse.

*Racing NSW* then looked to contract an established private handicapping organisation to enable and support the timely introduction of merit based handicapping to NSW race fields. A new 3-stage process was developed to performance-assess each horse after every run, then allocate and publish updated rankings. The ranking would be called a Benchmark and would indicate the weight to be carried at the horse's next start relative to the entire horse population in NSW.

The contractor was to provide a proprietary computer-based means of promptly assessing the true merit, relative to the entire NSW horse population, of the performance of each runner after every NSW race was decided.

Racing and Sports Pty Limited was contracted to supply *Racing NSW* a recommended Benchmark for all runners within (and no later than) 48 hours of every NSW race meeting.

In stage 1, the contractor would make its computerised assessment. Stage 2 would be a review of the computer output by experienced independent form analysts within the contractor's staff before submitting the Benchmark recommendation to *Racing NSW*.

Stage 3 would be a review of the Stage 2 Benchmark recommendation, together with relevant race and form information, by the Racing NSW handicapping dept. which would then publish the updated Benchmark.

The Benchmark was to show in simple form the capacity of each horse to compete within the entire NSW horse population, no matter where connections may choose to run it next.

At the same time practical changes were agreed within the handicapping department of *Racing NSW*. Benchmark recommendations from the contractor would be assessed by a panel rather than alone. The panel would review and consider the race film, steward's report and basis for the recommendation before releasing each new Benchmark. And a Liaison Officer would be appointed to take care of enquiries so handicappers could properly apply their time to the assessment process.

## Commencement of Benchmarking System – 1 October 2009

After a series of state-wide information seminars in early September explained the process to participants, *Racing NSW* launched its Benchmark Handicapping and Programming system on 1 October 2009.

*Racing NSW* is committed to an accreditation process for the new system. Quarterly reviews and periodic Industry Consultation will form the basis of any adjustments to BPah and ensure the objectives of the program are achieved.

**“THE MERIT ASSESSMENT BENCHMARKS THE HORSE AGAINST THE ENTIRE NSW HORSE POPULATION”**

# BENCHMARK PROGRAMMING AND HANDICAPPING EXPLAINED (“BPAH”)

The Objectives of the Benchmark Programming and Handicapping System are to:

- apply a combination of mathematical analysis and the assessment and adjustment of experienced handicappers to produce for the industry an objective assessment that measures the true intrinsic merit of each horse’s performance
- produce a weight scale in NSW that more accurately reflects the ability of horses contesting handicap races, making them more competitive
- create more opportunities for nominators to place their horses reducing the number of restrictions on eligibility
- make every race a highly competitive event, creating more interest for participants to analyse each horse’s chances
- create increased betting interest to stimulate wagering turnover

## BPaH Innovations

BPaH differs in a number of important ways from the systems of other Australian States, which generally operate Ratings based handicapping models.

Benchmark handicapping makes a merit assessment of individual race performances, mathematically analysing numerous race variables to form a fact-based view on the current racing ability of each horse. In contrast Ratings rely on traditional handicapping without the benefit of independent analyst data.

Benchmark racing opens the top of the weight scale to include more horses by allowing the nomination of horses ‘above the Benchmark’, while Ratings races restrict entry only to horses assessed below the standard set.

Across NSW, Benchmark races are programmed in 5-point graduations (Benchmark 50, Benchmark 55, Benchmark 60, Benchmark 65 and so on), effectively sorting the NSW racing population into well-handicapped contests that are 2.5kg apart in merit.

The Benchmark assigned to each horse is set on a single line scale with each benchmark point equating to 0.5kg in handicap weight.

Once published by *Racing NSW*, a horse’s Benchmark indicates the weight it will carry at its next start relative to every other NSW horse.

## The 3 Stage BPaH Process

The 3 stage merit based Benchmark assessment process begins with a mathematical (computer-based) calculation from proprietary software developed by Racing & Sports Pty Ltd under contract to *Racing NSW*.

