

Tracking Changes...

<http://www.wix.com/gavdobson/qdobson7/oped>



We've all been there.

"There" being the futile attempt to spot a specific horse as a multitude of runners hurtles towards the winning post – a Technicolor array of caps and silks atop chestnuts, browns and bays.

In the vast majority of instances, the race is entering the final stages as the horse in question is located, their winning chance over - along with the watchers fun.

The occurrence is all too frequent for many people involved in the sport, and it is a situation where technology can lend a helping hand.

Enter Trakus.

Initially designed for real-time data collection in sports such as American Football, Ice Hockey, NASCAR, and PGA Golf, it has since been successfully adapted to the sport of horse racing.

The wireless system works by 'tracking' each runner in a race using an ultra-lightweight credit card sized radio transponder placed in each runner's saddlecloth. Each transponder communicates with a handful of strategically placed antennas, linked together by fibre-optic cabling around the circumference of the racecourse, the two combining to instantaneously provide the precise real-time location of each horse.

The data generated by the system is then output to the Trakus Virtuoso™ Digital Sport Information platform and can be used in numerous ways.

Number.5 in the R2 Collective's 'Innovations of the Decade 2000-2010' the system was first installed at Woodbine – Toronto, Canada in 2006.

Now deployed at a number of major racecourses throughout the World, including most recently the ultra-impressive Meydan in Dubai, the Massachusetts-based company claims the technology is more accurate than conventional GPS or any other positioning technique currently available.

Woodbine supplements their live race video broadcast with Trakus data forming a split-screen layout. Coloured icons or 'chicklets' display the current position of each horse throughout the entire race. Similarly, Kentucky-based Keeneland embeds a constantly updating rundown of the field order towards the bottom of the visual broadcast.

How ever it is used, the Trakus system is constantly on-hand to display the exact location of each horse at every point in the race.

Successful US Racing mogul and Trakus Chairman, Barry Weisbord, is understandably proud of the system, "Nobody in the World does what we do at the minute. When I was first introduced to Trakus, I thought it was the biggest tool available to try and make horse racing more understandable, and although Trakus makes racing easily more understandable for the novice, the ability to identify every horse in the race, quickly, helps anybody watching the race."



The capability of Trakus to make any race easier to understand could certainly play a pivotal role in the current 'Racing for Change' initiative in the UK – a campaign with a strategic goal of bringing new customers and new spending into the sport.

Weisbord, along with CEO Bob McCarthy are both fully aware of Trakus' capacity to improve the experience of the British racing fan.

"We've had a series of productive initial discussions with British racing organisations and we are excited about the opportunity to introduce Trakus in the British racing market. We are aware of the Racing for Change initiative and think Trakus could potentially be a very good fit with the goals of the program," said McCarthy.

Weisbord is equally enthusiastic about a possible link-up in the UK, "We would really like the opportunity to explore Trakus in the UK, as not only are the on-course fans enhanced, but anybody watching on the TV, the internet or in the betting shop has their viewing of the race enhanced also. There's nobody in the World who doesn't want to know where their horse is during a horse race"

British racecourses, with their own unique twists, turns and geographical idiosyncrasies, many bearing little resemblance to the left-hand ovals of the US, would not, according to Weisbord, hinder the implementation of the system, "From a technology point of view, making it work in the UK is no different to making it work anywhere else in the World. It doesn't matter what the geometry of the course is, the total area will be surrounded by fibre-optic cabling, meaning that any part of the course, including chutes etc will be incorporated. Somewhere like Kempton would be an obvious choice for installation but to think that this technology would not be helpful at places such as Epsom or Ascot would be wrong, it would be very helpful."

Although the real-time application of the system is certainly impressive during a race, Trakus truly enters the 21st century with its post-race data manipulation.

Not only can 3-Dimensional animation replays be viewed instantaneously on-course, therefore giving the ability to closely examine the trip of every horse in the race quite possibly a useful tool for the stewards room – but visitors to the Trakus website can analyse races from many different angles. The most impressive of which being the incredibly realistic 'jockeys-eye' view, handing the viewer the reins to the mount of their choice.

However, perhaps the most cutting-edge application of the system is the ability to forward a 3-D animated replay to a mobile telephone.

In an age where mobile phones and the internet play such a central role in everyday life, these are excellent methods of promoting the sport to the younger generation, something Weisbord is very aware of, "The idea that we can talk to people in their 20's – in a way that they like to be spoken to – is very important."

Along with the ability to make a race easier to follow, a feature that may introduce a new demographic to the sport, Trakus has a number of additional uses for seasoned horse racing aficionados.

The T-Net database of supplementary information gathered by the system is available to view for every runner tracked. The data compiled includes, total distance travelled during the race, amount of ground covered in comparison to its opponents and the average and peak speed, in Mph.

The capture of sectional/fractional times at defined distances during the race is also inherent within the system, something that been available in most countries around the World with the exception of the UK – for a number of years.

The aim of the Trakus board is clear – they hope to deploy the system at all major racecourses around the world, with McCarthy stating the company goal as, "to help automate the collection of traditional performance measures, and to enable a next generation of innovative, user-friendly, multi-platform applications for on-track/infield boards, television, HD/3D-TV, broadband Internet, and mobile devices."

Hopefully, the UK powers that be share some common goals with Barry Weisbord and Bob McCarthy, as if implemented and embraced in the correct way; Trakus has the potential to really 'Change Racing' in Britain, not by a short head, but by a distance.

GD
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More information: www.trakus.com
To view Trakus in operation visit:
www.youtube.com/user/TrakusRacing

