November 2026 edition

How The Paddock Picks Analyzes Horse Races

Data-driven handicapping. AI-assisted research. A disciplined approach to betting decisions.

Horse racing is unpredictable. Even a heavily favored horse can lose, and the most experienced handicapper won't get every race right.

The Paddock Picks doesn't claim otherwise.

Our approach is to combine established racing information, quantitative analysis, and modern analytical tools to identify the most competitive horses in a race.

But finding contenders is only the first step.

We also want to understand how those horses might finish, what the betting market is telling us, and whether a potential wager makes sense.

Here's a closer look at the methodology behind The Paddock.

1. We Start With Racing Data, Not Guesswork

Every race presents a different combination of horses, conditions, and competitive circumstances.

We begin by analyzing structured racing data and past performances rather than relying on intuition or popularity.

What Actually Goes Into Our Contender Rankings?

The Paddock's core ranking model uses structured racing data, with particular emphasis on demonstrated speed, recent performance, late pace, past performance at the race distance, and performance trends.

These factors are combined using a consistent, predefined scoring framework.

The objective is to compare horses within the same race and identify a manageable group of contenders—not to claim that a numerical score represents an exact probability of winning.

We also use independent racing benchmarks to help evaluate the model's selections.

Beyond the core model, we're investigating additional information such as class changes, surface suitability, jockey and trainer performance, and market behavior.

These potential improvements are tested separately before being considered for inclusion. Adding another variable is not automatically an improvement, particularly when it overlaps with information already captured in the model.

2. We Use a Consistent Quantitative Scoring Framework

The Paddock's core model evaluates competitors using defined criteria and a consistent scoring approach.

Rather than changing the rules after seeing the outcome, we establish the evaluation framework before the race.

The model produces a ranked shortlist of three contenders.

This helps distinguish between a horse with strong overall credentials, another with a competitive alternative path, and a potential longshot that warrants attention.

The ranking is a comparative assessment. It should not be mistaken for a precisely calibrated probability of winning.

We also examine additional factors through controlled research. A new variable isn't automatically added to the model just because it appears promising in a few races.

The important question is whether it improves performance consistently when tested on races that weren't used to develop it.

3. How We Use Artificial Intelligence

The Role of AI

Artificial intelligence assists our research and development process, including organizing data, examining patterns, testing ideas, and improving analytical workflows.

Our core contender rankings, however, come from a documented quantitative scoring framework.

We don't describe the model as a self-learning AI predictor, and we don't assume that an AI-generated explanation is evidence of predictive accuracy.

The value of any analytical method has to be established through consistent, reproducible results.

4. We Look Beyond Horse Rankings to the Betting Market

How Betting Pools and Live Prices Fit In

The Paddock's contender analysis and its betting-market analysis serve different purposes.

The contender model evaluates which horses appear most competitive. The betting-market analysis examines the available prices and potential returns.

Relevant market information can include live win odds, betting pool totals, changes in wagering support, and exacta probable payouts.

Pool size provides context, but it doesn't independently establish that a horse or combination represents good value.

We also pay attention to when the data was captured. A price observed several minutes before post time may change, and delayed information should not be treated as current.

Our market-based evaluation methods are being developed and validated separately from the established contender model. We won't present them as consistently available, verified live recommendations until the supporting data and testing justify that claim.

5. Our Exacta Analysis Goes Beyond Picking Two Horses

Exactas are a particular focus of The Paddock's analytical approach.

A straight exacta requires selecting the first two finishers in the correct order. A box covers multiple possible orders at a higher total cost.

Our three-contender shortlist provides a useful starting point, but automatically boxing the three horses is not necessarily the best decision.

For example, a $1 exacta box using three horses costs $6.

If the winning combination returns only $4, the box produces a $2 net loss—even though the ticket contains the correct finishing order.

Our evaluation process therefore separates several questions:

Contender identification: Which horses have the strongest overall cases?

Finishing-order analysis: Which possible first-and-second combinations warrant closer examination?

Market pricing: What do available exacta prices suggest about the potential return?

Ticket economics: Does the potential payout justify the total wager and the risk of losing it?

Play or pass: Is there enough evidence to support considering a wager?

Not every combination involving our three contenders will be equally attractive.

And when reliable pricing information is unavailable or the evidence is insufficient, we shouldn't manufacture a confident recommendation.

Exacta pricing and market-based decision methods are being evaluated separately from the core contender-ranking model. They should not be interpreted as established live recommendations for every race.

6. We Test the Analysis Against Actual Results

How We Protect the Integrity of Our Results

A credible handicapping system needs an accurate record of what it selected before a race.

Our evaluation framework calls for recording the source data, model version, contender rankings, and the relevant timestamps before the outcome is known.

After the race, the selections can be compared with official finishing results and actual payouts.

We distinguish between finding the winning contenders, predicting their correct finishing order, and producing a profitable wager. These are different measures of success.

A complete evaluation record includes losing selections and races where the available evidence supports passing.

Changes to the model are evaluated separately against an unchanged baseline, rather than rewriting past predictions to make the results appear better.

The objective is to develop evidence of performance over time, including the weaknesses and limitations of the approach—not to highlight only successful selections.

7. Why We Believe in the Option to Pass

One of the most important parts of handicapping is recognizing uncertainty.

Some races have a clear group of competitive horses. Others are difficult to interpret, feature unreliable data, or offer prices that don't justify the risk.

Our decision-making philosophy therefore includes three possible assessments:

Play: Under the framework, an opportunity would qualify when it meets the applicable criteria and the available price supports it.

Caution: Important uncertainties remain, and additional selectivity is warranted.

Pass: The available evidence doesn't support a wager under the plan.

These classifications are intended to encourage deliberate decisions rather than constant betting.

A good analytical process should allow for the possibility that the best decision is not to wager.

8. What Our Analysis Cannot Do

No handicapping model can predict race outcomes with certainty.

Unexpected pace developments, poor starts, racing trouble, changing track conditions, scratches, and ordinary randomness can affect the outcome.

Market odds can change, data feeds can be delayed, and historical patterns may not repeat.

More variables don't automatically produce a more accurate forecast. AI doesn't eliminate uncertainty. And a high hit rate doesn't guarantee profitability.

We believe these limitations should be acknowledged rather than hidden.

The Paddock Difference

The Paddock Picks is built around a straightforward idea:

Do the difficult analysis behind the scenes. Present the important decisions clearly.

We use racing information, structured analytical methods, and ongoing testing to narrow the field.

We investigate betting-market information and potential exacta opportunities without assuming that every race deserves a wager.

A complete record of selections, passes, and outcomes is essential to evaluating the process.

Our goal isn't to give you more data to study.

It's to give you a shorter list of contenders, useful explanations, and a disciplined framework for deciding what to do next.

Less data. Fewer choices. Better-informed bets.

The Paddock Picks provides educational and analytical information, not guaranteed predictions. Horse racing involves financial risk, and historical performance does not guarantee future results.

Related guides

How to Identify Horse Racing Contenders

How to Read Horse Racing Odds

How to Use Horse Racing Picks on Race Day