

THE FORM GUIDE

As the results season draws to a close, and in honour of tomorrow's Grand National, we check the performances of some of construction's sleekest thoroughbreds. [Sarah Richardson](#) is trackside

Costain

Form guide

turnover 2006 £886.3m
(2005 £773m)
pre-tax loss 2006 £62m
(2005 profit £25m)



Costain took a tumble during 2006 after suffering writedowns thanks to project delays and disputes, and taking a hit from the closure of its international division. An attempt to shed excess weight through redundancies is taking place but a lack of clarity over whether problem contracts have been resolved has left this construction and engineering group with a considerable handicap.

Carillion

Form guide

turnover 2006 £3.6bn
(2005 £2.3bn)
pre-tax profit 2006 £68m
(2005 £52m)



Emerged from the shadows last year after a run of poor form. The acquisition of Mowlem is set to pay off, generating cost savings of £26m a year – a far cry from the £135m writedown previously associated with the company. A lifting of the tendering ban imposed by Network Rail has opened up another course to the company, where it could steal some ground on rivals.

Amec

Form guide

turnover 2006 £3.2bn
(2005 £2.8bn)
pre-tax loss 2006 £109m
(2005 loss £17.7m)



Amec hasn't shown good form for two years. New jockey Samir Briko will focus this nag on energy markets in the hope that conditions are more favourable than in the built environment – losses in that division contributed to a £90m writedown this year. The withdrawal from construction may take another year, however, and in the meantime the loss-making business continues to hold Amec back.

Lend Lease

Form guide (first six months)

turnover 2006 £2.9bn
(2005 £2.5bn)
operating profit 2006
£68m (2005 £83m)



Has been in poor form of late, thanks to a losing streak in UK construction. It suffered a £48m writedown, mainly on the Manchester Joint Hospitals PFI and Bridgewater Place in Leeds, but has also struggled on other projects. Murray Coleman, chief executive, concedes that a return to the winner's enclosure is unlikely in the next two years, even though the firm is looking to hire new talent.

Interserve

Form guide

turnover 2006 £1.4bn
(2005 £1.2bn)
pre-tax profit 2006
£15.1m (2005 £36m)



Usually a strong runner, this one fell badly this year owing to financial irregularities in its industrial services division. The failure cost the support services firm about £43m, but underlying performance was strong, and profit rose 61%. This suggests that it will go the distance, especially now that the industrial services business has been integrated with the reliable facilities business. So, a good bet for the future.

Balfour Beatty

Form guide

turnover 2006 £5.8bn
(2005 £4.9bn)
pre-tax profit 2006
£125m (2005 £141m)



Inconsistent. Despite good wins on schools in Birmingham, and hospitals in Birmingham and Glasgow, it was hampered by £25m in exceptional charges. It experienced difficulty restructuring its US civil engineering business, and was hit by integration costs after it bought Birse in July. That said, the acquisition of Centex in the US and a series of UK PFI wins should mean that 2007 is a good year.

Kier

Form guide

turnover First half 2006
£1bn (2005 £923m)

pre-tax profit first half 2006
£36m (2005 £28.4m)



On top form of late and reliable, with strong profit underpinned by good cash balance. Looks to have found a nice mix between construction and housebuilding, and has been performing well in both. Prospects for the immediate future are encouraging, with Kier standing a good chance of wins in prisons and education. A blip on a hotel project in Antigua has not been enough to put it off its stride.

Hanson

Form guide

turnover 2006 £4.1bn
(2005 £3.7bn)

pre-tax profit £481m
(2005 £429m)



The materials giant performed well in difficult conditions this year. Was not put off course by the US housing market slump or troubled trading conditions in the UK, where markets have seen a weak brick demand in repair and maintenance. Although it has struggled over some of the fences, expect it to do well in the long run. It is building up strength with acquisitions – 17 buys in the past year, including brickwork contractor Irvine Whitlock, means this horse looks a robust bet for the year ahead.

Persimmon

Form guide

turnover 2006 £3.1bn
(2005 2.3bn)

pre-tax profit 2006
£582m (2005 £495m)



A multiple winner last year, this housebuilder grew in stature with the addition of Westbury, which has strengthened this runner's resilience to slowing market conditions. Looking trim with £32m of savings off the back of the acquisition, there's potential for a further £45m this year. However, its position may be threatened if Taylor Wimpey joins the field, so expect it to bulk up further over the next six months.

T Clarke

Form guide

turnover 2006 £186m
(2005 £194m)

pre-tax profit 2006
£6.8m (2005 £8.6m)



Not a good year for the M&E contractor. It has struggled with heavy going in Scotland, Derby and East Anglia and has been

hit by rising copper prices, too. A tightening of financial controls and an overhaul of senior management may boost its chances but these changes are yet to be tested. Will have to get its fetlocks in order if it is not to struggle over the course of another season.

Galliford Try

Form guide

turnover first half 2006
£607m (2005 £372)

pre-tax profit first half 2006
£21.6m (2005 £14m)



A strong run of results recently, with pace improving thanks to completed integration of recent acquisitions Chartdale and Morrison Construction. The purchase of Linden Homes means this horse will double in strength again in the housebuilding field, where it is quickly emerging as a serious contender. A management reshuffle to strengthen the riding team means this is definitely one to watch.

Barratt

Form guide

turnover first half 2006
£1.2bn (2005: £1.2bn)

pre-tax profit first half 2006
£164m (2005 £180.2m)



After a patchy spell, this horse will be a favourite with the bookies next year. The acquisition of Wilson Bowden, soon to be completed, will make it the leader of the housebuilding field, with a valuation of £4.3bn and a landbank of 12,100 acres. It will also hope to transfer its form to the Midlands, where Wilson Bowden is strong. Even if Taylor Wimpey meets punters' expectations, expect Barratt to push it all the way.

Taylor Woodrow

Form guide

turnover 2006 £3.7bn
(2005 £3.6bn)

pre-tax profit 2006
£406m (2005 £411m)



Steady without ever threatening to hit top form this year, Taylor Woodrow is set to embark on a winning streak in 2007. The proposed tie-up with George Wimpey would put this steed at the top of its field, with a £6.7bn turnover and unit completions of more than 30,000 a year. Should rival Persimmon topple Wimpey with a bid for Taylor Woodrow, the firm would still hit the ground running, with the benefit of a greater landbank than it would enjoy by merging with Wimpey. A favourite with the punters, shares are at an all-time high.

● For the latest results, as they happen and straight from the horse's mouth, log on to www.building.co.uk/breaking news