

## Draft-horse Racing in Japan

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In Japan, draft-horse racing is peculiar to the island of Hokkaido. Draft horses were first imported to the area for farm work from Europe in the 19th century, but it was in 1946 that jockeys began driving them for sport and draft-horse racing was officially established. Unlike regular horse racing, draft-horse racing in Japan isn't fast. Horses are required to pull massive weight across a racetrack measuring 219 yards. The first horse and jockey team to cross the finish line is the winner.

In the 1980s, draft-horse racing in Japan saw a spike in popularity as four Japanese racetracks drew in huge gambling revenues. But the sport's popularity has declined over the years, which has brought controversy to Hokkaido. Many traditionalists feel the sport is part of the island's culture. Others view the tradition as nothing short of animal cruelty. According to one jockey, horses are ready to collapse by the time they reach the finish line.

While the debates continue, racetracks have closed, jobs have been lost and horses have been sold off for their meat. (Horsemeat is a delicacy in Japan.) In the end, it comes down to money: Nowadays, for draft horses in Hokkaido, their meat may be more valuable than their ability to draw gamblers.