

Brilliant Ballybrit!



An ecstatic Shane Shortall following victory on board Road To Riches in the Galway Plate.

The seven-day spectacle that is the Galway Races continued apace at Ballybrit last week with strong betting, attendances up on last year, over-sized fancy hats and high fashion along with copious amounts of partying.

Galway is as much a social extravaganza as it is a mere race meeting. Since its inception as a two-day festival in 1869 Galway Race Week has grown into the highlight of the business year for most of the region's local enterprises as huge crowds flock to one of the world's biggest race meetings. In 1999 the festival was extended to seven days and is now worth an estimated €75million to the local economy.

Although racing has suffered as much as any other leisure industry over the recent years of recession the figures from last week at Ballybrit are encouraging on many fronts as the Galway Festival continues to grow.

The tote aggregate for the first four days was €523,000 higher than 2013 with almost €1million alone bet on Galway Hurdle and Ladies Day last Thursday, a day that attracted 34,000 racegoers to Ballybrit.

With some of the best and well-known national hunt jockeys sidelined through injury many stars of tomorrow were given a chance to shine and how they grabbed it.

Shane Shortall in particular will have fond memories of Galway 2014. The 7lb claimer got the better of none other than Tony McCoy in a finish to win Wednesday's handicap hurdle and was celebrating the biggest win of his career just 90 minutes later when he partnered the Noel Meade trained aptly named Road To Riches in the Galway Plate.

Johnny Burke and Séan Corby were also among the winners while Finian Maguire, son of top former jockey Adrian, certainly looks a star in the making.