

CARLISLE RACECOURSE WINS NATIONAL TOURISM AWARD FOR QUALITY

Carlisle Racecourse's top-class facilities and customer service have been officially recognised after the venue was accepted into a prestigious new national scheme run by tourist chiefs.

The racecourse was visited by a mystery racegoer during a meeting here last month and the glowing assessment which followed has now led to the course being welcomed into VisitEngland's Quality Assured Racecourse scheme.

Carlisle received an overall score of 75.9% after being monitored in four different categories which saw it described as a "friendly and welcoming racecourse that gave the visitor a good experience." It achieved 80% ratings for both cleanliness and friendliness, with scores of 76.84% for efficiency and 73.9% for facilities and services.

Having achieved the accreditation, the scheme's Quality Rose Marque is now being proudly displayed at the racecourse.

John Baker, Carlisle Racecourse's managing director, said: "We are always striving to achieve the highest standards, so it is especially satisfying when people from outside our own staff independently recognise the quality of what we are doing here. Of course, whilst we are proud to gain the award, there is always scope for improvement in everything we do and the assessment provides an excellent management tool to help us achieve even higher standards than before."

The track is owned by the Jockey Club Racecourses, which has spent several millions of pounds in recent years upgrading facilities for all racegoers, from punters to owners, trainers and jockeys as well as improving drainage for national hunt and flat racing. The improvements have seen crowds rocket over the last two years, with record turnouts achieved several times.

Last month's undercover report saw the racecourse pass the accreditation process after being marked from one to five points for different categories in each section. These ranged from pre-arrival telephone enquiries to website, arrival and the racecourse itself, including toilets, catering and bars.

Each section had accompanying comments, some of which included:

- * Live telephone enquiry – "The call was handled efficiently, professionally and in a friendly manner"
- Live telephone dining enquiry – "professional, clear and above all friendly"
- Arrival – "all areas appeared free of litter"
- The racecourse – "deeply-tiered stands and well-placed big screens ensured best possible viewing for racegoers"
- Catering and bars – "high standard of cleanliness in all catering and bar facilities enhanced the visitor experience"

James Berresford, VisitEngland's chief executive, said: "*England has a world famous sporting heritage and for many parts of the country horseracing is at the core of the community. I can't think of a more thrilling day out than a day at the races.*"

"The VisitEngland quality rose marque provides a recognised stamp of approval showing visitors that Carlisle Racecourse has been assessed along similar lines to a more traditional type of visitor attraction, providing regular racegoers and first time visitors alike with a high quality, highly memorable experience."