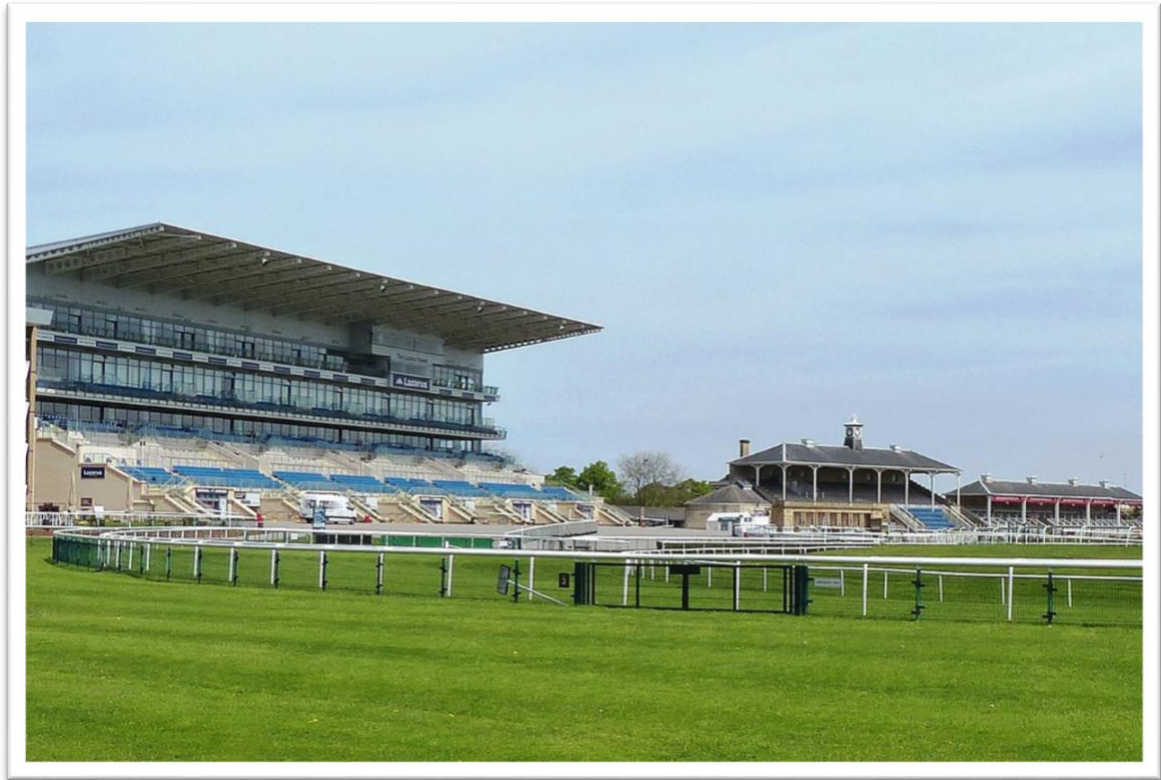


The St Leger



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2021

The Oldest Classic Horse Race – The Doncaster St Leger

The first section of this article will look back at the history of the great race and the second part will look at the sort of profile a horse needs to win.

The St Leger isn't just Britain's oldest Classic horse race it's also the third and final leg of British horse racing's Triple Crown, the first two being the 2,000 Guineas and the Epsom Derby.

The final leg of the fillies Triple Crown, which includes the 1,000 Guineas and The Epsom Oaks, is also the St Leger.

Like the other Classics it's spawned its clones around the world's racing jurisdiction's, with Ireland, USA, and even Jamaica having their own St Leger's.

The race was first run in 1776 but actually wasn't named the St Leger until 1778. It was named after the local sportsman and land owner Lt-Gen. Anthony St Leger of Park Hill.

The first race under the name of St Leger was also first held at today's location of Doncaster racecourse at Town Moor on Tuesday 22nd September 1778. The race was first run over 2m and it wasn't until 1813 that it was first run over today's distance of 1m 6 ½ f.

Since that day the race has been run every year, bar one, in the month of September.

The only year the race wasn't run was in 1939 on the announcement that Great Britain was at war with Germany which heralded the start of the Second World War.

The Leger hasn't always been run at Doncaster. During the First World War it was held at Newmarket between 1915 & 1918. Likewise, during the Second World War, it was held away from Doncaster. In 1940 it was held at Thirsk, the following year it was run at the long-gone Manchester racecourse.