The computation takes into account an exhaustive list of relevant factors such as population averages over multiple years, race quality, recent and historical individual performances, age and sex allowances, head-to-head comparisons, form cycle, track grading and race conditions.

The computer ranking is then internally reviewed by experienced Racing & Sports form analysts who then provide *Racing NSW* a recommendation within 48 hours of each horse running.

Finally, the Racing NSW Handicapping Panel reviews the background to the recommendation, the race film and other race data then determines and publishes the updated Benchmark figure for each horse.

The movement of a horse’s published Benchmark openly shows industry participants the handicappers’ assessment of performance merit from one race start to the next.

## Race Weight Scales in BPaH

After nominations close, weights for the meeting in question are declared by *Racing NSW* in direct accordance with the current Benchmark of each nominated horse.

The weight scale in a race is subject to the Rules of Racing that govern the minimum topweight in any race (58kg). Application of this rule may change the absolute weight a horse carries in a particular race, but the Benchmark will maintain the weight relativity between nominated horses.





## Industry Benefits of BPaH

BPaH opens the top of the weight scale so that, rather than staying at home, horses can compete in races in which they would have been ineligible under a Ratings system.

BPaH enables nominators to consider multiple Benchmark races against varying grades of competition. Any individual horse is likely to fit the weight scale in 4 or more consecutive Benchmark levels at any time, giving nominators unprecedented opportunity to select their best race preference.

Because Benchmark races are graded on comparative merit within the entire population, horses are theoretically competitive across their Benchmark range, irrespective of the weight allotted to them.

**“THE BENCHMARK GRADES EACH HORSE STATE-WIDE NO MATTER WHERE CONNECTIONS MAY CHOOSE TO RACE NEXT”**

Merit based handicapping specifically avoids ‘handicapping on potential’. The Benchmark process reviews the quality of race performances and makes an assessment based on the facts of a race just run, but does not speculate or anticipate future performances.

In similar manner, horses whose form declines are assessed on their merits run by run and can move down to competitive weights more readily than in the past.

The published Benchmarks form a valuable data resource for participants.

Benchmarks form a comparative reference guide to owners and trainers seeking to assess the potential competition prior to nominating or accepting in chosen races.

Race form students can readily assess horses by reference to Benchmarks, which are publicly available in real time from a fully inclusive single line database.

# BENCHMARKING IN ACTION

## Example: Benchmark 70 Hcp, Country meeting in December

(Country race run in December, required minimum weight = 58kg top - 54kg bottom)

HORSE	SEX	AGE	BENCHMARK	WEIGHT
Purple Prince	G	7	76	61.0 Kg
Little Phil	G	4	73	59.5 Kg
Exercise Pad	G	5	70	58.0 Kg
Boutique Girl	*M	4	70	56.0 Kg
Harding's Boy	G	6	68	57.0 Kg
Madeline	*M	4	68	55.0 Kg
George Regal	C	**3	68	55.5 Kg
Henry's Gold	G	5	66	56.0 Kg
Last Train	H	5	63	54.5 kg
Rooster Boy	G	5	62	54.0 Kg
Foxtrot	G	4	60	54.0 kg
Diamond Lady	*M	4	59	54.0 kg

\* Allowances F/M – 2kg all year round

\*\* Allowances 3yo – 1.5kg in December

Applicable Benchmark Policy Rules:

1. In all Benchmark races the Benchmark weight is set at 58kg in accordance with the minimum topweight provision of AR 103.
2. From 1. above, the weight scale is first calculated (before allowances – see below) from each horse's Benchmark by adding or subtracting 0.5kg per Benchmark point above or below the Benchmark.
3. Fillies and Mares are allowed 2kg (4 Benchmark points) all year round in open-sex races.
4. 3yo's are allowed 1.5kg (3 Benchmark points) in open-age races in December. See Page 10 for age allowances at other times of the year.
5. Entry order is set top-down by individual horse Benchmark before any applicable age or sex allowance is taken into account.

