

They're Off At DRC On Monday

Come Monday afternoon, the Detroit Race Course will open for business with a spic and span, amazingly clean plant ready to accommodate the more than 15,500 folks expected to jam their ways through the gates to welcome thoroughbred racing back to Michigan. The bangtails have been missing from the Detroit area scene since last November.

The huge plant will have the same efficient appearance for the 1970 opener as it had for the closing program in 1969. The clubhouse will be teeming with patrons, the male and female mutual clerks will be there to greet customers, just as they have for so many years; the horses will parade to the paddocks and then on the track to the starting gate as they did in November with colorful attired jockeys holding the reins, and when the announcer proclaims "they're off," one of Michigan's most lucrative businesses will start operation for the first of 90 consecutive days - it will be followed by a second 90-day meeting at Hazel Park beginning in August.

But it is the work that isn't visible that makes every racing meet possible - the tasks that begin as many as five weeks before opening day in the barn area.

THESE CHORES ARE handled by the unknowns of the racing world, the grooms, trainers, assistant starters, clockers, hot walkers and veterinarians - they're the ones that get the horses in top condition for the races, the ones that actually furnish the entertainment from back stage.

Hours of patient training, days of doing the same things over and over to teach horses how to run around a mile oval, weeks of nothing but hard labor which reaches a climax on opening day when the animals get their first chance to perform.

It is this behind the scenes work that makes a racing meet possible and it brings a cosmopolitan band of workers to the Motor City from every section of the United States as well as Mexico and other Latin nations.

THERE ARE NEVER enough hours in the day or days in a week for the stable help. Their chores begin at the crack of dawn when horses are brought out of the stalls for the morning workouts. No one yet has determined why horses have to get out on the track before the rooster crows but drive by the DRC any morning and there they are pounding hoofs in the turf.

Then hot and sweaty horses are taken to the new electric cooling off devices that automatically force them to walk slowly for as long as an hour and a half before they are put back in the stalls to await their day at the races.

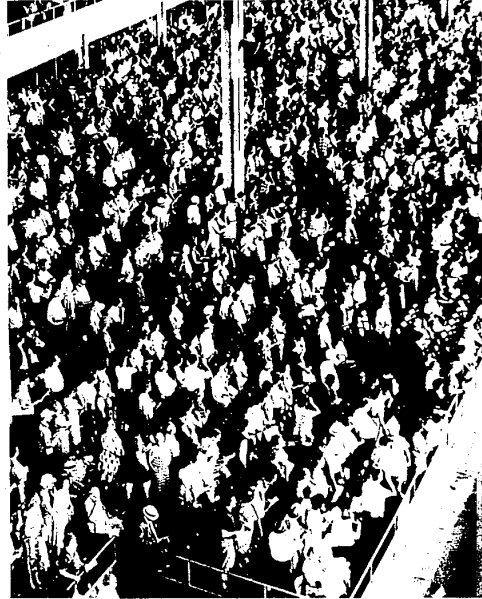
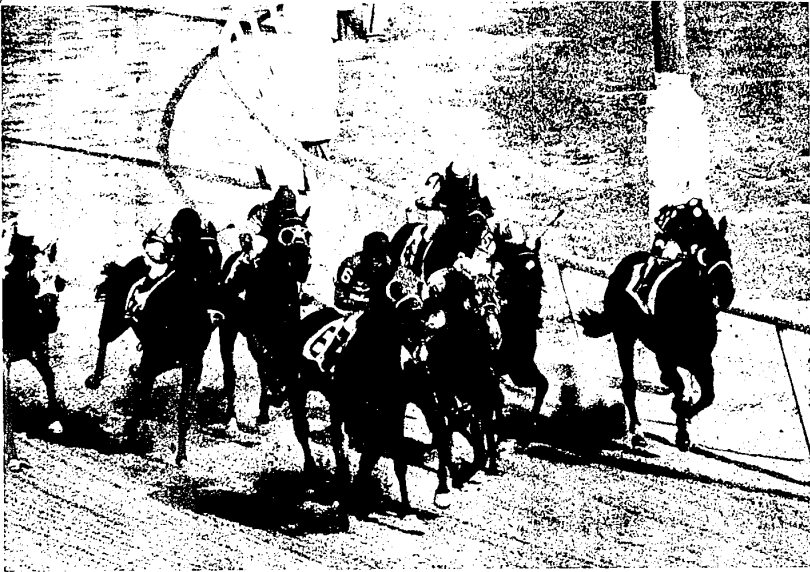
Trainers must know at all times just how the horse is working out, they have to know whether the animal is up to par or on the sickly side. The only way they have is by watching the workouts, getting reports from the grooms and then checking the feedbag at dinner time. Contrary to some reports, there isn't any such thing as a report straight from the horse's mouth.

Meanwhile, there is activity in the racing secretary's office where horses are carefully graded so that condition books can be drawn up that will give all a chance to compete in his or her own class.

The barn area is carefully guarded at all times and each stable receives the allotted number of stalls when the vans check in. The stable help also registers with the Racing Commission so that the track and the commission knows exactly how many workers and horses are on the grounds at all times.

Then, all at once, the opening day arrives and as if by magic the entire scene takes a new look. The track is ready, the grandstand and clubhouse have a different appearance, the racing secretary makes the draw for the initial program, the parking lot attendants arrive, the ushers take their places, the waitresses start rushing lunch and yun - and the racing season is on.

That's what the DRC will look like come Monday afternoon.



MORNING WORKOUTS find trainers and owners standing around the racing strip, watching their horses perform and taking note of the manner in which horses from other stables drill.



INTO THE STRETCH (Top left) goes the field in a race at the Detroit Race Course--this will be a familiar sight Monday when the track opens a 90-day meeting. (Left) Drawing for post positions for the first race is conducted by Racing Secretary Norris Gwin. (Right above), this is a sight officials hope for on the initial program--the stands packed with patrons welcoming the thoroughbreds back after an absence since last November.



IT APPEARS as if this horse has a big smile as his groom shows him one of the condition books. Maybe he has found a race that he knows he can win.



BIG PERFECTA will be available at the DRC for the first time. It has been popular wherever adopted and Mutual Manager Bert McCann expects it will work the same magic starting Monday.

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