

# Aintree

## Location, Parking and Access



The course is located north of Liverpool on the A59 and is best approached from either the M57 or M58.

Once on the A59 follow the AA signs. During the Grand National meeting there is a park and ride at J8 of the M57, unless you have pre-booked a parking space at the course then you must use the park and ride.

From the south leave the M6 at J21A to join the M62. Remain on the M62 to J6 and then join the M57. From the north leave the M6 at J26, joining the M58. Remain on the M58 for its entire length and then follow the direction signs.

From Liverpool itself follow the signs for Preston, then the A59 and finally the course direction signs.

Parking arrangements change depending on the type of meeting. For the general fixtures there is free parking at the course itself. However leaving the car park after racing is a nightmare, it can easily take up to an hour to leave after racing and there is no stewarding on exiting, resulting in a free for all.

For the Grand National festival there is very limited on site parking and for each of the three days the on course parking charge is £22, £30 and £35 respectively – this has to be booked in advance. There used to be a Park and Ride scheme but this has been stopped.

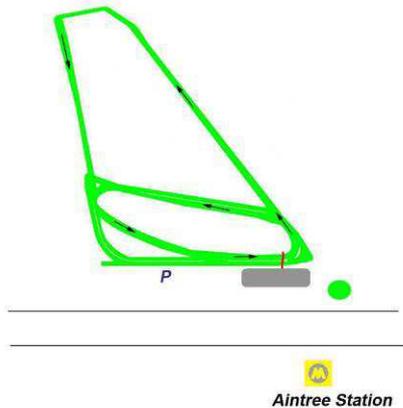
The easiest way to get to Aintree, and this is particularly true during the Grand National meeting, is by public transport. Aintree station is located across the road from the main entrance to the course and it is served by regular trains from Liverpool Central and Ormskirk. There is also a bus shuttle service in operation from Liverpool City centre to the course throughout the Grand National meeting.

The nearest airport is Liverpool John Lennon, a 20 minute drive away.

One important thing to factor in when travelling is that racegoers at the Grand National meeting will be subjected to security checks when they arrive at the course, this can result in long queues, so aim to arrive **at least** two hours before the start of racing.

## Course Layout

In reality there are two distinct racecourses at Aintree. The Mildmay Course is a "traditional" course about 1½ miles round, whilst the National course with its spruce fences is 2¼ miles round. Both courses are left handed (anti-clockwise) and both are level with no noticeable undulations, indeed they are almost completely flat.



The major characteristic of the Mildmay course is its sharpness and it favours fast, front running types.

## Admission

There are differing pricing structures for the Grand National meeting and the remainder of the fixtures. For general meetings there is a single enclosure with a single admission price of £20.

For the Thursday and Friday of the Grand National festival there are two enclosures. Effectively a Members and Tattersalls system is in operation – but with different names. Members prices for the Thursday range from £40 - £50 (The cheaper being standing the more expensive with reserved seating). Tattersalls admission for the Thursday is £21. On the Friday prices start from £64 for members and £32 for Tattersalls. There is limited reserved seating available in Tattersalls, advance booking essential, costs for each of the days is £18, £36 and £50 respectively.

On Grand National day itself the prices go through the roof with Members badges starting from £85 and Tattersalls badges costing £43. There is a third enclosure in operation on Grand National day, however this is alongside the National course with no access to the main enclosures, tickets for this area cost £19. A word of caution, the entire Grand National festival is very popular and it is almost essential to book in advance, especially if you want to go into the Members areas.

Some group discounts are available for some enclosures at the National meeting, these must be booked at least 3 months in advance. Children under 16 are admitted to Tattersalls free on Thursday and Friday of the National meeting and for £5 on Grand National day itself. Children are admitted free to the John Smiths No Nonsense enclosure.

Dress Code: There is no official dress code, smart is preferred.

**Discounts: Seniors**  **Disabled**  **Group**

## Overview

Ask a non racing person to name a racecourse and it is a fair chance Aintree is one of the courses they will know about. Intrinsicly linked to the most famous jumping race in the world Aintree is, of course, home to the Grand National.

I have a big bugbear with Aintree though, so let me get it out of the way first and that is the matter of security. I was present at Aintree when Merseyside police panicked and grossly overreacted to the 1997 IRA bomb scare. Since then a great deal of time, money and effort has been put in to increasing security at the Grand National meeting, to the extent that this must be the most over policed sporting event in the country. What is annoying is the security is, in my view, as much going through the motions as a meaningful security exercise ... inspections of bags are at best cursory. The person in front of me, for example, set off the alarm and was told to approach a guard for manual screening ... he simply walked off in the other direction and was not challenged.

Aintree is a course designed for the big occasion and it has spent a great deal of money investing in new infrastructure. Rather than going for a big bang approach like Ascot, Aintree opted for a phased approach and although it took longer it has meant each phase has been introduced with fewer teething problems. The problem now is that Aintree has some very high class facilities but, arguably, too few meetings to fully take advantage of them.



**County and Queen Mother Stands**

There are, in effect, two racecourses at Aintree. The Mildmay course which is a more 'traditional' course and the Grand National course with its famous, some would say infamous, spruce fences.

The Mildmay course is relatively compact, viewing of which is pretty good from the stands. Viewing of the National Course is frankly poor. You will need an excellent pair of binoculars to see the entire course and even then the view most of the time the "view" is of the horses rear ends as they head out, or head on as they return. There are, however, plenty of big screens to cover the fields on the big course.

The day of the first inspection was the first day of the National Festival in the company of 27,000 other racegoers, despite these numbers it still felt very comfortable and it was easy to get around the enclosures without feeling claustrophobic. Friday attracts around 55,000 and that number is on the edge of the comfort zone. On National day itself it is very, arguably too, crowded.