### Example Benchmark 70 race

Weights for individual horses in the above Benchmark 70 race example are determined as follows:

**Exercise Pad**, being a 4yo+ Male on Benchmark 70, is the Benchmark horse and is allocated 58kg

**Little Phil**, being a 4yo+ Male 3 points above the Benchmark on 73, is allocated 59.5kg (3 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 1.5kg above the Benchmark weight of 58kg)

**Purple Prince**, being a 4yo+ Male 6 points above the Benchmark on 76, is allocated 61kg (6 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 3kg above the Benchmark weight of 58kg)

**Harding's Boy**, being a 4yo+ Male 2 points below the Benchmark on 68, is allocated 57kg (2 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 1kg below the Benchmark weight of 58kg)

**Madeline**, being a 4yo+ Mare 2 points below the Benchmark on 68, is allocated 55kg (2 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 1kg below the Benchmark weight of 58kg, less an additional 2kg Sex Allowance in an open-sex race)

**George Regal**, being a 3yo Male 2 points below the Benchmark on 68, is allocated 55.5kg (2 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 1kg below the Benchmark weight of 58kg, less an additional 1.5kg December 3yo Allowance in an open-age race)

**Rooster Boy**, being a 4yo+ Male 8 points below the Benchmark on 62, is allocated 54kg (8 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 4kg below the Benchmark weight of 58kg)

**Foxtrot**, being a 4yo+ Male 10 points below the Benchmark on 60, is allocated 54kg (10 points x 0.5kg per Benchmark point = 5kg below the Benchmark weight of 58kg. Despite a "merit" weight of 53kg, the 54kg minimum for a Country race prevails). Note: This horse is 1kg "out of the handicap" in this race and connections may consider entering for a lower Benchmark race





# POLICY PRINCIPLES

**Maidens** – All horses will be issued with a Benchmark after three Maiden race starts, unless they earlier win a race or nominate for a Benchmark race.

As a general guide first starters will be allotted the following weights in Maidens, with the indicative Benchmarks shown (in bold):

- 57kg on a 53kg minimum in a Provincial Maiden Handicap (**58**);
- 58kg on a 54kg minimum in a TAB Meeting Country Maiden Handicap (**50**); and
- 56kg on a 53 kg minimum in a Metropolitan Maiden Handicap (**62**).

Maiden Handicaps are weighted at *Racing NSW* by a combination of the first starters' weight allocation model (summarised above) and the merit based handicapping (Benchmark) system.

*Racing NSW* begins to arrive at a provisional Benchmark for a new horse based on both the level of racing at which connections first place it and how it performs at its first start.

The three-race provisional period recognises the inexperience of horses early in their career, enabling them sufficient runs to begin to establish their form.

The provisional Benchmark continues to be reassessed on the merit of the second and third runs, taking into account natural improvement and experience factors and becoming more precise as the racing career progresses.

**Merit Based adjustments** – once a horse has an established form profile, generally movement in its Benchmark between runs in equivalent grade (unless exceptional circumstances apply) will increase by up to 6 points or decrease by up to 4 points.

**Ballot conditions remain** – Age and Sex allowances apply so as to be treated equally in the ballot– fillies and mares with the same Benchmark figure as a male horse are allowed 2 kilos throughout the year, 3yo and 2yo horses are allowed weight concessions according to the established scale of handicap allowances used in NSW. Like-for-Like ballot exemption policy remains unchanged.

**Raising or lowering the race Benchmark at the release of weights** – AR103 requires a min 58kg topweight when weights are released. The Racing NSW handicappers may raise or lower the Benchmark Level of each race at the

time weights are declared to meet the 58kg. In the majority of cases, the published Benchmark Level will remain.

**When might the race Benchmark be lowered?** – If the highest Benchmark horse nominated is under the Benchmark for the race.

**Example** - a Benchmark 70 race attracts nominations in which the top Benchmark horse is a Benchmark 68. In a Benchmark 70 race, this horse would normally be allotted 57kg. However, in this instance the Benchmark 68 horse, as the highest Benchmark runner, is allotted 58kg in accordance with the minimum topweight requirement and the race is adjusted downwards to become a Benchmark 68 Handicap.

