



## HIGHER PURSES FOR CAL-BREDS

California horsemen and horsewomen received dual doses of welcome news in late February when Santa Anita and Del Mar announced increased purses for their 2025 racing meets.

The purse increases are a tangible benefit from consolidation of racing in the south after the closure of Golden Gate Fields and the decision by the California Authority of Racing Fairs to not seek racing dates.

Santa Anita reported higher all-sources handle, on-track attendance, and average field size with the addition of relocated northern horses. Despite being impacted by the Los Angeles County wildfires, the improved business results in the opening weeks at Santa Anita allowed for overnight purse increases of an average of 8% for the ongoing winter Classic Meet and an average of 10% for the spring Hollywood Meet.

Santa Anita will also continue to work toward erasing its overpayment out of the purse fund.

Del Mar announced it would boost purses from last year by a blended 8% for its eight-week summer meet. The track projects that the upgrade means purses of \$100,000 for open and Cal-bred maiden special weight races, which includes a maiden dirt bonus of 25% to non-winner races at the \$62,500 level and above for trainers with fewer than 100 horses on

the Southern California circuit.

Bill Nader, president and CEO of the Thoroughbred Owners of California, was quoted in a Santa Anita press release that the purse increases are “only the beginning.” He further explained that a return to a balanced purse budget and anticipated further purse increases “for owners and breeders” are planned in a phased approach.

The opening-day crowd at Santa Anita on the day after Christmas was the largest in eight years, with betting of \$21.4 million in all-sources handle and an increase of 17.4% over the previous opening day. On-track attendance was 41,562.

David Jerkens, vice president and racing secretary at Del Mar, also highlighted the state consolidation of racing as the impetus for the purse increases.

“Santa Anita is off to a strong start with the new single-circuit structure now in place for California racing, and we are looking forward to continuing this positive momentum for our summer meet,” Jerkens said in a release.

As a critical component of the consolidation, accommodations have been made to write race conditions exclusively for horses and trainers previously based in Northern California. These will include restricted claiming and restricted starter claiming races with larger purses

than were available in the north last year. Through the end of March, complimentary vanning has been provided for those horses.

Meanwhile, other expanded opportunities for Cal-breds are in place. Among them is the second-look first-condition allowance, for which any horse that wins a Cal-bred first conditioned allowance race on turf will be eligible to run in the same condition on dirt. And any horse that wins a Cal-bred first condition allowance race on dirt will be eligible to run in the same condition on turf. This is in addition to the second-look opportunity afforded to Cal-breds that win a state-bred first-condition allowance, who then are still eligible to win a first-condition open allowance.

Noting the success Santa Anita has had integrating northern horses into its racing program, Del Mar will offer similar racing opportunities to those horses at its summer stand.

Of course, significant challenges remain for our industry. The most urgent priority in California is eliminating the discrepancies with tracks in states that augment purses from alternative gaming revenue.

While state industry leaders aggressively pursue options for closing that gap, breeders should be reassured by the positive momentum and successes seen thus far. **CTB**