

How much does a jockey weigh?

(And how much is mud?)



IT HAS BEEN SAID that it's the differences of opinion that makes horse racing possible. Uncertainty of outcome always makes for an interesting and exhilarating sport, especially when gambling is a cornerstone. However, when Hollywood Casino at Penn National Race Course built their incredible new facility, they left nothing to chance. Built on the site of the original track's grandstand, they celebrated their grand opening in early 2008 and invited Rice Lake along for the ride.

Horse racing is one of our oldest sports. In England's early 1700s, it first became a professional sport. With large monetary stakes tied to predicting the winners of a race and with few regulations in place, early days of the sport were littered with shadiness. One dodge was "sandbagging"; weighing down selected horses or jockeys and betting on horses carrying less weight.

Eventually, regulators caught on and implemented countermeasures—forcing the jockeys, with their tack in hand, to be weighed before and after each race. The riders had to fall within the weight requirements before the race *and* after it.

A sport as steeped in tradition and hunches as horse racing often clings to antiquated

equipment. Even today, some tracks continue to use mechanical scales—scales that are prone to weight fluctuations with varying weather conditions, and that are also the frequent victims of scale rage damage from jockeys upset with their weight reading.

Hollywood Casino at Penn National Race Course upgraded their mechanical scale with the newest, technology-rich solution. "We wanted to do an upgrade in conjunction with the opening of the new building," said Rob Marella, director of racing. "We talked to Apple One and they presented the Rice Lake scale to us. Once we saw how accurate it was and how easy it was to use, this was really a no-brainer. We had it certified the day it was here, and it's been as user-friendly and reliable as it could possibly be."

Albert Felicio, president of Apple One Scale & Calibration, remembers going up against competing bids when Penn National was making its decision. "The competitors had plastic indicators and that sort of thing. The quality just wasn't there," Albert said. "When I brought in Rice Lake's DeckHand™ and IQ plus® 390-DC, it really wasn't comparing a scale to a scale. I had the only real scale available." He also remembers servicing mechanical scales at area race tracks. "Friday nights around 6:30," Albert said, "I used to expect a call from the race track to fix their scale."

After Apple One helped implement the new scales, the improvement was evident. With the old mechanical scale, the weighmaster (responsible for taking and recording all weight readings) could only record weighments in half-pound increments, that is if his eyesight was good enough to make out exactly where the needle was pointing on the faded dial. With the IQ plus 390-DC, however, a highly readable LCD displays weight in 0.1 pound increments.

In addition to the improved weight readout and increased graduations, the system's portability and durability were important factors in Penn National's decision to use Rice Lake. "The battery pack allows us to use it in remote locations," Rob Marella stated, "and the fact that it can withstand

the outdoors is important to our application—not only the outdoors, but sand, mud and dirt. It's great that you can just hose it off and it's ready to go."

Obviously, a jockey always wants to finish first. However, in the rain, an additional incentive comes into play—not only to finish first, but also to lead for as much of the race as possible. Followers often weigh four pounds more than when they started, picking up four pounds of pure mud along the way. They also go through multiple pairs of eye goggles and turn their vibrant racing colors brown by the end of the race. In comparison, the winner looks like a laundry detergent commercial.

it is resurfaced, that's a lot of handwriting for the weighmaster. Rob looks forward to someday making the weighmaster's job easier. In the meantime, he's confident that Rice Lake's product will stay the course. "Through it all—mud, dirt, rain, and snow, I'm sure the scales will work fine," Rob says.

Penn National Race Course, Apple One Scale, and Rice Lake Weighing Systems—a perfect trifecta. ■

Jim Lynch, mid-Atlantic regional director for Rice Lake; (left) Rob Marella, director of racing for Penn National Race Track and Albert Felicio, president of Apple One Scale & Calibration.



When their horse is running behind the leaders, jockeys often weigh several pounds heavier after the race than they did before.

"These scales are in all types of industrial applications," Albert said. "Penn National is easy for them." He has installed similar applications at other East Coast race tracks, including Rice Lake 120 digital weight indicators with internal battery packs at the Sperryville, Virginia, facility.

At Penn National, Rob Marella anticipates using some of the 390-DC's additional features sometime in the future. "It would be great if we got to the point where we wouldn't have to handwrite all these records," he said in reference to the indicator's RS-232 capability. Because the track is currently running four days a week and will run five days a week year-round after

