RACING POST

Freemium, Metering & Paid Subscription POC
Case Study

By Charmaine Wyland

My Role:
UXDR project lead, hands-on designer (along with 2 other designers), research collaborator, business strategy stakeholder

This project addresses the how The Racing Post approached driving user account sign-ups including considering:

- Metering (creating a freemium tier)
- Simplification of the free account sign up process
- Better sign-posting (and possible renaming) of their Premium content to both promote subscription and reduce user frustration
- Better promotion of their Premium content related to subscription tiers

This project was run while Racing Post was going through a larger digital transformation process that touched on all areas of user experience, tech stacks and data integrations.
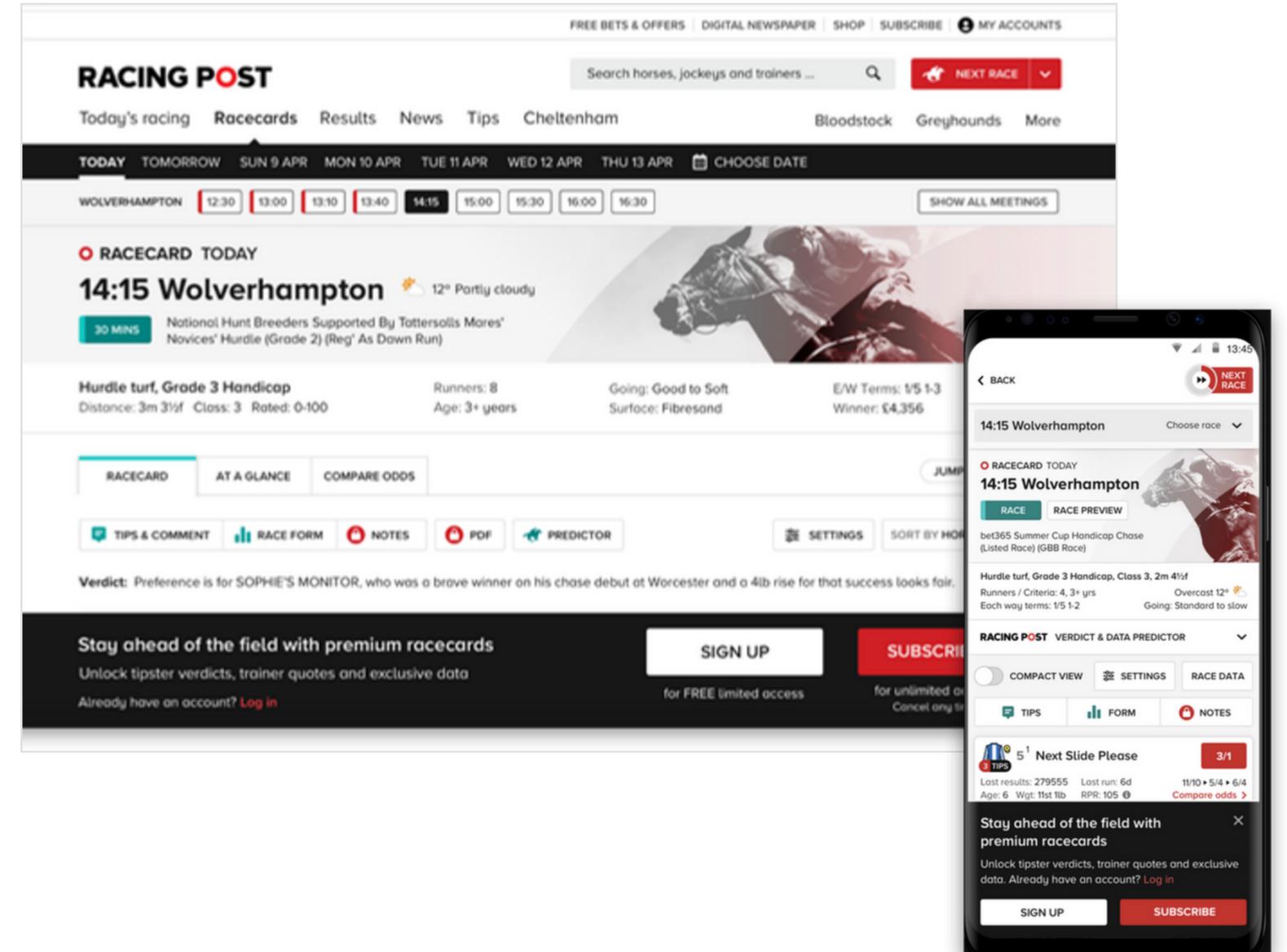
Business objectives: Why do this?

