




HOR\$ENSE

"The PRICE-PERFORMANCE LEADER in thoroughbred handicapping software" SM

Presents the **Expert-ease** newsletter

I can remember a time when...
there was NO fall racing... 😞



Joe's Corner: Detroit breakdown...

... it's a Motor City Shakedown!!! – J. Geils

As **Hor\$ense** turns 35, I'm reminded of how it changed my thinking on handicapping. ***It seems just like yesterday...***

In late 1990, while still living a stone's throw away from Del Mar, my employer decided to close up shop in San Diego. Being an "AI specialist", there wasn't a local market for my skillset. After two years of "grunt" programming jobs, I decided to jump back into the AI pool... but we had to move. ***So long Del Mar*** *sniffle*

But where to, Joe? It was off to metro Detroit. ***Odd choice, no?*** Not really, as the "BIG 3" automakers wanted to use AI in new ways. It helped that I had lived there 15 years earlier, when my mom took me in to give college one last run. So, in 1993, we were off to "The D", where I made new friends... at the track!!!

Yes, they had thoroughbred racing! The "main stage" was at Detroit Race Course – DRC to the locals – and it wasn't much to look at... but it was a HUGE deal for the local racing crowd. I remember my first trip there... I ditched work for opening day in 2003... but it was SNOWED OUT! ***Ahh, Dee-troit racing!***

While I was in town – for six years, as it turned out – I kept at it with **Hor\$ense** (starting the conversion to Windows, and adding more AI), wrote articles for *PRN* and other mags, did seminars in and around the track, got my first phone wagering account (with NYRA), and hung out with some pretty smart handicappers.

Ten years in, and I was just scratching the surface...

Yours in Racing,

Joe

Quick Hits

Places to Be

At the Track	Get back!!!
Away from the Action	Anywhere!!
Race Books	Come to Vegas!
In-person Tourneys	Good Luck...

Things to Do... now & forever

- Keep accurate wagering records!
- Skip a race now and then!
- Stop and smell the roses!

Fact that sounds made up...

After 30+ years, BRIS has raised the price on their datafiles! There are many handicapping programs that use these files; with **Hor\$ense** it was in place before 1993, when the price dropped to \$1 per card. It has been the best deal in handicapping for three-plus decades!!!

Alas, the price went up to \$1.50 per card on September 1, 2024... and I am gladly paying the increase!!!

Expert Quick Trick

If you play multiple surfaces in a day AND have "wet" conditions, the new (in '24) "wet/dry" tool is just for you! The old "menu bar toggle" has been replaced by the Temporary Settings option (in the Settings menu) that controls the specific conditions at a track (i.e., "wet" dirt, but "dry" turf).

No more switching back & forth!!!



Featured – Some Breeders’ Cup History...

I have a secret... I love the Breeders’ Cup races!!! As we approach 40 (FORTY!) years of World Championship caliber racing – in 1984, the inaugural races were run in my back yard, at Hollywood Park – I’m struck by so many things that have seemed to have gone right, in an industry that’s not all that well known for “getting it right”. In honor of the occasion, let me hand-pick some events that have stuck with me... **shall we?**

The First Year

As the gates opened on November 10, 1984, the crowd of more than 62,000 watched a new era in racing begin, with seven championship races. Little did we know that it would FINALLY be the way we would identify the best horses of the year in the various categories. Previously, owners and trainers of the contenders deprived fans of seeing their favorite horses running after the traditional summer meets ended... and we didn’t like it. This event was the start of the “thoroughbred playoffs”... and it sure has been a fun ride! I’ll admit that I was a skeptic, figuring that it would be a fad... **BOY, WAS I WRONG!!!**

The “Pick-6 Heist”

In 2002, some enterprising knuckleheads decided that they would take down the pick-6 with some “programming savvy”. The software “genius” and the two other stooges figured that nobody would notice the skullduggery, but didn’t count on a 43-1 shot winning the last leg (making it the only winning ticket, at \$3 million-plus). We were told that the “winning” ticket looked very sketchy – singles in the first four legs, then all horses in the final two legs – to the point where even the dumbest bettor on the planet knew it was a fake. I thought that it would be the “beginning of the end” for the event... and I was wrong (again)!