**When might the Benchmark be raised?** – If the lowest Benchmark horse is above the minimum weight.

**Example** - a Country Benchmark 70 race (54kg minimum) attracts nominations in which the top Benchmark horse is a Benchmark 72 (= 59kg) and the lowest Benchmark horse is on 64 (= 55kg). In this instance the Benchmark 64 horse, as the lowest Benchmark runner, is allotted 54kg in accordance with the minimum weight allowed and the race is adjusted upwards to become a Benchmark 72 race. An upwards race Benchmark adjustment such as this is only possible when at least one horse is nominated sufficiently above the race Benchmark to still satisfy the 58kg minimum topweight requirement.

Class 1 and Class 2 and other non Benchmark races will be scaled according to the strength of nomination, to ensure a spread of weights that reflects the optimum competitive racing objective of the Benchmark system i.e. a minimum topweight of 58kg and a minimum weight of 54kg (Country) or 53kg (Metropolitan/Provincial).

**Group and Listed Races** - To ensure the Racing NSW Benchmark handicapping policy is aligned with the objectives of *Racing NSW* and is sensitive to our black-type racing schedule, exceptions may apply in assessments of Group and Listed handicap races.

It is in the best interests of racing that handicappers have the discretion to take into account all the considerations and deliberations that are necessary to frame weights in our highest standard races. With the increased volume of Interstate participation within these races the objective will always be to ensure the best possible fields without compromising the principles of handicapping. Benchmarks will still provide the foundation for these races and offer a guide to nominators.





# MINIMUM WEIGHTS / ALLOWANCES / SET WEIGHT MAIDEN RACES

## Minimum Weights (AR 103)

### Metropolitan

53kg all races unless otherwise published in the Racing NSW Magazine's programming section

### Provincial

53kg all races unless otherwise published in the Racing NSW Magazine's programming section

### Country

54kg all races unless otherwise published in the Racing NSW Magazine's programming section

### Quality Handicaps

53kg minimum with a 61kg maximum topweight, and total minimum prizemoney of \$50,000.

### Feature Races

- Group 1 52kg
- Group 2 52kg
- Group 3 53kg
- Listed 53kg

## Minimum Topweights when Weights are declared

Metropolitan Provincial & Country 58kg  
Group 1 and 2yo only races 57kg

## Minimum Topweight at Acceptances

A minimum topweight at acceptances of 57kg is applicable to all Handicap races. Weights shall be raised at acceptance time to meet this requirement.

## 2yo and 3yo Allowances

When 2yo and 3yo horses race against older horses in Benchmark races, they will receive an age allowance according to the time of the year. The following scale identifies the developing maturity of 2yo and 3yo horses as the season progresses.

Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-July
<b>3yos</b>			
- 2.5kg	- 1.5kg	- 0.5kg	-
<b>2yos</b>			
- 5.0kg	- 4.0kg	- 3.0kg	-2.5kg

## Fillies and Mares Allowances

All Fillies and Mares are allowed -2kg against Male horses in mixed sex races.





## Set Weight Maiden Races

The table below sets out the weights allocated to each age group in age-unrestricted Set Weight Maidens throughout the racing season.

Age	Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-Jul
2	53.0kg	54.0kg	55.0kg	55.5kg
3	55.5kg	56.5kg	57.5kg	58.0kg
4+	58.0kg	58.0kg	58.0kg	58.0kg

In Female only set weight Maiden races the scale is 1kg less than above.

Maiden Plate races run under "Picnic" conditions shall carry 8kgs additional to the weights listed above.

### 2yo Maiden Plates

Colts & Geldings 56kg

Fillies 54kg

### 3yo Maiden Plates

Colts & Geldings 56kg

Fillies 54kg

### 2yo only or 3yo C & G Maiden Plates

Colts & Gelding 56kg

### 2yo or 3yo Fillies Maiden Plates

Fillies 56kg

2yo runners are subject to the provisions of AR45 & LR40.

