

**Daily Racing Form**  
**Handicapping | Posted 2/5/2009, 6:54 pm**  
**Pace trends stand out if you go with the Flow**  
**By Dave Litfin**

OZONE PARK, N.Y. - Whether you're 9 or 90, nothing's better than getting a new toy. But you can keep the new sports cars and fishing rods and hi-def TVs; just sit me down with Daily Racing Form's web-based Formulator for the afternoon and I'm as happy as a toddler in a sandbox.

What's more, I've been having even more fun - if that's possible - accessorizing Formulator with weekly e-mail updates from Racing Flow, the bias and pace figures discussed in this space two weeks ago that can be easily uploaded, even by toddlers, with a few keystrokes. For a handicapper trying to get a handle on how races have been run and how surfaces are playing at major circuits nationwide, this is akin to getting a gift-wrapped box full of new jeeps and artillery for your G.I. Joes.

To recall, when a race card is opened, three ratings appear underneath each running line: a track bias rating indicating whether the surface favored speed or closers or was neutral; BL12, the winner's lengths behind (if any) at the first two calls; and a race-specific "FLOW" number indicating whether and how the pace may have affected the outcome. A FLOW figure of 0 is neutral and favors no running style. Large negative numbers (-200 or less) indicate slow-paced races (PLODS) that favored speed; large positive numbers (200 or more) indicate fast-paced races (ZIPS) that favored closers.

For a snapshot view of how Aqueduct's inner track has been playing, check the above chart, which shows the Racing Flow bias ratings for the first four weeks of racing in January:

Jan. 1: -3  
Jan. 2: 47  
Jan. 3: -52  
Jan. 4: -86  
Jan. 7: -17  
Jan. 8: 100  
Jan. 9: 99  
Jan. 10: 279  
Jan. 11: 258  
Jan. 14: 120  
Jan. 15: 226  
Jan. 16: Cancelled  
Jan. 17: 161  
Jan. 18: 188  
Jan. 19: 81  
Jan. 22: 31  
Jan. 23: 97  
Jan. 24: 80  
Jan. 25: 209

The thing that should catch your eye is that despite the frozen tundra's speed-favoring reputation, the first four weeks in January produced not a single day that could be considered significantly biased toward early pace horses. Moreover, the dates of Jan. 10, 11, 15, and 25 strongly favored closers, and Jan. 17 and 18 trended that way as well.

So, what's going on? There have been significant changes this winter: a) a new track superintendent; b) the elimination of mud calks; and c) more stringent guidelines for the use of steroids. Any or all of those factors might contribute to explaining the seismic shift in how the inner track has played; but whatever the synergy, this has not been the inner track speed handicappers have known and

loved for the last three decades.

"It's been a different year," said trainer Bruce Levine as he prepared the speed horse Coli Bear for last weekend's Correction Stakes. (She was on a clear lead for a half-mile and faded to finish out of the money.) "You don't get those merry-go-round tracks; in fact, there are more and more horses winning from off the pace."

In looking through Saturday's Big A card, not much was left to the imagination with a six-horse Whirlaway Stakes headed by Haynesfield, who was under a stiff drive to capitalize on a closer-favoring flow as the 1-2 favorite in the Count Fleet Stakes five weeks ago.

"He would be a bet against," said Phil Gregoire, a co-founder of Racing Flow. "Unfortunately, he faces little competition, with the exception of Mike From Queens" - who argued the hot pace in the Count Fleet - "who gets the upgrade. . . It would be beneficial if the Peace Town camp decides to grab [the early lead]."

For an introductory bit of Racing Flow perspective in stakes at warmer climes Saturday, consider the following:

Juvenile filly champ Stardom Bound makes her seasonal debut in Santa Anita's Las Virgenes Stakes, her first start since sweeping the Del Mar Debutante, Oak Leaf, and Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies - the latter on a Pro-Ride surface that received a big closer-favoring bias rating of 241.

"She was a downgrade for us on Cup Day, and our stance has not changed," said Gregoire. "We envision her having a more difficult time if she maintains the same style."

In the Colonel Power turf sprint at the Fair Grounds, Storm Treasure (third) and Rouse the Cat (12th) ran in the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint. Handicappers may recall the otherworldly fractions from that race of 20.73 and 41.81 seconds, which translated to a FLOW figure of 338.

"That's probably the biggest 'ZIP' we've ever had," said Gregoire.

A new racing season is under way, and I feel like a kid left alone in a candy store.

Copyright - 2007 Daily Racing Form, LLC. All rights reserved.