

# Country Championship (Easter Cup)

## Background

The relative performance of the Easter Cup as a Group 1 race in recent seasons, along with the change in horses' birthday, which has prompted an overhaul in the feature racing programme has created an opportunity to re-invigorate/re-purpose the Easter Cup.

Still to be run in an around Easter and using the goodwill generated by an established, \$100,000 race, the objective is to create a 'Super Country Cups-type' championship that will be a tremendous target for horses a notch or two down from the highest level of harness racing in New Zealand.

The competitive nature of this racing series is envisaged to generate future FFA horses and be a nationwide focus for those horses below the top echelon.

Qualifying races will be run at various venues across New Zealand commencing from 1 August 2021. The concept is to be inclusive and create generous opportunities for horses across the nation. So horses from Auckland to Invercargill that may be a notch below those elite horses have an ultimate goal, at Easter, in the Championship.

HRNZ have identified the need to create pathways following on from the conclusion of the age group racing year, post Derby, Oaks, Sires Stakes etc. As a result, additional funding has been directed towards the Country Cups races, which act as qualifiers. Depending on the status of the meetings Country Cups races will be run for either \$15,000 or \$20,000, which will make them appealing targets on their own.

The Championship also promises to be a strong, sellable property to a potential sponsor. Such a sponsor would gain nationwide recognition, over an extended period, which culminates in a \$100,000 Championship race in April.

This is a draft document with associated conditions that will need to be reviewed further before being confirmed and released to the industry.

## Qualification

Horses become eligible for the Championship by competing in a minimum of three Country Cup qualifying races.

Once horses have fulfilled the three-start criteria, selection will be based on success in the qualifying races.

Selection will be as follows: Best finishing position: Firsts selected ahead of Seconds then Thirds, Fourths, Fifths, Sixths etc.

If there is a tie for any qualifying positions, there will be a countback to the second-best qualifying placing. If there is still a tie for a position the countback will revert to the third best qualifying position.

If a tie persists then then a countback will be based upon which horse had the most qualifying starts. If after that measure, there is still a tie, the horse with the highest rating will be selected.

Given this is the first year of the Championship the competition will not discriminate between qualifying races, in terms of their worth in qualification status. This also will allow horses from all over the county and equitable opportunity to qualify.

The championship qualifying races (country cups) will either exclude highly rated (FFA) horses or ensure they start off prohibitive handicaps.

The Championship race itself will have set handicaps so participants know where they stand from the commencement of the championship launch.

### **Possible Country Championship Race Conditions**

Country Championship \$100,000 (Listed)

Addington Raceway, Saturday 16 April

Special Handicap, 3200m

R60 & Faster. Front- R60-R70, 10m R71-R80, 20m R81-R90, 30m R91-R100, 40m R101+.

As this Championship targets horses in the middle tiers of the ratings system and the conditions are prohibitive for those FFA or highly rated horses it was considered by the architect team that Listed status was most appropriate for this race - subject to HRNZ approval.