# BENCHMARK PROGRAMMING

A fundamental of programming Benchmark races is to match the Benchmark level of races to the underlying horse population. The levels of Benchmark races planned across the State are detailed below. As a guide, the higher grade Benchmark races in each sector will be programmed on the Premium days, with a sliding range to the lower Benchmark races depending on the day of the week, prizemoney levels and track location.

**“THE HIGHER BENCHMARK RACES IN EACH SECTOR WILL BE RUN AT ITS BETTER GRADE RACE MEETINGS. METROPOLITAN SATURDAYS WILL HAVE HIGHER BENCHMARK RACES THAN WEEKDAYS. PROVINCIAL AND COUNTRY CUP MEETINGS WILL HAVE HIGHER BENCHMARK RACES THAN REGULAR TAB RACE MEETINGS.”**

## Metropolitan

Race type	Usual day run
OPEN	Saturdays/Feature
Benchmark 95	Spring/Autumn Carnival
Benchmark 90	Saturdays
Benchmark 85	Saturdays
Benchmark 80	Saturdays
Benchmark 75	Saturdays/Midweek
Benchmark 70	Midweek
1 Metro Win	Midweek
0 Metro Win	Midweek
Maiden	Midweek

## Country

Race type	Usual day run
*OPEN	Any
Benchmark 75	Feature Days
Benchmark 70	Any
Benchmark 65	Any
Benchmark 60	Any
Benchmark 55	Any
Benchmark 50	Any
Benchmark 45	Community mtgs (+ some TAB)
Benchmark 40	Community mtgs (+ some TAB)
Class 2	Any
Class 1	Any
Maiden	Any

## Provincial

Race type	Usual day run
OPEN	Feature Days
Benchmark 80	Feature Days
Benchmark 75	Feature Days
Benchmark 70	Any
Benchmark 65	Any
Benchmark 60	Any
Class 2	Any
Class 1	Any
Maiden	Any

\*Country racing will continue to program open handicaps, but in many cases these races are able to be replaced by Benchmark races, given they enable eligibility of entry above the Benchmark level.







# BALLOTING CONDITIONS

**Order of Ballot:** Balloting conditions under Benchmark programming are straightforward: the ballot for Benchmark races is in Benchmark order - horses that carry the lowest Benchmark are the first to be eliminated.

Similar to Benchmark races, the ballot order for races restricted by the number of race wins (Class 1 and 2 races and 0 - 1 metropolitan win races) is also by Benchmark order.

**Ballot Exemptions** - At present ballot exemptions apply to horses that, in the previous 21 days, have been balloted from a race or failed to gain a start as an emergency.

**Example:** Provincial Area:

- if a horse has been balloted out of a NSW Metropolitan or Provincial Benchmark race at acceptance time, that horse will be exempt from the ballot for 21 days from a Provincial or Country Benchmark race of like value.

For the purposes of this condition, the following Benchmark ranges apply:

Balloted from	Exempt from
Benchmark 70	Benchmark 60 and higher
Benchmark 65	Benchmark 55 and higher
Benchmark 60	Benchmark 50 and higher

**“HORSES BALLOTTED FROM METROPOLITAN OR PROVINCIAL RACES ARE EXEMPT FOR 21 DAYS FROM ANY BALLOT ON A PROVINCIAL OR COUNTRY RACE OF LIKE STANDARD”**

**“HORSES BALLOTTED FROM COUNTRY RACES ARE EXEMPT FOR 21 DAYS FROM ANY BALLOT ON A COUNTRY RACE OF LIKE STANDARD.”**

**Example:** Country Area:

- if a horse has been balloted out of a NSW Country Benchmark race at acceptance time, that horse will be exempt from the ballot for 21 days from a Country Benchmark race of like value.

