

## GEAR CHANGES - BLINKERS

Blinkers are a piece of headwear applied to a horse which restricts their ability to see things on either side of them and instead focus their vision straight ahead. A trainer will apply blinkers to a horse if it's losing focus in its races (often distracted by runners around it), is too relaxed and needs to be 'switched on' or more generally just isn't running up to the potential they believe it has.

History is littered with horses that made big improvement when blinkers were applied and for that reason a gear change of blinkers on (especially when on for the first time) attracts plenty of attention in the betting market.

But just how effective are blinkers as a gear change? What does factual data tell us about their success in getting horses to win races and the ability of the market to accurately factor that into its prices?

Are there any differences in those results depending on key variables like the age of horse, distance, number of career starts or trainer? We're about to explore all of those angles and provide you with some valuable insights that you can use to make more informed and profitable betting decisions.

### Blinkers On

The following table shows the results of all runners from May 2014 to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

Group	Runs	Wins	SR%	POT%
Blinkers first time	12772	1204	9.4%	-4.5%
Blinkers back on	5267	508	9.6%	5.7%
All horses	409903	40817	10.0%	-7.4%

We can see that horses with blinkers being applied provide a much better return than the overall average. Even the +2.9% POT difference between blinkers first time and the overall average of all horses is significant. Across a large sample of runners, these figures suggest that in its pricing of runners the market underestimates horses with blinkers going on.

### Blinkers On First Time – By Age

Age	Runs	Wins	SR%	POT%
2YO	1632	147	9.0%	-3.0%
3YO	5958	596	10.0%	-5.9%
4YO	3222	294	9.1%	-7.5%
5YO+	1960	167	8.5%	5.2%

While a small sample compared to others, the record of horses 5YO+ with blinkers on for the first time is significantly better than the overall average.

### Blinkers On First Time – By Distance

Distance	Runs	Wins	SR%	POT%
Up to 1349m	8311	763	9.2%	-7.1%
1350m to 1749	3720	365	9.8%	0.9%
1750 to 2000	741	76	10.3%	-2.0%

Blinkers on for the first time has historically provided much better returns at non sprinting distances of 1350m or further.

### Blinkers On First Time – By Career Starts

Starts	Runs	Wins	SR%	POT%
First Start	2333	176	7.5%	-9.8%
1 to 4	6222	568	9.1%	-6.1%
5 to 9	2324	261	11.2%	-5.3%
10 to 19	1318	147	11.2%	6.3%
20+	575	52	9.0%	12.2%

This table presents a very significant insight. First starters with blinkers for the first time have been under-performers compared to the overall average. More importantly, the more starts a horse has had before having the blinkers applied for the first time, the more underestimated they tend to be by the market, providing a greater betting advantage.

## Blinkers On First Time – By Trainer

The decision to put blinkers on a horse for the first time normally rests with the trainer. The table below shows the record of well known trainers in Australia with at least 40 runners to sample.

*Based on all runners from May 2014 to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2016*

Trainer	Runs	Wins	SR%	POT%
L & T Corstens	58	11	19.0%	36.6%
R L Heathcote	70	8	11.4%	34.3%
T Gollan	77	17	22.1%	21.6%
R W Smerdon	86	16	18.6%	7.5%
D K Weir	206	35	17.0%	-1.1%
P Stokes	45	9	20.0%	-3.4%
J O'Shea	194	33	17.0%	-9.7%
P & P Snowden	54	8	14.8%	-15.8%
Hayes & Dabernig	163	19	11.7%	-17.3%
G Waterhouse	94	12	12.8%	-18.8%
T McEvoy	111	15	13.5%	-20.0%
C Waller	147	18	12.2%	-28.7%
M G Price	114	8	7.0%	-45.4%
M W & J Hawkes	86	6	7.0%	-53.3%
C Maher	44	2	4.5%	-70.0%

While the average POT% of horses with 'blinkers first time' is just -4.5%, you can see that some of our most well known and successful trainers have a record that is significantly worse than that. This could very well be small sample variance. It can be very misleading when examining a minimal number of records with a relatively low overall strike rate.

However it could also be a sign that the combination of 'blinkers first time' and a high profile trainer results in an overreaction of the betting market as to the winning chance of that horse.

What can you take from this? I personally don't discount a horse's chance because the stable doesn't have a good record applying blinkers for the first time (it could simply be variance / coincidence). At the same time though, I certainly cannot consider it a positive for the horse and promote its forecast performance by any meaningful degree.

### Key Points to take for your betting

- Historical data shows that the addition of blinkers (first time or again) is somewhat underestimated by the market, providing a better than average return.
- The more career starts a horse has had, the more of a betting advantage blinkers first time has been.
- The average betting advantage with blinkers first time doesn't exist at sprint distances up to 1349m. It is however significant in races at 1350m or further
- Don't fall into the trap of liking a horse largely on the basis that it's from a high profile stable with blinkers for the first time. Many (as shown above) have been big underperformers.