User accounts & customisation product strategy
1. Demonstrating our value drives registrations = First party data
2. First party data drives better conversion = Better monetisation
3. Loyalty drives better retention/frequency = Increased monetisation & retention

How do we enable this?
- Demonstrate value & drive registrations ---> Freemium offering (Flexible sampling & account acquisition)
- Data to drive better conversion ---> Metering

Requirements for POC:
- Better demonstration of the value of our premium products to unregistered/unsubscribed
- More account sign-ups - allows more comprehensive tracking, better chances of monetisation
- Understanding of the sweet-spot with metering between allowing some access, and instigating subscription
- Better monetisation of our user base with increased subscriptions

Customer objectives: What do we need to hope customers get out of this?

- Clear communication of the metering concept - what it is, what it gets them, status

- Better understanding of the product value - of what they can access if they choose to Subscribe

- An easy and frictionless account creation journey

- Awareness - knowing what they have paid for (with premium subs)

- A feeling of satisfaction - that they are pleased with what they get included with their subscription and/or the level of customisation they can get with even just the freemium tier of sign-up to the Racing Post.

How this Proof of Concept will be measured for success:

- Better demonstration of the value of our premium products to unregistered/unsubscribed users (measured by user feedback)
- Understanding of the sweet-spot with metering between allowing some access, and instigating subscription (multi-variant testing and user feedback)
- Creation of a larger plan and prioritisation for roll-out of metering and subs changes

Once the POC is launched on the tech stack

- More account sign-ups - allows more comprehensive tracking, better chances of monetisation
- Better monetisation of our user base with increased subscriptions

Racing Post user engagement breakdown, all platforms

This data was looking at how many people had signed up for an online account with Racing Post, regardless of if it was free, lower tier subscription or upper tier subscription.

27million users with no RP account and not logged in to bookmaker

RP registrants	23,134	0.08%
Bookmaker log in	442,861	1.64%
RP + Bookmaker	1,332	0.004%

RP registrants / No bookmaker log in	22,239	(0.08%)
No RP account / Bookmaker log in	441,529	(1.63%)

Registration vs low and upper tier subs engagement

Monthly Users	**1,745,876**	
RP registrants (logged in)	4,322	0.25%
Essential Annual	1,137	0.06%
Essential Monthly	1,927	0.11%
Ultimate Annual	3,468	0.19%
Ultimate Monthly	6,482	0.37%
RP registrants (total)	82,319	4.7%

What was known (from data, surveys and user research)

- Much of the Racing Post's content was free for the user to access, even the content and data that was proprietary to Racing Post.

- Paid subscriptions were aimed at this most expert of horseracing of enthusiasts leaving a large swathe of more casual or less expert users "on the shelf" for monetisation.

- Paid subscription uptake and renewal had been on a steady decline for years.

- Despite the lifetime value of subscribers to their most expensive tier (Ultimate) showed greater monetary value over the lifetime of those users' engagement, the paid subscription tiers had not changed in years.
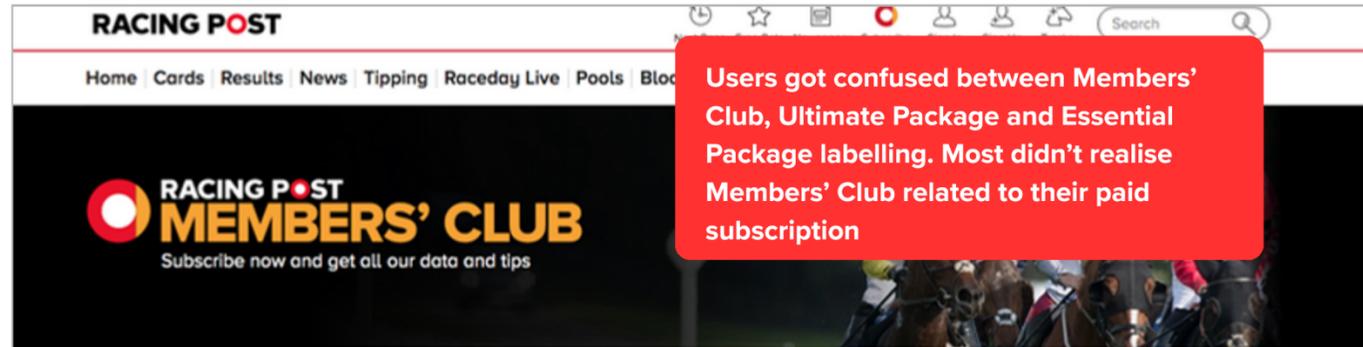
Users got confused between Members' Club, Ultimate Package and Essential Package labelling. Most didn't realise Members' Club related to their paid subscription