For the purposes of this condition, the following Benchmark ranges apply:

Balloted from	Exempt from
Benchmark 70	Benchmark 62 and higher
Benchmark 65	Benchmark 57 and higher
Benchmark 60	Benchmark 52 and higher
Benchmark 55	Benchmark 45 and higher
Benchmark 50	Benchmark between 0 and 52
Benchmark 45	Benchmark between 0 and 47

Note: Exemption becomes null and void should the horse receive the opportunity of a start in any race within the 21 day period.

There are no ballot exemptions in Metropolitan racing.

**Review** - In the next six months Racing NSW will review the ballot exemption policy.

# FAQ'S – SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT BENCHMARK

## ***How will the Benchmark system increase my placement options for my horses?***

Any Benchmark race is open to all horses. Take a Benchmark 60 horse in your stable. Typically you would have the option of it carrying a competitive weight in any one of 4 or more different Benchmark races as per the table-

Race Benchmark	55	60	65	70
Weight Carried (kg)	60.5	58	55.5	53

Although any horse can theoretically nominate, it is expected that common sense and prizemoney differentials will ensure that well performed horses do not nominate for Benchmark races significantly below their own Benchmark.

## ***Will my horse, weighted down on the limit, get balloted out if horses enter and accept above the Benchmark?***

Yes it may. The Benchmark system seeks to field the best quality race from nominated horses, so entry order is in Benchmark rank from top down.

## ***What if I get balloted out?***

Depending on Sector, ballot exemptions apply for horses balloted from like races in the preceding 21 days (refer p.15 for details). This policy will be reviewed in the forthcoming six months.

You could also consider entering that horse for a lower Benchmark race to ensure it gets a run.

## ***I think my horse looks really badly off under its new Benchmark. What can I do?***

The goal of the changeover was to set the new Benchmark for every active horse in time for the Oct 1 start date. But some patience is needed by all as the system beds down.

When Ratings were converted to Benchmarks under the merit based system some horses moved around by quite big numbers while others hardly moved, if at all.

If you think your horse is badly treated, choose a race and run it. The more your horses are exposed to the Benchmark system by competing in races, the sooner their Benchmarks will settle when measured against the entire NSW horse population.

## ***What if I reckon my horse meets a last-start competitor badly at the weights next start?***

This will seem to happen from time to time because the traditional head-to-head comparison of weights between 2 competing horses is only one factor in merit based handicapping.

Head-to-head analysis, when carried out in isolation from other factors can be misleading. For example, such direct comparisons do not take into consideration just where each horse is in its preparation or form cycle. Nor are distance capability or state of track considered, to name just a few variables that contribute to turnarounds irrespective of actual weight movements.

Before the updated Benchmarks are allocated, the performance of both horses is assessed against the entire NSW population by the 3 stage method rather than simply against each other based on their finishing positions.

## ***What about track differences? My horse can't compete at the better tracks***

The statistical analysis from the 10 years of data researched does not support the theory that some racecourses have stronger form than others regardless of the particular race.

For example, whilst there may be some races on the program at a major Country racecourse that produce form that is higher in measured value than those from another Country racecourse, equally there may be some races that are equal or stronger at the other venue when the form is analysed.

Quite often a similar pool of horses contest events at either Country centre, or likewise at Metropolitan versus Provincial racecourses, negating the belief that one track is always stronger than another.

## ***What if I still don't think I can beat a particular horse?***

You now have more placement options under Benchmark. So if you think your horse meets a recent competitor "poorly" you will have more options to choose an alternative race and avoid any rematch that you see as unfavourable.

If, however, you choose to run against the horse in question you can have confidence that the Benchmark process gives both horses a competitive weight despite how the head-to-head might appear to you.

## ***Is my lightly raced smart young horse going to be handicapped on potential?***

Absolutely not. This is specifically excluded by **Racing NSW** policy.





It is important to distinguish between merit based handicapping and handicapping on potential. Merit based handicapping reviews the quality of race performances and assigns a Benchmark figure, it does not anticipate improvement in performance.

Every horse that races in NSW has its performance assessed in the same systematic, fact-based way and its new Benchmark is based on what it did last start, not what it might do at its next.

