

# AT THE RACES

Chariot races were originally part of religious festivals, but soon became incredibly popular as entertainment. Races were held at specially designed racetracks, called circuses, and regularly attracted huge crowds. The largest racetrack was the Circus Maximus in Rome, which could seat 250,000 people - more than any sports stadium in the world today.

## THE DAY BEGINS

Only Roman citizens and their families could go to the races, and people started arriving at dawn to get a good seat. Unlike at the Games, men and women were allowed to sit together. The poet Ovid wrote that the circus was a good place to find a girlfriend or boyfriend!

The spectacle began with a parade, as musicians led in the official who was to start the races. This might be an important senator, or even the emperor himself on special occasions. He and his attendants were followed by singers, and priests carrying images of the gods.



Part of a Roman mosaic showing a champion driver and his horse

Chariots raced around the central barrier - or spina - which had three pillars at each end.

The poorest citizens stood at the back.

Marble seats for senators

Imperial box

