

# ODDS-ON FAVOURITE



## Winning Stages

At any stage of the game, the players may consult the racing programme (top picture). This gives details of the race venues, and also indicates the prize money available for specific races. After the runners have been chosen for a particular race, players have the opportunity to bet on the horse of their choice (second picture). Bets must be between £5 and £500. The horses are then lined up to wait for the starter's gun, and the players must sit back and wait while the race is run. Our final picture shows the horses slowing down after passing the winning post, with our photographer's selection finishing a poor fourth...

**The Sport of Kings — or just a mug's game?** Opinions may vary as to the merits of horse racing, but Salamander Software's *Classic Racing for the Oric-1 and Atmos home computers* is a clear winner in the flat race simulation stakes.

Classic Racing gives you the opportunity to play the part of a race horse trainer over a season of meetings. It is a game for one to six players, but if there are fewer than six people playing, then the computer makes up the numbers so that each race will have six runners. The game allows you to choose the length of the season: a full season covers 16 race meetings, each consisting of six races. Those with less stamina may select a shorter season. The player's objective is to make as much money as possible. This may be achieved in two ways: you can collect prize money by training one of the first three horses in a race, or you may bet on the result. You *must* enter a runner for each race, but there is nothing to stop you betting on one of your opponents' runners if you feel this gives you a better chance to win money.

Your stable comprises 16 horses, and at the beginning of the season you have no idea of their merits. As early season races are for small prizes, this is the ideal time to experiment by trying your runners over different distances and in different ground conditions. This is simply a matter of trial and error — you must observe how a particular horse performs under given conditions and plan your strategy accordingly. This does entail copious note-taking — each time a horse runs you need to jot down the distance, the weight carried, the 'going' (ground condition), and the result. It's a pity that Salamander has failed to include a routine to print such details out automatically, as this would save a lot of effort.

Once you have chosen all six of your runners for the first meeting, you will be given the names of your opponents' horses and told the weight each will be carrying. The computer then allocates odds against each horse winning. At the start of the season this appears to be done in an arbitrary manner but, as the season wears on, horses with proven track records will start at shorter odds. Betting is compulsory — stakes must be between £5 and £500 — and the odds offered can be very generous. Because a winning (or placed) horse will collect prize money, it is often profitable to bet on an opponent's runner, thus giving you two chances of making a profit.

It is also possible to engineer betting 'coups', by entering a horse in races for which it is obviously

unsuitable — for example, a horse that performs well over five furlongs in heavy going may be entered for two successive 1½ mile races on firm ground. It will almost certainly lose ignominiously, and then may be entered in a more suitable race at good odds. However, once you have ascertained the ideal distance and going for a particular horse, you must resist the temptation to keep running it in race after race — as in the real-life racing world, horses need to be rested every so often if they are to perform at their best.

When all the bets have been placed, the action switches to the race itself. The horses amble into position, the starter calls them to order, then the Oric sound facilities produce a fair approximation of hoofbeats on turf as the runners head for the winning post. The race sequence is beautifully done: horses jostle for position in a realistic way and the runners are just as prone to erratic behaviour as their real-life counterparts are. It is infuriating to have to sit back and watch as your selection slows to a walk a hundred yards from the finish while the odds-on favourite glides past!

At the end of the race, winning bets are paid and the process is repeated for the rest of the card until the end of the meeting. Each meeting has a track with different ground conditions and race distances. If you eventually decide that one of your horses is not up to standard it may be dropped from your roster by simply failing to race it at three successive meetings. This gives you one less factor to worry about, but it costs you a £1,000 penalty at each remaining meeting.

Towards the end of the season, the races become harder to win, as all the players then have a much better idea of their horses' capabilities and are less likely to enter runners in races they have no chance of winning. The rewards are correspondingly greater — the first three home in the Derby, which is run during the last meeting of the season, share £90,000 in prize money.

Classic Racing is the most impressive piece of software yet for the Oric and Atmos. The race sequences are compelling viewing, and the strategy involved in planning your season's campaign makes this a game that will hold your interest over repeated playing. It's possible to win more than £250,000 over the full season — the only problem is collecting your winnings!

**Classic Racing:** For 48K Oric-1/Atmos, £6.95

**Publishers:** Salamander Software, 17 Norfolk Road, Brighton BN1 3AA

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**Joysticks:** Not required

**Format:** Cassette