That said, its Benchmark will reflect its merit measured against the entire NSW horse population and is the same process irrespective of whether your horse wins, is placed or unplaced.

Because each individual performance is analysed in exactly the same way, horses that genuinely improve their Benchmark will have their Benchmark adjusted accordingly. Due to sector and regional variation not all Class 1 races are identical in quality. Therefore horses from two same Class races on any day may have different Benchmark adjustments, including the winners.

At the centre of the Benchmark system is the capability to immediately measure the actual merit of every runner's performance in every NSW race and make appropriate Benchmark adjustments.

Such a system ensures good young improving horses will be identified early, but even if a lightly raced horse wins by a big margin in fast time and scatters its field,

the Benchmark assessment will be conservative based on over a decade of computerised race data on similarly performed horses.

***Why do you need a computer to tell the handicappers what to do?***

The computer provides an instant factual support for analysis of performance merit that simply cannot be done by traditional manual handicapping methods.

Its results are powerful tools in the hands of our handicappers who continue to have the ultimate decision on Benchmark allocation.

***Is it appropriate that a private company (Racing & Sports) be given the charter to rate/benchmark horses in NSW for handicapping purposes?***

In deciding on Racing and Sports as the contractor, **Racing NSW** was able to take advantage of computer based data dating back over a decade, assets that we couldn't replicate in a reasonable time even if we chose to.

The Integrity aspect of the arrangement between the two organisations is one that has been examined at great length by **Racing NSW** in the lead up to the Benchmark program.

It was imperative that the Racing NSW Regulatory Handicappers have the final determination for the weight released for each horse.

***How can the industry be sure that Racing NSW Handicappers do in fact have the final say over the weights?***

**Racing NSW** decided on the 3 stage process with that integrity question in mind.

This process ensures that the Racing NSW Handicapping Panel, which operates under a strict Code of Conduct, remains solely responsible for the final Benchmark (and consequently the weight) of each horse.

***Why doesn't RNSW employ a world-renowned senior handicapper to take charge of handicapping in NSW?*** **Racing NSW** looked carefully at that option and came down strongly, for integrity and consistency reasons, in favour of a panel system for the handicapping function in NSW.

***Why can't we just go back to the Class 1-to-6 system? In fact I reckon the old days were the best, with Maiden followed by Improvers Hcp, then Progressive, Intermediate, Encourage and so on.***

We are retaining Class 1 and Class 2 races in the Provincial and Country sectors for at least the time being based on representations from trainers.

But our analysis shows the Class system actually restricts placement opportunity and competitiveness.

The Class system is also more likely to produce more uneven contests, which prevents us maximising betting interest. Of course wagering turnover ultimately determines the size of the prizemoney pool on which participants rely.

Those effects come about because the Class system (and any similar restrictive grading system) locks horses into the highest Class they achieve (by races won) for the rest of their careers.

Benchmark removes weight ceilings from entry criteria and handicaps horses on a single line everywhere in the State. This encourages free movement of horses within and between the Sectors.

We believe Class 1's and 2's will quickly become redundant when nominators experience the way the Benchmark system provides better opportunities for their horses than any previous system.

Rather than segment the horse population by number of races won as the Class system does, Benchmark grades all horses by weight against the population and opens up a whole series of options for nominators.

***I need to take my horses through their grades and now I can't because it is all Benchmark racing.***

Benchmark actually grades the whole NSW horse population much more evenly and fairly than any system used in the past. And the Benchmark race system gives every horse the chance to step up or down in race strength to wherever its best earning opportunities lie.

Also, in effect, the trainer gets to handicap his own horse when he chooses the best Benchmark race option for it. The Benchmark system is the best way yet devised to "work a horse through its grades", because it provides a series of Benchmark races that are 2.5kg apart in terms of quality wherever a trainer chooses to run.

And it's fair because the Benchmarks (weights) are allocated according to the performance merit of every horse compared to every other horse backed up by the data from more than a decade of comparable races.