Between 1942 & 1944 it was held at Newmarket and in 1945 it was run at York. Since 1946 it's been run exclusively at Doncaster although the race was held at Ayr in 1989 when Doncaster racecourse suffered from subsidence and once more at York in 2006 when Doncaster racecourse was being refurbished.

The race has always been high in the affections of the people in Yorkshire. During The First World War the race was at its zenith, as an estimated half a million people would make the annual trek to Doncaster for the great race.

As the years have passed, the number of racegoers declined to 50,000 or 60,000 in the 1960s and this time around about 30,000 are expected to attend the main day of the fixture on Saturday.

From Nijinsky to Capri

The first St Leger was won by a filly Allabaculia, who wasn't actually named until after she won it. Since then the race has attracted an alumnus of great horses such as the Flying Dutchman, Voltigeur, West Australian (the first winner of the British Triple Crown in 1853), Formosa (the first winner of the fillies Triple Crown in 1886), Pretty Polly, Bahram, Never Say Die, Meld, Ballymoss, St Paddy and of course the legend that is Nijinsky in 1970.

Nijinsky trained by Vincent O'Brien came into the race having already landed the first two legs of the Triple Crown before going on to take the Irish Derby and then beating the older middle-distance horses when landing the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Ascot.

The colt's preparation for the race didn't go without drama as he contracted ringworm in August but fully recovered to take his place at Doncaster. Just prior to the race it looked as if his jockey Lester Piggott wouldn't be able to take the ride after a fall in the race preceding the St Leger.

The full drama surrounding the fall was only revealed after the race. A patient had escaped from the top security Rampton Hospital and had threatened to kill the jockey before the race. Which had led to fears that that Piggott's fall was connected to that threat.

The drama before the race wasn't really matched in the race itself as Nijinsky who was sent off the 2/7 favourite won the race in effortless style to become the first horse since Bahram in 1935 to complete the Triple Crown.

Sadly, Nijinsky wasn't able to round off his career with a win in Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe a month later going down by a head. We will never know if the horse had peaked in the St Leger. His trainer hadn't wanted to run his colt in the St Leger but owner Charles Engelhard wanted his place in history and that's why the Doncaster racegoers got a chance to see the horse in all his glory.

Those who witnessed Nijinsky's majestic performance of equine athleticism that day will always be able to say "I was there to witness racing history". He remains the last colt to win the Triple Crown.



Nijinsky winning the 1970 St Leger

Oh So Sharp, trained by Henry Cecil, for Sheikh Mohammed took the fillies Triple Crown in 1985 having won the 1,000 Guineas and the Oaks earlier that season.



Oh So Sharp winning the 1985 St Leger in the hands of Steve Cauthen.

Since then few horses have attempted the Triple Crown. In 2012 there were 32,000 racegoers hoping to see history made as the Aiden O'Brien trained Camelot made his bid for the Triple Crown.

Starting the odds-on favourite, Camelot looked to be moving like the winner entering the straight but for a few fateful strides he wasn't able to get a run on the inside when making his effort.

By the time he got into the clear the eventual winner Encke had got first run and although Camelot made up plenty of ground inside the final two furlongs, he failed by just $\frac{3}{4}$ length and had to settle for the runners-up spot.

With a clear run he would surely have joined the racing legends by winning the race and of course the Triple Crown.

The changing emphasis on breeding as well as trainers & owners favouring sending their best 3-year-olds to races like Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe or the Breeders' Cup Turf Classic means it will probably be a long time before we see a horse with requisite speed and stamina, go as close as Camelot did to winning the Triple Crown.

Since Camelot's failed attempt the race has been in the news for other reasons.

In 2015 the first past the post Simple Verse controversially lost the race in the Stewards room, although she did regain the race at a subsequent appeal hearing.

A year later Laura Mongan became the first female trainer of the race with the victory of her colt Harbour Law.

Calls to shorten the distance or open the race to older horses or geldings, like the Irish St Leger, have rightly fell on deaf ears and the St Leger remains open only to the classic generation.

This Year's St Leger Winner is?

The St Leger is rightly considered the conclusive test of a three-year-old's stamina over the 1m 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ f distance and it becomes even more of a stamina test if the ground is on the soft side.

