

Field Trip to Ellis Park Kentucky

July 4-5, 2014. By: Debbie Blank

Pat Loontjier and I traveled to Ellis Park, Kentucky on July 4-5, 2014 to see, play and experience first-hand the historic horseracing machines. There is no question that these are slot machines.

My experience and observations:

- Every single person was playing the slot machines, not choosing the historical horseracing option.
- There were probably 200 machines in the two rooms of the facility with about 25 people playing the machines (place had cleared out since live racing was over for day and it was July 4th before fire works).
- The machines look like slot machines, play nearly as fast as slot machines (every 3 ½ seconds), have options like slot machines (chose to play one or up to 9 lines).
- They are set up in rows with chairs, just like casino slot machines.
- The only things that sets these machines apart from normal slot machines is an approximately 3x2 inch screen at the top right or bottom middle of the machine. Every time you play a game, a 2-3 second horse race plays in that box, with the results showing the name of the track, date and winning numbers.
- All the machines were set on slot machine mode; none were set the horse racing option. The machines are computers (mechanic unlocked one to show me the screen which gave options like my computer does).
- There were at least a dozen different types of machines with different themes (pigs, cherries, Egyptian, mining, fish, etc) accepting bets from 10¢ to \$5, which increase to 50¢ to \$45 per play if you choose more lines.
- Each type of machine (Black Hills Gold, Treasures of Egypt, etc.) is connected with the same type of machine throughout all the parks in Kentucky.
- Many machines say they are 1¢ with a minimum of 10¢ (or 25¢ or 50¢, etc.) It makes it sound like they are penny machines. But, what it means is that the payout is in pennies. For example, I won 2000 once, which amounted to \$20.00. VERY deceptive marketing.
- When I said to the attendant that these machines are just like slot machines, he told us these machines are “loopholes” because Kentucky does not allow slot machines.
- The attendant said the payout is 93% for the \$5 machines, reducing incrementally down to 87% for the 10¢ machines. Though people win that amount of time, that percentage does not mean that people walk away with the money. Most people, like us, continued playing until we lost all the money we played.

How to play the historic horseracing machines:

- Each machine had a small “i” in the lower area that needed to be touched to bring up the horse racing instructions. Once I did that, there were several very confusing explanations of what you needed to do to play the horse slots.
- When I clicked one particular button, a Daily Racing Form popped up that took about 20-25% of the screen on the right. It listed the horses by color and number in three pie charts, with each pie chart representing the percentage of times they came in first, then second and then third. Unfortunately, the machine only gives about 15-20 seconds to do your homework before the Daily Racing Form left the screen, never to be found again!!!!!!
- Nowhere on the machine does it provide the odds, age of horses or any other info one uses in determining what horse to bet.
- Once I chose my #1 horse, it asked me for my 2nd place horse pick, then my third. All of which I dutifully chose from my “thorough” research.
- When I hit play, the game reverted to the slot machine front. While the horse race ran for about 2-3 seconds in the small 3 x 2 window displayed on the slot machine, I was watching the slot machine spin its columns.
- Any payout came based on the slot machine calculations. In other words, if I was playing the Black Hills Gold machine, I had to have 3 pots of gold in a row, or three barrels in a row and so on. The machine did not let me know I had won or lost based on my horse pick, just based on the sequence of the gold, barrels, etc.
- Plus, the winning sequence had to be in a row or column that I had paid to play. Each machine had anywhere between 1 to 9 playing options I could pick.
- There were times when I actually picked the winning horse or the place or show horses in order, but still lost my money!!! Attendant said it was because my “winning” horse number was on a row I had not paid to play! However, most machines did not display numbers, only the theme items of the machine (like cherries, pigs, gold, etc).
- So, not only did I have to pick the right winning horse with almost no information, I also had to choose the correct rows or columns to play or just play them all. It appears, however, that even if I do all that, my “number” would have to come up on the screen in the right sequence to win!! I am not convinced I would have won with my horse pick, even if I had done all the right things.

Conclusions:

- These historic horseracing machines look and play exactly like slot machines.
- While they have added the “loophole” of using an historic horse race video, the schematics, computerization and play are the same as slot machines.
- Those who like to study and play the horses will do so live or via simulcast, NEVER by these machines because there isn’t enough info and you don’t necessarily win if you choose the winner.