A Two-Day Festival!!!

Just FIVE years later – at Monmouth Park (my favorite second-level track) – the event was expanded to a two-day affair. The 2007 edition had three races on Friday and eight on Saturday, and it felt like a weird experiment. The experiment lasted until 2018, when the Churchill Downs edition was the first to hold all five of the juvenile races on the Friday card. Last year – at my first “home” track of Santa Anita – 14 races were run over the two-day American festival... and it’s a beautiful thing. **Del Mar awaits!!!**

Location, Location and ... Location!

Hollywood (Park) got the party started, and locations have always played a big role in the success of what is NOW the premiere event of the year (sorry, Triple Crown, you’re SO last century). Here are some quick hits on the places they’ve been. Among the one-hit wonders – including Aqueduct, Arlington, Lone Star and Monmouth – Woodbine has been the only one held outside of the US. While Churchill Downs and Santa Anita and have had the lion’s share of the races, Del Mar and Keeneland have held six of the last ten... AND it returns to Bing’s seaside playhouse in 2025. Looking to the future, I don’t expect many changes – the redone Belmont will get another one – but what about some NEW spots? A rebuilt Pimlico would be a good addition, and I’d be intrigued at it going to Fair Grounds (in New Orleans). **Road Trip!!!**

What about All-Weather?

In 2009, the first all-weather (AW) main track races were held at... Santa Anita! Bet you forgot about that!!! So, other than Woodbine, where (and how) could they run AW championship races EVERY YEAR? Well, Gulfstream is ready, Belmont will have one soon... and Pimlico is considering it. The AW races could be held on the Thursday (or the Saturday) before, at any of these tracks. Spread the JOY!!!

The HORSES...

It’s not just the champions that we watch. We’re a sucker for the stories behind the horses. Cody’s Wish was the latest, and there have been many others. Who remembers Zenyatta beating the boys in 2009? And, let’s not forget the shippers, who have really made it a WORLD championship: Europeans came over first, and more recently Japanese horses have made the trek across the Pacific. Finally, let’s not forget about our bets... nowhere else can you regularly get HUGE prices on Grade/Group 1 winners!!!

Well, that’s it! Now, all you have to do is sit back and watch the show... ENJOY!!!

Handicapping Tips – The Evolution of Speed...

Going from a “rough” start to “smooth” sailing...

Once upon a time (before computers), everybody figured out Speed by hand...

And, it wasn't a very big deal!!! You had a “home track” – my dad first took me to Santa Anita – and the fractions and final time were only influenced by the DRF Speed Rating (SR) and Track Variant (TV), so speed was “easy-peasy” to figure. Nothing too “**rough**” about it, but...

As a young adult with a car and a (very) modest paycheck, I ventured to the other tracks on the So Cal circuit – mainly Hollywood Park and Pomona – and quickly learned about the “**rough**” edges caused by the differences in the other tracks; the Pomona “bullring” and the longer Hollypark stretch were a new experience. Since I hadn't had to deal with shippers very much, I struggled with creating good fractions. After I figured that out, I set my sights on making good sprint-route conversion times. These were truly my “**rough times**” as a speed handicapper...

And then I discovered TWO things that changed my speed handicapping forever. First, in the early 1980s, this sleepy little town called Las Vegas started taking bets from all around the country, in something called a “race book”. I tried to create times for the “far-away” tracks, but they were not nearly accurate enough. Once I found the “3-year-best times” tables in the DRF, I was able to use those final times to create very accurate conversions. This improvement was great... but it was very slow and tedious! I *STILL* needed help with the “**rough**” patches...

Discovery #2 was the Texas Instruments programmable calculator! With it, I could quickly calculate the track difference ratio and apply it to the times I created. While this cut down on the time needed, it was still more time consuming than I wanted. Given that the fledgling “personal computer” (PC) wasn't cheap enough in 1983, I toiled with my semi-manual “system” for a few more years. When the PC became affordable, it changed my speed game!

The first thing I did with my PC was to write a routine that would take the “3-year-best times” (that I stored in a file) from ALL of the tracks that the DRF provided. This let me compare them to the raw times from the PPs much quicker than I had ever done before. One problem was that I *STILL* needed to write each one down in “the form”. This problem was remedied once I got to work on the initial version of **HorSense**; I captured all of the speed information in output files and created screens and printouts to make them readable. This method worked for a long time.

