

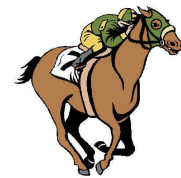


HOR\$ENSE

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

Presents the **Expert-ease** newsletter

What are HRFs, and who needs them? They're Horse Racing Friends... which is something we ALL need right now!!!



Joe's Corner: Meeting HRFs!!!

Old friends move on, new friends enter. But, a recent one made me realize that I have few local horse racing friends (HRFs). **So, what sent you down this rabbit hole, Joe?**

It started with my trip to the East Coast in June. The races were cancelled the day I went to Parx, yet the local HRFs were there to talk horses anyway. Next day, I met up with a customer at Delaware Park, making a new HRF. On day three, it was an "out-of-the blue" HRF at Aqueduct. This all made me long for that HRF connection at home. **But why?**

Being a sociable type, I enjoy in-person interactions with like-minded people. In the 1980s, my HRFs were guys I knew from bowling, and we rarely passed on the chance to go to ANY of the So Cal tracks. **My OG HRFs!** My 1990s HRFs were locals at Detroit Race Course, and the horses were the center of our conversations. **Things change...**

The move to Tucson (AZ) in 1999 effectively ended finding new HRFs, as the local track opened for two weekends a year and Turf Paradise was 90+ minutes away. LA was no better, then I made new HRFs when I moved to Vegas in 2018, before COVID struck! All that will be changing...

I'm returning to the local casino race books... I want to see if HRFs still exist here. We'll see how it goes... maybe I'll learn something! **Let the (next) adventure BEGIN!!!**

Yours in Racing,

Joe

Quick Hits

Places to Be

At the Track	Get there!!!
NOT at the Track	Anywhere!!
Race Books	Find one!
In-person Tourneys	Try it & Love it!

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... **Windows 10 is almost dead!!!**

Technically, support is due to end in late October, but we are being offered support for "one more year", but only if you agree to their terms.

Eventually, we'll need the upgrade...

Expert Quick Trick

With the latest incarnation of AI being recognized as just another corporate "money grab", true "smart" tools will become even more important.

With **Expert**, I'm committed to your improvement as a handicapper, and I'm already working on the 2026 features that should help you. Check out the **Featured** section on the early work I'm doing for ALL of us!!!

Featured – The 2026 Release! *Sorry... WHAT?*

Wait, didn't you just wrap up the 2025 release??? Why, YES, I did!!!

But that's no reason to stop moving forward. I always have things bouncing around in my head, plus ideas from the inquiries I've gotten from customers. Each one gets documented and analyzed. For those that initially make sense, I write some test code to prove that the idea can be coded and tested; the good ones move to extensive testing, which takes anywhere from a few hours to multiple months. And that's why I get started early enough to try to get them all into the next release. **Check out the pre-26 work...**

Pre-Race Screening:

- Dirt and All-Weather surfaces have been separated, in the Pre-Screening Profile layout. This should have been done ages ago... my bad. STATUS: tested and ready for 2026
- Adding a second check for optional claiming races, where the datafile "race code" considers them claiming races, even when there are horses who are not in for the claiming tag. STATUS: ready to start initial testing
- Refining the PASS/PLAY rating for the "Distance on the Surface" part of the overall playability rating. This should result in more PLAY races. STATUS: in final testing
- For the PASS/PLAY decision, adding additional AI checks (only under certain conditions). This will result in more PLAY races. STATUS: in initial testing

Evaluation:

- Adding an additional FINISH factor, using the difference in stretch distances between a race and the PP being evaluated. Based on the PACE/TRIP ("FUMO") definitions, it will impact the FINISH position. STATUS: initial testing completed, fine-tuning the formulas
- In the early stages of using 4½ furlong PPs in 5 and 5½ furlong races. This will allow more PPs to be used. STATUS: data has been gathered and formulas are being reviewed

Analysis:

- Assigned a lower threshold for positive in-the-money records (from 25% to 20%). This will increase the number of IN-MONEY positives scores, and affect the DIG DEEP (individual) analyses. STATUS: tested and ready for 2026
- Looking at adding more "smoothing" for predicted race fractions, based on sprint and route pars for distance subsets (short, medium, long). This is a major refinement and will require a lot of testing. STATUS: will start testing in early 2026
- Evaluating a series of PP-related bonuses to apply under specific conditions. Unsure of impact. STATUS: still gathering information

Overall:

- Work is on-going for the new All-Weather surface at Belmont Park; the first track with FOUR surfaces! The internal workings have been completed, and now I have to wait for races to be run (supposedly starting in September of 2026). STATUS: waiting for actual race data in 2026

This isn't a complete list of improvements! In fact, I haven't even given thought to any other things that could interest me!! But that doesn't mean I'm not thinking about them!!!

Handicapping Tip – Do Something with your Records!