Few features had any visual clues to indicate they were part of the subscription. The few that did, most users found the icon confusing. Paywall barrier text was vague and did not sell the benenfits of sign up.
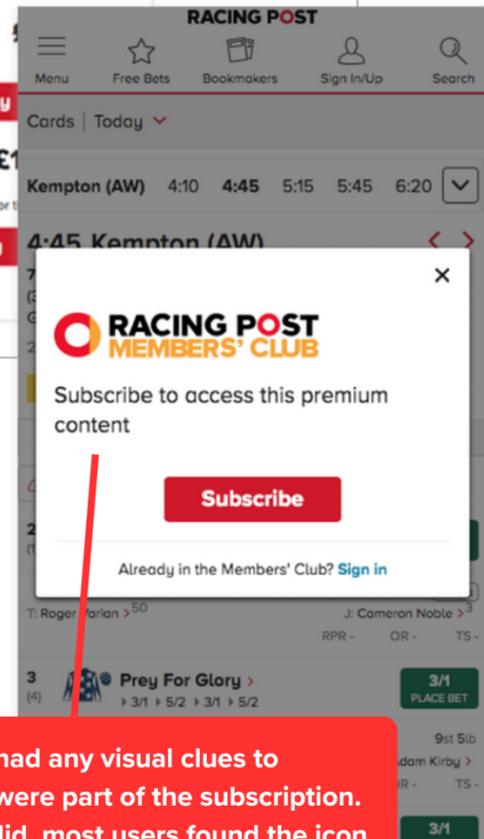
⭕ User Pain Points with Our Current Subscriptions

Cost
- Lapsed subscriber report the high price of subscriptions as main issue.
- Comments related to the cost of the subscription being the thing that holds people back from purchasing.

Time
- About 10% of people cite not having enough time to read/use the features to justify the cost.

Lack of visibility of the features included in Premium
- There is no "try before you buy" option for paid for features - people don't know if the features are included to be worth the high price

The subscription
- Major difference between happy current subscriber needs and a larger growth subscriber audience wants / needs.
- Tipping content and Horse Tracker we both ranked highly by non subscribers while they are near the bottom of the list from subscribers.
- The core proposition focuses on depth of information – some customers are less familiar with racing jargon, nuance, history or personalities.

Target Audiences / User Types
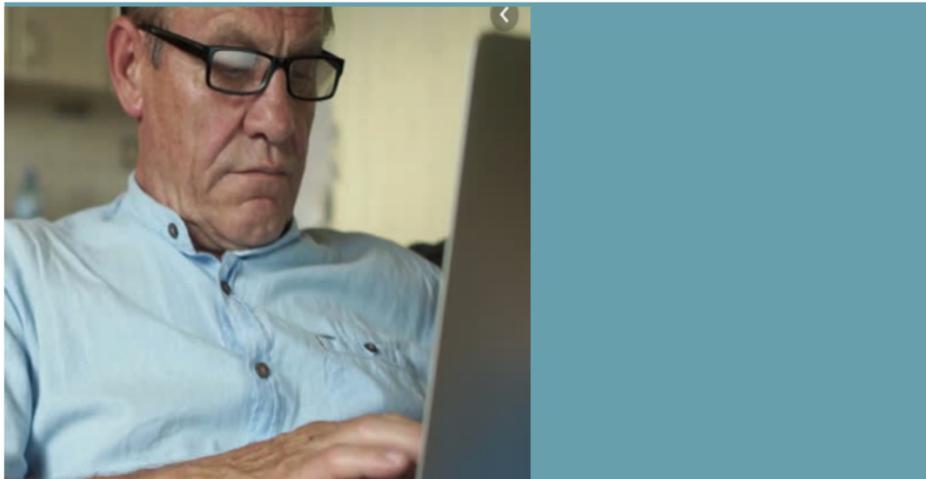
Very experienced horseracing enthusiast

- **Has followed racing for years, expert level of racing knowledge and is very keen on the sport**
- **Frequent bettor (usually not through RP)**
- **Rarely admits to using tipping content, but consumes a lot of data and editorial content**
- **Spends 20+ hours a week researching HR bets**
- **Data junkie**
- **Most likely to subscribe**

- Appreciates the subscription and more than other user types; believes it provides value for money re: data and editorial
- They do not like change to their routine or the idea of diminishing value in rising cost or diminishing data quality
- Most likely to sign up for freemium access, most likely to subscribe to current subs tiers

Consider how to support their needs with subs content while being flexible enough to entice other user types.

