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RACINOS AND RACING FANS**

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Mountaineer Park, the Chester West Virginia racino, has published the glossiest media guide imaginable. It has 90 pages full of extraordinary pictures of the facility and racino. You can see the golf course, the entertainers, the casino, the dining rooms and the spa. There are pictures of horses and numerous statistics of the racetrack. There's even one small picture of people in a dining room watching the races. What you won't find at all are pictures of the grandstand or people in the seats watching the races. That's because the racing fans at Mountaineer are MIA.

In many ways, racing at Mountaineer is a great success story. With thousands of slots, purses have boomed. The average daily purse distribution per racing program was \$166,382 for 2002, and the average purse per race was \$18,284. In the first full year of slots in 1995, the average distribution per racing program was \$25,636, and the average purse per race was \$2,871. Not adjusting for inflation, that's a 536% increase in purses per race in seven years. In fact, the average per race purse in 2002 is now higher than the full program's average purse in 1992.

Additionally, Mountaineer now has a booming simulcast business. People outside Mountaineer bet \$258 million on Mountaineer racing in 2002. With Mountaineer racing 230 programs, that amounts to more than \$1.12 million handle per day from off-track locations. \$258 million is more than the entire handle of any of the racetracks in New York State other than the NYRA tracks. It's more than the total (\$243 million) of all moneys wagered at New York State OTB's on non-NYRA New York State tracks. What's not to like?

Nothing, except what happened to the fans at Mountaineer? A total of \$16.2 million was bet on-track on live racing at Mountaineer. This amounted to an average of \$70,558 per race card. In the 50 plus year history of Mountaineer/ Waterford Park (a track never renown for its high quality) the per diem figure never was anywhere near this low. For example, in 1990, \$47.8 million was bet on track for a per diem average of over \$208 thousand. In 1995, the per diem figure over \$97 thousand. Given the increase in the quality of the horses competing at Mountaineer, you might reasonably expect some increase in people betting on the live product. Instead, the opposite has happened.

Even when you add the total amounts wagered on both the live Mountaineer racing with the total bet at Mountaineer on other tracks, you get a low total. All told, \$39.0044 million was bet at Mountaineer on horse racing in 2002. In 1995, that total (again without adjusting for inflation) was \$39.819 million. In 1990, \$47.8 million was bet just on the Mountaineer live product. Again, the product quality, the physical surroundings, and the variety of offerings have improved greatly, but the handle hasn't increased. Racinos have not provided any synergy for on track racing at Mountaineer.

If Mountaineer has proven anything, it is that you can bring glitz and gloss to the racino, but, so far, glitz and gloss don't bet the ponies.