You're keeping diligent wagering records... right? *Now what?*

Those of you who have been keeping tabs on my exploits for any appreciable amount of time know that I'm a **STRONG** believer in keeping records. And it's not *just* to see how I'm doing. I also use the data to determine what's keeping me from getting even better. Let's take a stroll down my "golden path of riches" – whatever THAT means – to unlock the many ways YOU can get the most out of your record keeping. **Let's get started!!!**

Not surprisingly, my earliest record keeping goes back to 1994-95! I had a new program called Excel, and I built a simple spreadsheet. I played mainly New York and So Cal... and my record keeping showed me that I was downright awful! If there was a single lesson that I learned from this, it was that I needed to literally **STOP**... and not return until I came up with a plan that had a real chance of working. My spreadsheet made it easy to analyze what I was doing wrong. Still, it took me **FOUR** years to start wagering again (after moving to Arizona in 1999). I wasn't in "plus" category until 2002-03. I learned about my "high danger plays". **Then along came 2004...**

A very poor start to that year forced me to "figure it out or get out", so I took the spreadsheet information I'd gathered and used it to drive future wagering decisions. **What did you do???** I analyzed five major "problem" categories: **[1]** lowest odds to play (and what was "too low"), **[2]** race/surface types (spoiler: I was terrible with routes on dirt AND synthetic), **[3]** age (specifically races for 2-yo or 3-yo ONLY), **[4]** class for lower levels (learned what the lower limits should be), and **[5]** races that **Hor\$ense** didn't consider GOOD. It was an eye-opening and rewarding experience, where I discovered these keys to becoming a "plus-player", year after year.

I was humming along pretty well... and then I ran headlong into 2007! That was the year that I basically gave back all of my 2004-06 winnings. I had released the **Professional** version (the precursor to **Expert**) in 2005, and thought I had "it" together. I ended up reviewing my "big 5" categories, and learned that the two main issues were that **[1]** "low odds" was a moving target, and **[2]** "3-yo and up" races were money losers until September. Things ran smoothly for eight years... and then the **Expert** program came out in 2015. You see, it got a great review, but...

My own wagers weren't reflecting the high marks that **Expert** got in the review. Partly to "blame" was that my focus had shifted to "Vegas style" multi-day tourneys; I cashed twice (once each in 2015 and 2016), but my daily-play ROI was awful! After three more losing years, something magical happened... **I retired in 2017!!!** This allowed me to work on my two distinct wagering strategies: **[1]** no tournament plays lower than 5-1, and **[2]** "daily-grind" plays of 5/2 or higher.

Since that time, things have gotten much better. I had my biggest tournament score in 2019 (which COVID brought to an abrupt and "forever" halt). My daily plays also improved, with only two (very small) losing years from 2017-24. One change: I had to lower my acceptable "low end" odds: first to 2-1, then down to 9/5; I'm now looking at 8/5 as the next threshold to consider. I only made one other MAJOR change (in 2023): I abandoned the idea that I was actually any good at one-turn routes; I was, in fact, not good at picking them! **Smart man!!!**

As I look to my growth as a handicapper, I always have a focus on how to make **Expert** easier for you to use AND work for me (using AI program refinements and multiple setup options). To improve, you won't know what you need to do unless you keep detailed records; I can help with that... just ask me for my FREE template. **I'm here to help... in any way I can!!!**

It's time to get serious with your record keeping. You have much to learn!!!

“Tip by the Book”... Using computers in 1986?

*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?***

For this issue, I started to “review” Tom Ainslie’s “Complete Guide to Thoroughbred Racing”... but then I changed my tack. **Why?** You see, when I opened those pages in 1986, I was initially excited that the cover of the 3rd edition listed “Computer Handicapping” at the top of his guide to “picking winners”. In reality, it was a half-page of generic ideas on how a computer could *eventually* help. **My hope turned to disappointment...**

And then, inspiration! Like Tom, the top handicappers in the 1980s were not using computers. PCs weren’t cheap, and very few handicappers had programming skills. As a result, books of the time were NOT geared towards software systems. Heck, in 1986 the first version of **Hor\$ense** was a year away from its release. Finding a silver lining, I used Ainslie’s brief coverage of the subject as inspiration to forge ahead with my program!!!

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 visit a race track. Big or small, I want to see them ALL!!! **So, where in the world is Traveler Joe???***

What a weird summer! I haven’t missed the Del Mar summer meet in quite a while... but it happened this year. No guest handicapper gig for the track, no expert handicapper for a private party, no more family there to use as an excuse to go. **Nothing... nada, zip, zilch!**

So, I set my sights on another trip to Kentucky Downs. This year, I would be foregoing my “golden ticket” into the VIP area... so I could hang out with my Louisville HRF! It came with a twist... his first ever visit to Belterra Park (in Cincinnati). **That’s what an HRF is for!!!**

And what a Belterra experience we had! What started out as just the two of us quickly doubled, as **HIS** HRFs wanted to meet us there! I figured “the more the merrier”, and we had a blast!!!

Next up was Kentucky Downs. In a good twist-of-fate, my Louisville HRF is brother-in-law to Junior Alvarado, and he was able to get us into the VIP area. The day started wet and ended sunny. **So good!**

Finally, I just got back from my visit to Santa Anita. Since opening weekend and my 50th high school reunion were aligned, I took the “on-the-way” detour. I had forgotten how majestic it was! I found a few nice guys there, who became HRFs for the day. **Ain’t life GRAND?**

On the possible fall horizon: Del Mar and Los Alamitos.

In closing...

As the fifth year of this quarterly newsletter closes, I’m reminded that change is constant. In that regard, I’ll be tweaking the sections... I have no idea what will change, but I know that it’s needed. **Have a great rest of the year...**



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What I Don’t Want...

Horse racing “reality” shows!

The overall genre is worn-out, and the two about horse racing that I watched didn’t change my mind.

So... when I heard there were plans for one about owners, I thought “doesn’t this need to end before it starts?” What value would this add to the growth of the sport? **None?!?**

So that means I’ll be wrong and it’ll be a smashing success...

All of that time and energy could be spent stabilizing their base (and add?) more of small-money players, rather than mainly cater to the large accounts. I think both types can coexist, but that’s a fantasy story for another day...

Not for me, thanks!!!