

Promote racing, say Ballenger advisers

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Horse racing should be considered "show business" — with the accent on "business."

That's the theme of a four-part package of proposals unveiled recently by state Racing Commissioner William S. Ballenger. His 18-member advisory committee made the unanimous proposal, echoing Ballenger's own philosophy that Michigan is failing to promote what could be a lucrative industry.

Among the proposals were a tripling of its advertising budget, the legalization of off-track betting, physical improvements to area tracks and tighter security.

THE TONE of its 17 pages of recommendations was contained in a single sentence:

"If a fraction of the time and effort that has been put into studying how to promote Michigan horse racing had been put into direct marketing actions over the past decade, the industry here would be in a much stronger position than it is today."

Total annual attendance has declined 35 percent since 1971, the committee found. Average daily attendance has plummeted 54 percent. And young pa-



State Racing Commissioner William S. Ballenger says Michigan is failing to promote what could be a lucrative industry. He says horse-racing is 'show business.'

trons are missing as horse racing labors under a "Victorian image" and is challenged by other forms of entertainment, including the highly publicized state lottery.

Heart of the industry are the Detroit Race Course in Livonia, Northville Downs and Hazel Park race course, with lesser draws being at Jackson and county fairs. The racing commissioner

is headquartered in downtown Plymouth.

THE COMMITTEE — composed of representatives of the various horse breeds, government and the public — failed to endorse one of Ballenger's pet proposals: reducing the state's high tax rate on pari-mutuel wagering.

Such a cut would hurt horse pro-

grams and wouldn't necessarily boost the betting handle, it said. But it admitted Michigan's 6 percent rate is higher than most other states.

Observer & Eccentric area members included Louis Carlo of Northville (standardbred owners) and D. Joanne Jackson of Bloomfield Hills (thoroughbred). Jackson resigned last March. Alternates included Theodore Mennin of Troy (thoroughbred), Herbert Tyler of Southfield (thoroughbred) and James Baldwin of Birmingham (general public).

State taxes on betting bring in \$23 million, the group said.

In addition, the horse industry generates \$88 million in income, including \$30 million to employees, \$14 million for feed and bedding and \$11 million for equipment, veterinary care and insurance.

The industry's investment in breeding and racing stock was tallied at \$130 million. Investments in farmhands, buildings and equipment were worth \$450 million. Racetracks, barns and parking lots were worth \$65 million.

STATE REVENUE is split between the state general fund and horse industry improvement programs, but the committee proposed a firm allocation of the revenues.

Complaining that less than \$1 million

is spent to promote pari-mutuel tracks, a 40 percent reduction (adjusted for inflation) since 1976, the group recommended earmarking more than \$3 million of betting revenue for marketing the industry.

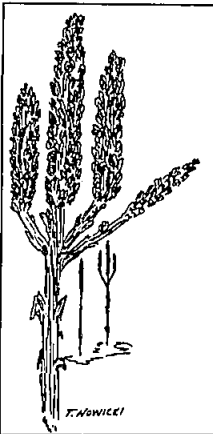
Among staff expansions for Ballenger would be a full-time "information unit" to issue news releases, create a weekly TV show on feature races, publish a newsletter, establish a speaker's bureau and maintain a racing library with film and videotape.

Noting that New York State increased its betting handle by 50 percent with off-track betting (OTB) without hurting the race tracks, the group recommended Michigan do the same.

Off-track establishments would have simulcasts, defined as "live televising of races to legalized wagering areas of races at tracks and OTB branch offices."

OTHER recommendations included:

- Tighter paddock security at tracks
- Licensing of more employees "who could have an effect on the outcome of a race."
- Testing of jockeys and drivers for drugs as well as alcohol.
- Power for the racing commissioner to require physical improvements and maintenance at tracks, including a requirement that owners set aside a definite amount of money for physical improvements.



Common mullein often has three long spikes and is called "cloverleaf candelabra."

Candelabra on the freeway

By Timothy Nowicki
special writer

FREEWAYS around metropolitan Detroit and across Michigan provide a fast, relatively safe means of travel. And if traffic isn't too heavy, a driver can view the surrounding countryside or the land adjacent to the pavement.

The land next to the pavement is the right-of-way and is a safety zone. It is kept open so the driver can see any unsuspected trouble that may lie ahead. Along most highways, this area is mowed so that the grass doesn't obstruct the view. Short vegetation in the right-of-way allows the sun to shine unhindered on plants growing there.

ONE PLANT frequently seen along roadways is the common mullein. It forms long spikes that reach heights of four feet or more.

Typically it produces just one long spike, but every once in a while a plant will branch to form three or more spikes. You might call them "cloverleaf candelabras."

These long spikes actually are the flowerheads of the plant. Dozens of but-

nature

ter yellow flowers bloom in summer along the length of the spike, but blooming occurs only after the second year of growth.

During the first year, large fuzzy leaves grow flat to the ground in the open, sunny roadside areas. Late in the second summer, the tall, woody flowerheads are produced.

CLOVERLEAF candelabras are easy to see during the winter. Their dark brown stalks contrast sharply against the snow-covered ground.

It would be a good time to count the number of spikes and see how many a single plant can produce (this should be done by passengers; I don't want anyone getting into an accident because a driver was counting mullein spikes).

If you get a chance to examine a stalk as you are walking through an open field in winter, take note of the capsules formed along the spike. These are the remains to the flowers, and inside are seeds. In the old days, people dipped the stalks in paraffin, filling the capsules, and then lit it for a torch.

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