The next step was to “smooth out” my speed estimates, but it took roughly 20 years to get it right. It started with the **Professional** product (in 2005), with my elevated understanding of the issues created by the SR/TV and various class-based speed figures. Over the last two decades, I've used AI to identify the “odd” times, in both the Evaluation and Analysis phases. **And now...**

In 2015, **Expert** was created, and with it came the **HorSmarts** “AI engine”... and it made speed estimating even better. And there are new (in '24) “smoothing” updates... and more are coming!

For Evaluation, my early work only involved class-based time changes. This year, I refined those; I also added a “too much trouble” check. For the future, I'm working on a “super-check”, which will better adjust times based on very specific “matching” rules (with “sprint/route match” and “same track and surface” decision making). This work takes care of individual horses...

For full-field Analysis, there are “too fast” checks for fractions & final times. For the next release, I'm using AI “pace-based” rules that adjust the 1st and 2nd calls AND the PACE/TRIP analysis.

With **Expert**, it's “smooth” sailing for the evolution of Speed handicapping!!!



“Tip by the Book”... the PRN Legacy!!!

*Let's talk about tips from books and newsletters. Some are terrific (inspiring me to do similar work), and others not so much. **Let's delve, shall we?***

Much has been written about the *Phillips Racing Newsletter* (PRN), both in this newsletter and at-large. Always old-school in appearance, where the Dietrich clan (Russ & Alan) manually laid out each page, the tips were interesting... and sometimes they were fantastic!

It was truly the “everyman’s newsletter”, with tips produced by the “father & son” combo (they were prolific) AND their devoted readers. They didn’t always “hit-the-mark”, but some of them provided the impetus to look at handicapping in ways that I hadn’t considered and/or didn’t require a computer to achieve the goal of winning races.

I am ever so grateful for their hard work...

I’m a Travelin’ Man... I Get Around!

*Part of my retirement involves travel... and every trip I take – whether it’s alone or with my wife – I try VERY HARD to stop at a race track. Big or small, I want to see them ALL!!! **So, where in the world is Traveler Joe???***

So, my summer was fun!!! I took a couple of return trips...

The annual visit to Del Mar was a bit different this time around. I could only go one time, so I tried to set up my usual “track handicapper” gig on the same day where I was the handicapper for a friend’s private party. But the track had no opening for that day, so I decided to take a day trip... and almost didn’t get there in time! And nothing beats the beautiful oceanside layout, 70-degree weather AND great racing!

In early September, I headed out for another visit to Kentucky Downs. I flew into Louisville, so that I could take a racing friend with me for the weekend. Nothing quite like a two-hour ride (each way) on the open road, listening to music and talking horses non-stop. By Sunday night, I had tired of THAT drive... and then the next day I drove from Louisville to Chicago, to pick up my wife. **Ah, the open road!!!**

In closing...

File this one under: “oops... things happen” 😞

In 35+ years of **Hor\$ense**, I’ve had the rare occasion when an issue needs an immediate fix that isn’t happening to everyone. Well, after this year’s release, a very small number of customers were getting a “rogue” error. These people were getting an “error code 6 overflow” message in the Analysis section of the program, which was causing **Expert** to fail. It was acting differently on different computers, and other errors are being triggered by it. **Not exactly what I wanted...**

So, a fix was needed... and **fast!** As soon as the first customer let me know, I began testing on all of the EIGHT computers I use for testing, but I couldn’t repeat this error. To fix it, I had to force the errors to happen. Once done, the customer verified my changes, and I was able to quickly get **Expert** working right for EVERYBODY...

Ahhh, just another day in the salt mines...



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What I Do Next...

A Race Screening Tip...

As the calendar flips over to October’s fall racing, I also do a little “flip”. The last three months of the year are a time when I (grudgingly) acknowledge that the 3-year-old crop is mature enough to run against older horses... which means that I remove the 15% race screening penalty for “3-and-up” races.

This step should produce more “playable” races for the rest of the year... and in January I’ll go back to avoiding these races.

Joe Mainardi

Owner, Developer, Writer...

“a one man show”

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