

HBF Horseracing Start Time Analysis

The Horseracing Bettors Forum analysed start time delays for all courses over the last 5 years ahead of non-standard race times trial in February.

The data set for this study was a list of races in the UK and Ireland from Jan 1st 2015 to December 31st 2019. The difference between the actual time a race started and its published start time was calculated. The purpose of this study was to see if there were any differences between different racecourses in their ability to get races off on time. The data showed a small number of races that started very much later than their appointed start time, these could well be due to events such as bad weather, loose horses etc, as these were not under the racecourses control all the races with a delay of over 10 minutes were excluded, as were some which were recorded as starting before their allotted start time. The resulting dataset covered 63,298 races with 500 races removed for the reasons above.

The average delay was 92.15 seconds however 90% of races started within 3 minutes 20 seconds of their allotted time.

Noting that races that go off more than two minutes later than their published time can cause races to clash with another that is due to go off later it was decided to analyse races that had a delay of more than two minutes. Approximately 25% of races are delayed by more than two minutes which provides a sufficient sample to analyse. It is also understood that races can be delayed by the racing authorities to avoid clashes.

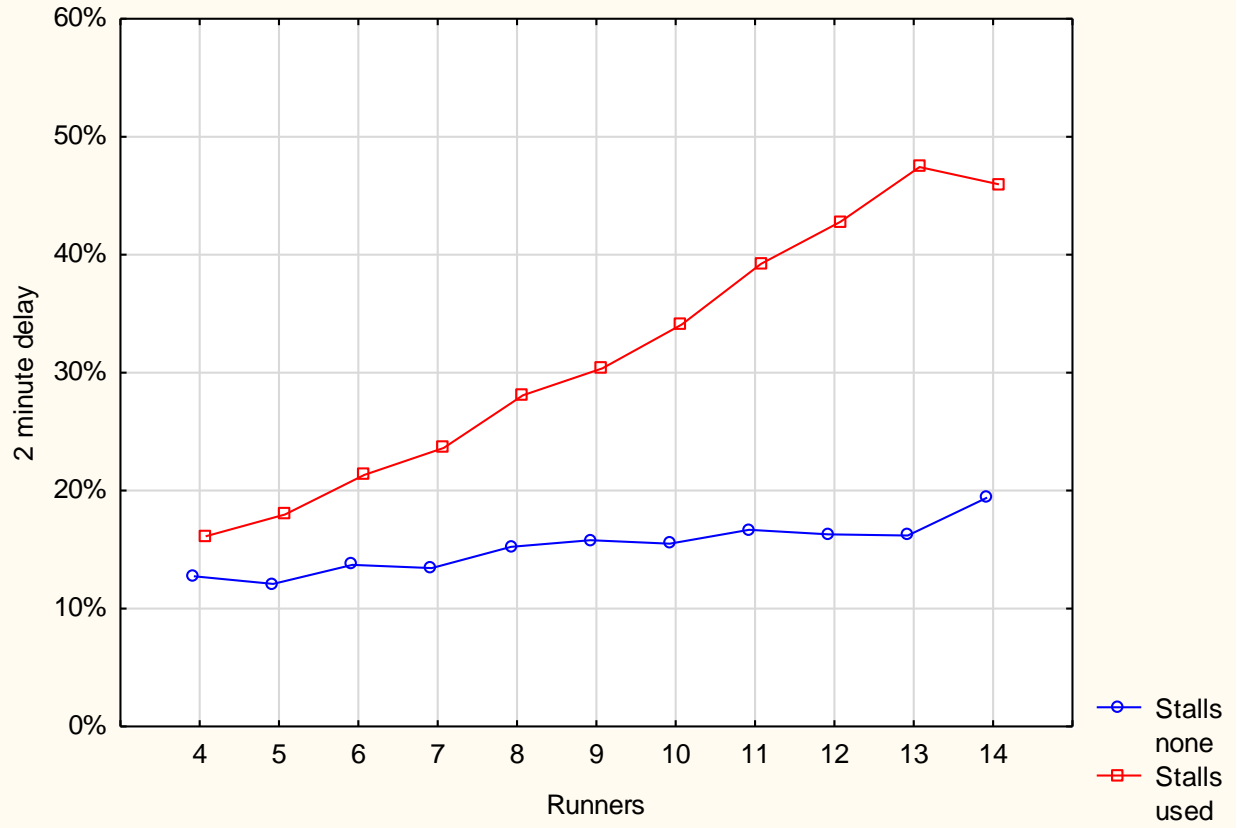
Percentage of races starting more than two minutes late (all runners)

	GB	IRE	Combined
A/W	33.6%	31.8%	32.7%
Turf	33.0%	32.9%	32.9%
Hurdle	14.9%	16.6%	15.8%
Chase	14.7%	17.2%	15.9%
NHF	18.9%	14.4%	16.7%
All types	23.0%	22.6%	22.9%

This shows delays for A/W and Turf racing are twice as likely than NH racing which is obviously related to the use of starting stalls.

