

Hands-Down



The 30,000-seat grandstand at Woodbine Entertainment Group is packed on a warm June afternoon in 2011. There's a general din and palpable tension in the crowd, as fidgeting horses enter the starting gate. ¶ All bets have been cast. All eyes are on 17 high-strung, Canadian-bred, 3-year-old horses and their riders. Each horse and each jockey is intent on beating the other competitors to the finish line, 1¼ miles away on this oval track. ¶ "They're at the post. They're off, in the Queen's Plate," comes the measured voice of announcer Dan Loiselle over the loudspeakers.

There's the thunder of hooves and the trading of positions, with Oh Canada ahead by a nose after ⅘ the distance. Then Inglorious, the only filly in the race, makes her move. She storms out of nowhere in the final stretch, down the center of the track, passing the front-runners to burst through the finish line. And by now Loiselle is screaming into his microphone, and the din of the crowd becomes a roar.

The Queen's Plate is Canada's equivalent of its southern neighbor's Kentucky Derby. Woodbine, on the outskirts of Toronto, is the country's premier racetrack and one of the foremost tracks in North America.

Spectators seated in these grandstands

Woodbine By the Numbers

Grandstand seating capacity at Woodbine: **30,000**

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Average number of Standardbred races per year: **2,500**