

Media Release

Monday 13 November 2023

## **Ellerslie Racecourse welcomed thoroughbreds on track for the first time in 20 months this weekend.**

**Auckland Thoroughbred Racing (ATR) has today confirmed that the Club successfully welcomed horses back to the Ellerslie track on Sunday, 12 November for the first time since the track was closed in March 2022.**

New Zealand's premier thoroughbred racecourse has not hosted any race meetings since Auckland Cup Week in March 2022 to allow for the installation of a StrathAyr track and the return of horses to Ellerslie has been much anticipated.

Sunday saw phase one of ATR's return to racing protocol completed and resulted in four horses galloping on the new StrathAyr track, the first to do so since the upgrade.

Ridden by senior jockeys, Sam Spratt and Masa Hashizume, the horses galloped in pairs with the first two on the running rail and the second pair five metres out from the running rail.

Both jockeys were complementary of the track with Spratt commenting that it was practically perfect.

"It's pretty much perfect," said Spratt.

"It rides incredibly even and smooth, and it was great to see that the ups and downs of the Ellerslie track have been retained.

"It's great to be back and it's going to be pretty flash when it's up and running."

The jockeys provided additional helpful insights into the feel of the track which will aid the ATR track team as they perfect the preparation of this new surface ahead of Ellerslie's return in 2024.

ATR Executive General Manager – Racing & Operations, Craig Baker, was thrilled with the outcome.

"To receive such positive feedback from this first gallop fills me with great confidence for the future tests.

"Having horses gallop, jumpout and ultimately trial gives the team the opportunity to refine the irrigation process, a key component of the preparation plan for a track of this type."

ATR Chief Executive Officer, Paul Wilcox, concurs.

"There was nothing quite like the moment I saw horses walk through the birdcage onto to this new track for the first time.

"It's a really significant milestone to have reached and I imagine the feeling will only be trumped by our first official raceday back in early 2024."

Phase two will see 12 horses take to the track later this month ahead of jumpouts in early December.

All going well, ATR anticipates returning to racing on Sunday, 14 January, ahead of the highly popular TAB Karaka Millions on Saturday 27 January.

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