***My good old horse hasn't won for 18 months and he is still at the top of the weights. What will Benchmark do for him and his owners?***

Just as importantly as improving progression for up-and-comers, Benchmark provides for efficient regression of older horses down the weight scale and into weaker races as their form tapers.

One of the aims of Benchmark is to prolong horses' careers in NSW.

The computer Benchmarking tools will give the RNSW Handicapping panel the confidence and justification to drop tapering horses to their correct mark based on present performance merit not past glory. In contrast to Ratings, horses can drop more quickly – up to several kilos at a time under the Benchmark system.

***Do the weight allowances for age and sex still apply?***

Yes. **Racing NSW** hasn't changed established protocols that have worked well for industry participants. As an example, when racing against older horses, 3yo's receive weight allowances which vary as they mature from 2.5kg in Aug-Oct, then 1.5kg Nov-Jan, 0.5kg Feb-Apr, 0kg May-Jul.

Fillies and Mares are allowed 2kg against Male Horses – see next question for further explanation.

For Balloting purposes, the Benchmark applies. This prevents the weight allowance forcing horses with an equal Benchmark further down the Order because they are a Filly/Mare or a 2yo/3yo.

Example of 4 horses, all Benchmarked at 60, with the weight they would carry in a Benchmark 60 race held in October:

Horse's Benchmark	60	60	60	60
Weight Carried (kg)	5G=58kg	5M=56kg	3G=55.5 kg	3F=53.5kg





### ***We need more races for Fillies and Mares. Why don't you put more on?***

Data from thousands of races around the world shows that fillies and mares require a standard weight concession of around 1.5kg to be competitive against males.

In NSW we allow 2kg, hence we shouldn't need sex restricted races. Despite the technical situation we have listened to participants and not reduced the number of races with sex restrictions.

However, over time we believe it will be proven in NSW that placement options and opportunities to earn prizemoney will both be increased by removing rather than holding on to race entry restrictions.

### ***How will first starters be Benchmarked? What about Maidens?***

The Racing NSW BPpH system will issue all horses with a Benchmark after three race starts, or earlier if they win a race or nominate for a Benchmark race.

The three-race provisional period recognises the inexperience of horses early in their career, enabling them sufficient runs to begin to establish their form.

### ***How do you start to grade my horse?***

The Benchmark system begins to arrive at a Benchmark for a horse based on both where it is placed and how it performs at its first three starts.

Thus connections of a first starter begin to establish its Benchmark initially from the grade of the race in which they choose to run it.

### ***What happens next?***

A provisional Benchmark is assessed after its first start. This initial mark is then reviewed on the merit of its 2 subsequent runs, taking into account natural improvement and experience factors.

### ***What do first starters carry in Maidens?***

As a general guide first starters will be allotted the following weights in maidens, with the indicative Benchmarks shown (in bold):

- 57kg on a 53kg minimum in a Provincial Maiden Handicap (**58**);
- 58kg on a 54kg minimum in a Country Maiden Handicap (**50**); and
- 56kg on a 53 kg minimum in a Metropolitan Maiden Handicap (**62**).

Maiden Handicaps are weighted at *Racing NSW* by a combination of the first starters' weight allocation model (summarised above) and the merit based handicapping (Benchmark) system. This combination is applied conservatively, taking into account natural improvement and the gaining of race experience, to determine a newly raced horse's Benchmark, which becomes more precise as its racing career progresses.

# MANAGEMENT AND ONGOING REVIEW OF BPaH

Racing NSW is committed to measuring the progress and outcomes of the BPaH system. Quarterly reviews and ongoing industry consultation will form the basis for the maintenance of the BPaH model. Continued measurement of horses across the entire NSW horse population will be a key factor to ensure cluster handicapping does not occur – i.e. horses weighted against their immediate pool in isolation from the wider State group.

Racing NSW will publish findings from these reviews and make adjustments to the BPaH model or realignment of horse Benchmarks to ensure the objectives of the program are achieved.

A Racing Liaison Officer has been appointed to take care of enquiries so handicappers can properly apply their time to the assessment process.





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