Contrast this to the non-Festival days, where only a couple of thousand, at most, attend and the place can seem like a ghost town and it is difficult to get any type of decent atmosphere.

Having decried the crowds, the atmosphere at National day is something you should experience at least once in your life. OK you will see more on TV at home but what you won't get is the sheer buzz of the place, best exemplified by the roar as the race sets off.



**Earl Of Derby and Earl Of Sefton Stands**

Alternatively if you have never been to a festival meeting before and you find the prospect of the massed crowds too much, then go on the Thursday where there is still a great atmosphere but with a less claustrophobic feeling.

One gripe at the festival meeting is it is difficult to work out exactly which areas your particular badge will allow you access to and which are excluded, however this is something you will soon pick up ... especially with the very heavy stewarding. The number of stands is bewildering although at the festival they come at a price. At the time of updating this review (September 2007) tickets for Grand National day 2008 have almost completely sold out, and the Friday is not too far behind. If you want to visit the National and want a place in one of the stands then the advice is get on the Aintree mailing list and book as soon as the tickets go on sale.

If you go to any of the days at the festival meeting, make a point to arrive early and take the opportunity to walk the National course. You won't be allowed on the hallowed turf itself but you can walk the inside road and get a chance to see the famous and infamous fences up close ... do this and you will never look at the Grand National in the same light again ... the fences are awesome.

On the non-festival days racegoers effectively have the run of the enclosures. All of the stands offer excellent viewing facilities, especially the roof of the County and Queen Mother stands, however these are open to the elements, so not much fun if the weather is wet.

### **Best Viewing Positions**



The roof areas of any of the main stands affords the best viewing and at the non-National meetings are accessible to all racegoers.

For the Grand National meeting itself they are the highest prices tickets and they sell out very quickly attesting to their popularity.

Viewing from the Earl Of Derby and Earl of Sefton stands is good, although these stands are beyond the winning post.

For the Mildmay course viewing at ground level is good with most of the course visible. Of course from the higher levels viewing is excellent.

On the National course, by its very nature, viewing is not possible with the naked eye – unless you have exceptional vision. From the roofing and higher levels it is possible to follow the race with a decent pair of binoculars.

### **Catering**

If you have the money there are numerous dining packages available at the Grand National meeting. For the Thursday restaurant packages range from £126 to £255 a head. On Friday these start from £155 and on the big day itself prices range from £190 through to £409.

For those of us on more modest budgets there are far too many dining options than is possible to detail here, suffice to say the options are there, but at a price.

Most of the eating options come from the ubiquitous mobile units, the main saving grace being that with the sheer number of outlets it is possible to find some real gems amongst the more traditional grease wagons. Two standouts were a gourmet sausage unit offering some excellent sausages in a bap for £4.90.

There was a burger stall selling beef burgers for £6.30 (£6.80 with cheese and £7.80 with cheese and bacon).

Other options included, noodle bar (£5 - £6.50), Baguettes (£5.20), Hog Roast (Roll £5.50, baguette £6.50), Steak Roll (£6), Fish and Chips (£7.80), Chips (£3).

The main way Aintree wants to get your money though is through the alcohol, it's impossible to go anywhere without being confronted by either a bar or mobile beer vendor. Looking at the percentage of racegoers walking round with drinks in their hands it looks to be a successful tactic. Bitter is charged at £3.80 a pint and lager £4.40.

*Prices correct as at April 2013*

### **Ancillaries**

#### **Bookmakers**

Needless to say at the National meeting there are many bookmakers, not only in the main betting ring but at various locations throughout the course. (On the Thursday of the festival meeting I counted at least 70). The ring is generally strong with an average over round of around 1.5% a runner.

#### **Racecard**

A large, glossy, racecard albeit with a great deal of advertising. All the usual features are included, plus several interesting articles. The cost at the National meeting was £4

The only minor gripe was it was difficult to find the race details in amongst everything else, however that is partly my fault for not using the index.

#### **Toilets**

Large numbers in the various stands which appeared to cope with the numbers. There were also a large number of temporary facilities to supplement the usual options. However by mid afternoon these were looking tatty and dirty with paper towels strewn all over the floors.

## **Parade Ring**



The parade ring is located behind the stands and a new horse walk leads the horses between the stands through the midst of the crowds. There is a large tiered viewing area at one end of the parade ring. As well as the tiered viewing area there is a grass mound surrounding most of the ring offering good viewing. Unsurprisingly the ring is bigger

than at most courses.

The winners enclosure is located at one end of the ring and is functional, it is questionable as to whether it has the same ambiance and feel as the old unsaddling enclosure.

The pre-parade ring is located behind the weighing room. All racegoers, except those in the Steeplechase enclosure have access to view the parade ring.

## **Non Racing Attractions**

Liverpool, European City of Culture 2008 is the primary local destination. Steeped in maritime history it is a vibrant city. Of course in the 60's it was home to the Beatles and a visit to the Cavern Club is a must for music fans.

If you aren't a city fan there are the beaches of Southport, or a little further afield, the decadence of Blackpool

## **Contact Details**

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**Ownership** | Jockey Club

<b>Inspection Dates</b>		
<b><i>Date</i></b>	<b><i>Weather</i></b>	<b><i>Type</i></b>
12/04/07	Hot and sunny	7 jump (Festival)
28/10/07	Sunny with a cool breeze	7 jump weekend
03/04/08	Overcast with some drizzle	7 jump (Festival)
23/11/08	Very wet, almost monsoon	7 jump weekend
02/04/09	Overcast, becoming sunny later on	7 jump (Festival)
24/10/10	Sunny with a chill wind	6 jump weekend
08/12/12	Bright becoming overcast later	7 jump weekend
04/04/13	Broken cloud and windy	7 jump (Festival)