The forum then looked at delay related to field size. This graph shows how the number of runners increase the likelihood of a delay of more than two minutes, the red line showing flat racing and the blue line showing NH racing. It shows that for fields of 13 and 14 runners there is close to a 50% chance the race will be delayed by at least two minutes.

Percentage of races delayed by more than 2 minutes
For races where stalls are used compared to where no stalls are used.



Additionally, a review by course was undertaken looking at races where races went off with a two minute delay. To facilitate a comparison only races that had nine or ten runners were included in the sample, thereby removing any issue with courses that have a higher proportion of larger fields.

This table is for flat courses and shows the percentage of races being late and the total of races in the sample.

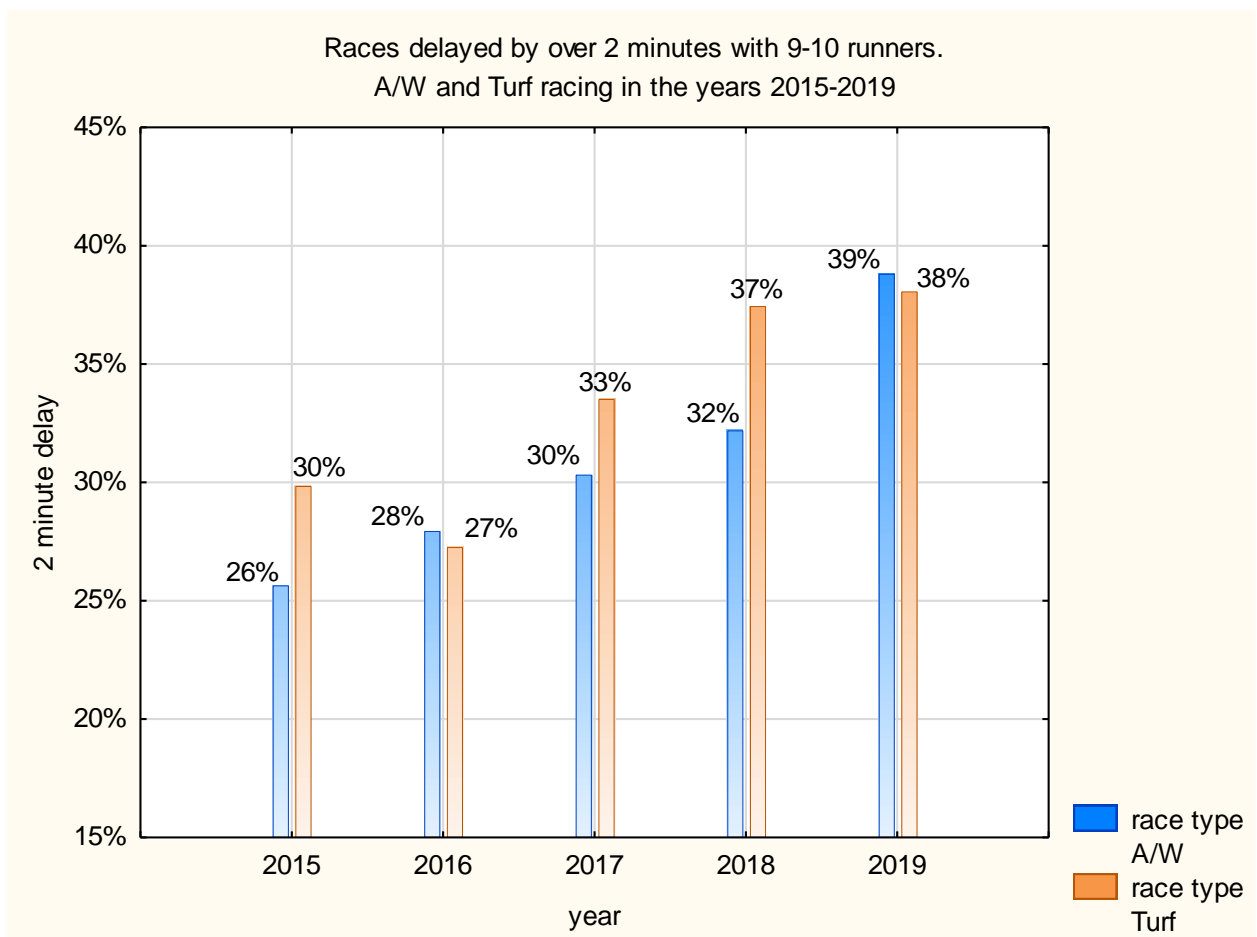
	Flat Course	Two minute delay	N
1	Wetherby	60.5%	38
2	Newbury	52.4%	124
3	Ffos Las	51.6%	31
4	Epsom	47.8%	67
5	Chelmsford City	44.3%	521
6	Thirsk	43.4%	145
7	Chester	42.2%	147
8	Newmarket	41.8%	316
9	Ascot	40.5%	131
10	Haydock	38.9%	157
11	Yarmouth	38.3%	120
12	Sandown	37.9%	132
13	Newcastle	36.9%	317
14	Ripon	35.7%	126
15	Redcar	35.2%	159
16	Musselburgh	34.5%	145
17	Windsor	34.1%	208
18	Salisbury	33.6%	152
19	Kempton	33.4%	557
20	Nottingham	33.2%	187
21	Pontefract	32.6%	141
22	Lingfield	32.2%	692
23	Bath	32.2%	115
24	Carlisle	30.9%	110
25	York	28.9%	114
26	Doncaster	28.7%	164
27	Chepstow	28.6%	133
28	Brighton	26.3%	133
29	Southwell	25.6%	277
30	Hamilton	25.5%	137
31	Goodwood	25.2%	143
32	Ayr	23.8%	151
33	Beverley	23.8%	189