In the last decade, the race has attracted winners of varying quality. The best winners have arguably been Conduit who would go onto win the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes and Breeders Cup Turf as a 4-year-old and 2013 winner Leading Light who would go on to win the Ascot Gold Cup in 2014.

However, wins by the likes of Arctic Cosmos, Masked Marvel and Harbour Law will probably only be remembered by the connections of each horse.

The 2017 renewal was one of the best in the past 10 years in terms of quality. The race was won by the Irish Derby winner Capri. The runner-up Crystal Ocean was a gallant runner-up in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes earlier in the campaign.

The third home Stradivarius has since gone on to multiple Group 1 successes such as the Ascot Gold Cup (3 times) & Goodwood Cup (4 times) and the fourth home from the 2017 renewal, Rekindling, went on to win the Melbourne Cup.



Capri lands 2017 St Leger

Key Trends:

What is the ideal profile for a St Leger winner?

To help us find it. It's worth looking at some of the key trends for the race.

1. Last Time Out Placing: 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th have won all of the most recent 24 renewals.
2. Odds SP: 25/1 & under – have won all of the most recent 24 renewals, and all were in the top 8 of the betting.
3. Official Rating: 108+ – 9 winners from the most recent 10 renewals.
4. Career Wins: 2 to 4 – 21 winners from 153 runners 51 placed.

5. Stalls: 1 to 9 – 22 winners from the last 24 renewals.
6. Days since Last Run: 16 to 90 – 23 winners from the last 24 renewals

Top Trainers:

- Aiden O'Brien – 6 winners from 52 runners 4 placed.
- John Gosden – 4 winners from 17 runners 8 placed.
- Saeed Bin Suroor – 4 winners from 11 runners 6 placed.

Carl's preview of the St Leger and Some of the Supporting Races

1m (Str) Cazoo May Hill Stakes (Group 2) - Thursday 9th September 14.40pm

Inspiral is the current favourite for this contest and odds on too. There is no doubt that she is very talented and coming from top connections was always going to be short. But the stable have not really been firing on all cylinders for a while and may be the strength in depth is somewhat lacking and at the current odds I would be looking to take her on.

Albula comes over from Ireland and ran well when just picked of late on last time out, I am not sure of the depth of that form but she is still learning and must be respected.

There are a couple that take my eye both having run once and won. They are **Speak & Suspicious**; both looked strong at the finish line and could offer some value at double figure prices against the Gosden shortie

1m6½f Park Hill Fillies' Stakes (Group 2) - Thursday 9th September 15.15pm

This looks a wide open contest despite another Gosden trained runner in **Free Wind** heading the market at 2's. She won with relative ease over in France, but was turned over the time before at Newmarket and she looks far from a good thing she is supposed to be at the current price.

One that intrigues me is **Heartbreaker** who ran in a maiden at Wolverhampton and bolted up in taking style. She had run in NH Flat races prior to that and has been bought by King Power Racing since that Wolverhampton win. She looks to be way over priced given her ability at 25'1 and the horse she beat with ease when last seen winning over hurdles on her debut has since won with ease herself, so the form is strong.

Cazoo St Leger Stakes (Group 1) - Saturday 11th September 15.35pm

All eyes will be on **Hurricane Lane** who has only been defeated once this season in the Derby by a stalemate. There are not many negatives, and you can see why he is odds on. He handles any ground so rain would be no problem (plenty in the forecast as I write this) and has the strongest form.

But there are plenty of decent challenges not least **Mojo Star** who was runner up in the Derby. He broke his maiden last time out in effortless style, and I think there is more to come at this type of distance. He got no luck in the run in the Irish Derby when well behind Hurricane Run & Lone Eagle.

The latter mentioned Lone Eagle was well positioned and nearly nicked the race with a good ride from Dettori. He was well held last time out at Ascot but did not look at home on the fast ground that day and will be better suited by some give if the rains arrive in time.

There are a whole host of O'Brien trained runners entered up at this stage, but most look way below the standard required to trouble those already mentioned with the exception of **Interpretation** who is the unknown in terms of ability in the race for me. He has plenty of staying power and is on the upgrade (unbeaten this season) and if he turns up on the day he could go well.

For me the current betting has things about right with the exception of **Interpretation** who you can get some 20's with most firms and might be worth a small wager at this stage.