

Horse Racing Around the World: Norway

Racing In The Land Of The Vikings

Story and photos by Kimberly Rinker



A patron studies his program as horses thunder down the stretch at the Ovrevoll Galoppbane.

One and a half centuries ago, if one lived in Norway and had a racehorse, they had to wait for winter and Sunday afternoons, when on their way home from church they could race their horses across frozen lakes.

Norway is located in the western portion of the Scandinavian Peninsula, abutting Sweden to the east, and is just north of Denmark. Spreading along 148,747 square miles, Norway boasts a population of just 5.1 million people and is the second least densely populated country in Europe. Its eastern border alongside Sweden is the longest uninterrupted boarder in Europe, while its western, extensive coastline along the Atlantic Ocean is the site of some of the world's most beautiful fjords. As well, Norway is laced with nature reserves of minerals, seafood, lumber and hydro-electrical power.

The country most recently celebrated their 200-year anniversary on May 17, 2014.

Although there are 12 pari-mutuel racetracks in Norway, there is only one Thoroughbred oval, located just outside the capital city of Oslo. All of the other major raceways are harness tracks.

Located in the area known as Baerum, in the village of Jar at the head

of the Oslo Fjord, the Ovrevoll Galoppbane (gallop track) sports both a turf and an all-weather track. It was first opened to the public in 1932 by the King (Haakon VII) and Queen (Maud) of Norway.

Ovrevoll is considered to be one of the finest raceways in Scandinavia, and the area surrounding it, while only 15 minutes from downtown Oslo, has a uniquely rural feel and idyllic atmos-

phere to it. One can easily stroll through the small paddock area to the grandstand and back, and hang out at the cozy walking ring in between both areas. The track has a county fair feel to it and the people are quite welcoming and friendly.

Racing takes place from mid-April until early December. The dirt track—used as a training surface year-round, is just shy of 7/8 of a mile and has lights for night racing. The turf course—at one mile and a quarter—is used for racing only, or for training on special occasions just before big events.

Most of the major races are turf tests, and Norwegian Derby Day, featured annually on the last Sunday in August, plays host to the 1,800,000NK (Norwegian Kroner) Marit Sveaas Memorial (Gr 3) for two-year-olds, as well as a host of other top events. Hurdle contests are also held at varying times throughout the season on the turf course.

This year, Derby Day will be held on August 24.

FORM NUMBERS & THE RACES

All racehorses are assigned a “form number” for wagering purposes. This number indicates the horse's ability, and



A racetrack publicity poster for Ovrevoll Galoppbane.



A horse is walked by his groom at the Ovrevoll Galoppbane, just outside of Oslo, Norway.

will rise or fall depending on the status of a horse's performance from start to start.

For a horse to be assigned a form number, he or she must have three career starts, and must have finished second in two races or won at least one race. The form number thus determines the amount of weight to be carried as well. The form numbers on all horses in Scandinavia range from 40 to 100, using



the theory that one kilogram equals 0.2 seconds equals one length.

Many Norwegian racing terms are similar to North American jargon. For instance, a Maidenløp is a maiden event, while a Noviseløp is for horses with just one win to their credit, and those horses carry a fixed weight. Aldersvektløp are stake

events, typically carrying fixed weights, dependent upon age, not form numbers. Generally, fillies and mares carry less weight when racing against stallions and geldings. In the Norwegian Derby, all male horses carry 59 kg, while distaff competitors carry 57 kg.

The Norwegian Jockey Club works to promote the breeding and racing of Thoroughbreds throughout Norway and Scandinavia, with a membership cost of approximately \$500 per year. The club holds classes on breeding and racing, and offers visits to breeding farms and field trips to training centers and mornings at the racetrack, as well as social excursions.

WAGERING

Wagering on Norwegian horse racing is controlled and overseen by Norsk Rikstoto, which also manages all of the nation's racecourses. Established in 1982, this national tote company opened as the first nationally recognized off-track betting system. All of the races are broad-

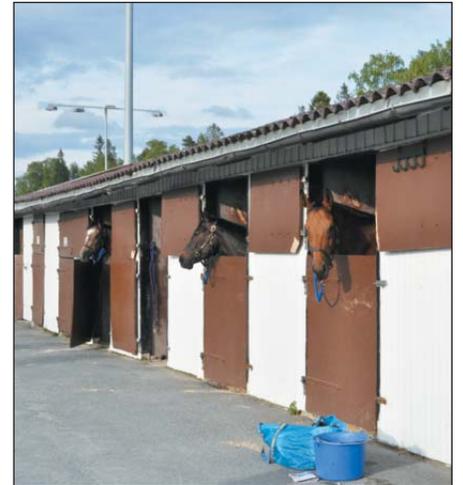
(Left) A Norwegian thoroughbred surveys his surroundings from his stall at the Ovrevoll Galoppbane.



A handler walks a Norwegian thoroughbred around the paddock walking ring at Ovrevoll Galoppbane.



The saddling area and outdoor café at Ovrevoll Galoppbane.



The Ovrevoll Galoppbane race paddock.

cast on the company's television channel, Rikstoto Direkte. The government provides a legal framework for the wagering system, and also notches 3.7 percent of Norsk Rikstoto's gross revenue in fees annually.

Including both Thoroughbred and Standardbred trainers, there are 200 professional trainers and more than 6,000 racehorses currently plying their wares in the Norwegian racing industry.



Off-track wagering parlors are distinguished by these Norsk Rikstoto signs, and can be found throughout the city of Oslo, Norway.