34	Leicester	23.6%	161
35	Wolverhampton	22.4%	841
36	Catterick	21.5%	130

Wetherby, Ffos Las and Chelmsford are some of the newest courses to introduce flat racing and appear in positions 1,3 and 5. However Newcastle's flat AW track which opened in 2016 appears in position 13. Many of the UK's premier tracks, Newbury, Epsom, Chester, Newmarket and Ascot all appear in the top 10.

The difference in the AW tracks ability to run racing to time is striking, Wolverhampton has just 22% of races run late, which is impressive considering they have 812 races in the dataset, whereas Chelmsford is double that with 44% going off late. (Southwell 25.6%, Lingfield 32.2%, Kempton 33.4%, Newcastle 36.9%).

One area of concern is the trend that shows that more races were delayed in 2019 than any of other years in the sample, the graph below shows this more clearly.



For National Hunt racing the following table shows each course for the last 5 years, for this analysis only races with 20 runners or less were included.

	NH Course	Two minute delay	N
1	Cheltenham	36.8%	489
2	Chepstow	27.7%	520
3	Market Rasen	26.8%	736
4	Aintree	25.9%	255
5	Wetherby	25.6%	516
6	Huntingdon	23.4%	565
7	Bangor	21.1%	479
8	Kelso	20.1%	457
9	Sandown	20.1%	304
10	Ffos Las	20.0%	445
11	Hexham	19.8%	496
12	Newcastle	19.7%	330
13	Ayr	19.5%	435
14	Carlisle	17.4%	397
15	Plumpton	16.5%	508
16	Newbury	16.5%	352
17	Towcester	15.9%	258
18	Uttoxeter	15.6%	844
19	Ascot	15.1%	258
20	Leicester	14.9%	276
21	Cartmel	13.5%	303
22	Warwick	13.3%	587
23	Sedgefield	13.0%	625
24	Wincanton	12.1%	514
25	Hereford	12.0%	217
26	Exeter	11.4%	519
27	Haydock	10.8%	278
28	Doncaster	10.6%	359
29	Stratford	9.2%	574
30	Fontwell	9.0%	748
31	Worcester	8.7%	692
32	Lingfield	8.4%	178
33	Taunton	8.2%	466
34	Kempton	8.1%	432
35	Ludlow	7.6%	526
36	Newton Abbot	7.2%	572
37	Catterick	7.2%	293
38	Musselburgh	7.1%	340
39	Perth	6.4%	516
40	Fakenham	6.1%	359
41	Southwell	5.7%	671

This shows that Southwell gets nearly 95% of its races away within two minutes of the advertised start time whereas the UK's top NH track, Cheltenham, struggles to get two out of three away.

Unlike the flat courses there has been no significant increase in the delays over the last 5 years for NH racing.

More recently courses are being requested to delay racing to avoid a clash of a late running, while these races will have been included in the figures the numbers of 9 or 10 runner races being delayed for this reason are not believed to be statistically significant and cannot account for the trend in more late running races.

Summary

Delays to racing are very annoying to those watching racing. When races go off late they can create clashes and consequently there is a tendency for bettors not to bet on the subsequent race as the delayed race is still in progress. While the move to non-standard times will allow some flexibility the HBF believes that there needs to be a substantial improvement to the current level of delays to races otherwise it is believed the number of races that clash will remain despite the move to non-standard times.

For this reason the HBF calls for:

- Stewards to record and publish the reason when a race is delayed by more than two minutes.
- Greater efforts to be made to reduce the upward trend in late running races.
- Courses to review the interval needed between races especially when they anticipate large fields being declared.
- A review of timings at racecourses (horses into parade ring, jockeys mounting, exit to start etc) especially at those courses which appear at the top of the tables.
- UK and Irish racing authorities to work closely to avoid clashes.