



VRC says Cup sales are off and running

Report Noelle Waugh

Ticket sales for the Melbourne Cup carnival, traditionally the biggest event of the racing season, are tracking strongly despite the upheaval caused by the equine influenza outbreak in NSW and Queensland.

As organisers at the Victoria Racing Club make final preparations for next month's carnival, the Melbourne Racing Club will this weekend host one of its top racing events, the \$2.5 million Caulfield Cup.

The number of punters who turn out at Caulfield will provide a strong gauge on the likely impact of EI on the Melbourne Cup Carnival.

The spread of the virus has stopped racing in parts of NSW and Queensland since mid August, but authorities in Victoria are hoping next month's carnival will still run to schedule.

Stephen Silk, general manager for strategic marketing at the Victoria Racing Club, said corporate member bookings, reserve dining and seating tickets to the overall carnival were 95 per cent sold.

He said general admission ticket sales were nearing 25 per cent of the total 37,500 available each day of the carnival, against only 5 per cent at this time last year, after it introduced a rule disallowing ticket sales on the day of each event.

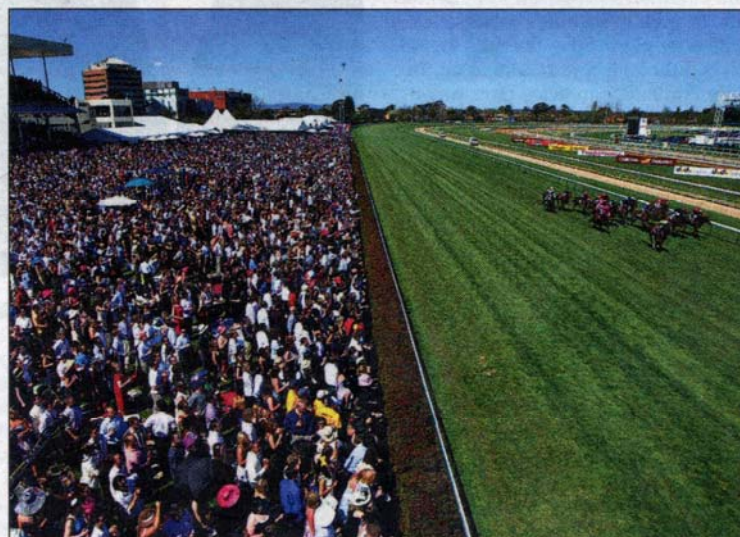
"We introduced that because crowd numbers were becoming too unpredictable. For example, on Derby day last year we had 130,000 people but we had forecast for that day a crowd of about 115,000," he said.

"By making people pre-purchase we can plan better for all patrons . . . and it allows us to set a ceiling for the number of patrons we think comfortably fit in here at Flemington, which is 115,000."

Mr Silk said there had been some difficulty getting that message across given the EI outbreak but pointed to the strength of ticket sales two weeks out from the carnival as supporting its decision to implement a pre-sale strategy.

The VRC has also overhauled the main website for Flemington in a bid to use interest in the carnival to boost its profile beyond the four-day event.

The website, developed by digital agency Citrus, went live at



Organisers of the Melbourne Cup carnival are optimistic.

Photo Vince Caligiuri

the beginning of the month and in the past two weeks alone has processed more than 250,000 ticket sales.

Mr Silk said the website would be linked into the core flemington.com.au site, as well as melbournecup.com, helping it drive traffic to the brands.

It is the first time the VRC has dedicated part of its media spending to online marketing and Mr Silk expected the changes to boost unique user numbers from less than 4 million last year to 10 million.

The website is designed to give the VRC's 25,000 members better

access to its services, as well as boost interest in the Flemington brand throughout the year.

Mr Silk said the website would enable it to leverage off the Melbourne Cup carnival where more than 75 per cent of attendees were aged 18 to 40 to help it attract a younger audience to the entire Flemington racing program.

The VRC has introduced a program called "Flemington Style", linking its fashions on the field events and other related social activities like food and wine festivals throughout the year.

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