Mid-level horseracing fan

- **Has followed racing for a few years, medium level of knowledge, but not expert**
- **Frequent bettor (could do through RP)**
- **Consumes tips, data, analysis, video content**
- **Time poor - wants snackable data and lots of good tipping**
- **Could subscribe to a tier more betting and rich media focused**

- They are tech savvy and time constrained, they need a clear, quick proposition that takes very little effort and makes their life easier
- They are not getting enough value from the current subscription content for how they use it - a combination of irrelevant content (for them) and perhaps the format they receive it (taking too much time to digest)

Consider media and content they would like to access for subs, especially around tipping and snackable data.

Just-getting-into-racing fan

- **Has just started to get into racing, very low knowledge, very open to education**
- **Still learning horseracing betting, most likely to sign up to a bookmaker officer**
- **Time poor, leans on racing-knowledgeable friends and social media for info and tips**
- **Least likely to subscribe, most likely to engage in live updates, social and rich media content**

- They take their information from social, friends and anywhere they can find it but they are very passive.
- They are not so into horseracing that they want to spend the time or a lot of money
- They value the excitement, interactions, event and benefit from social validation and recommendations

Consider media and content they would like to access metering, especially around updates, social and tipping.
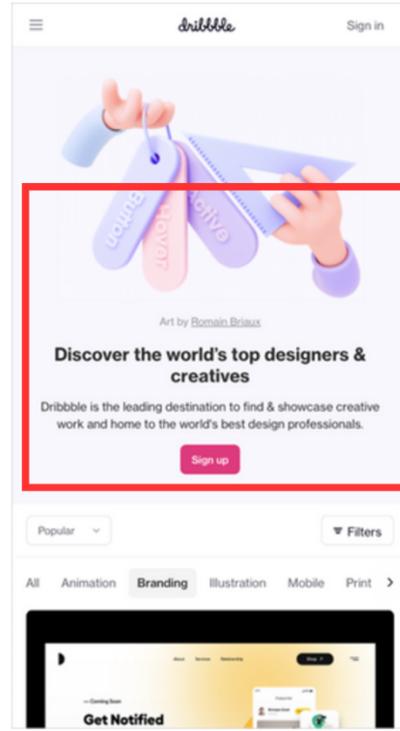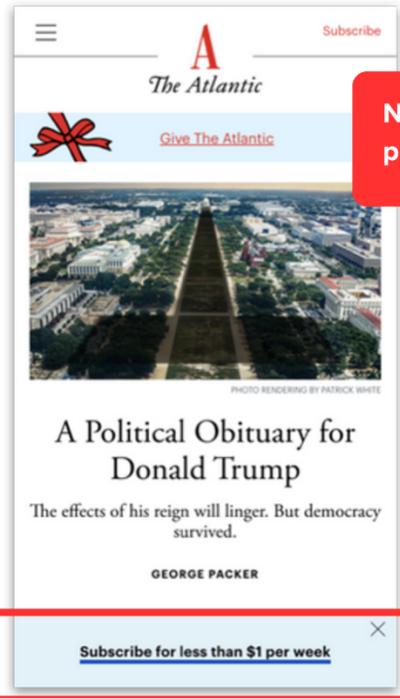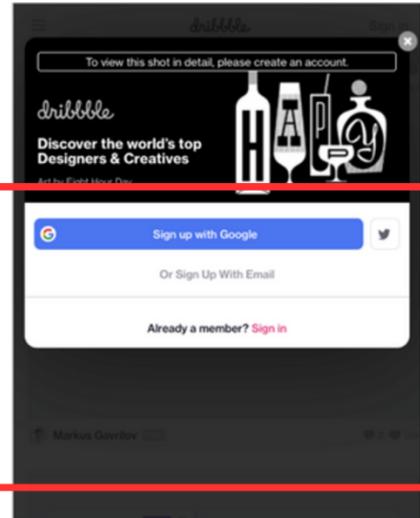
Competitor Analysis
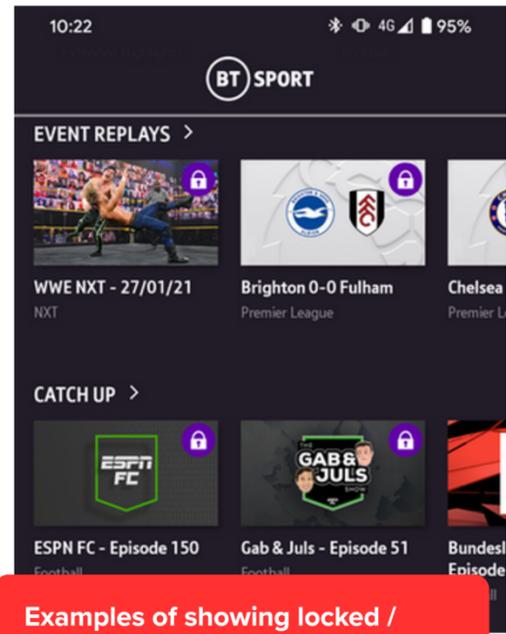
Examples of showing locked / premimum or freemium content within content on the page
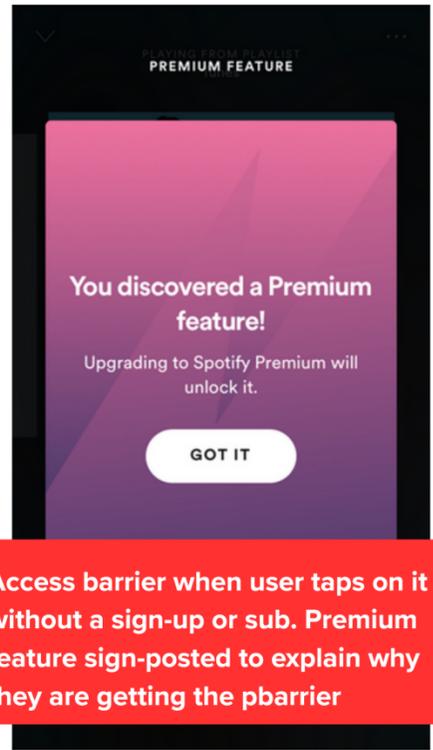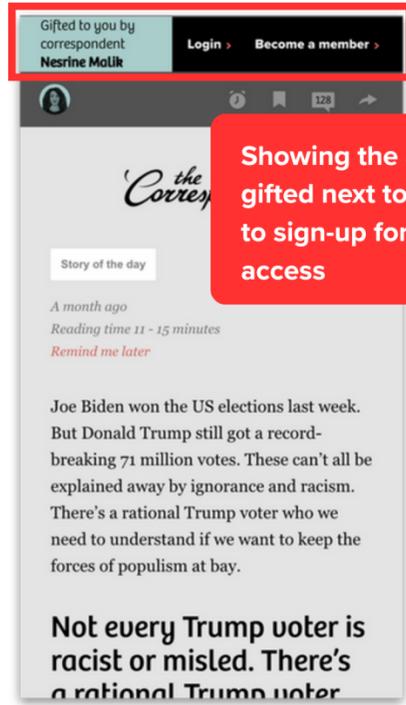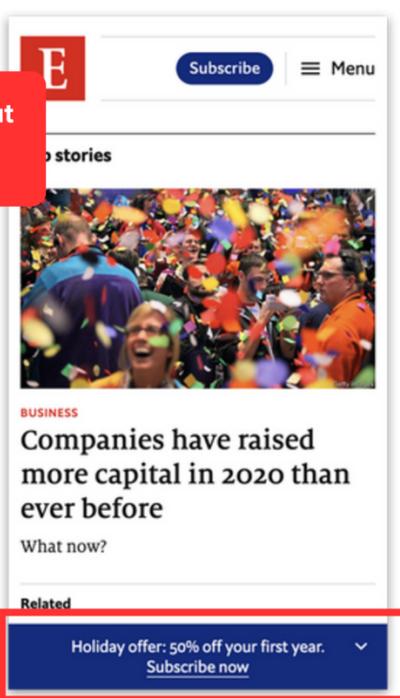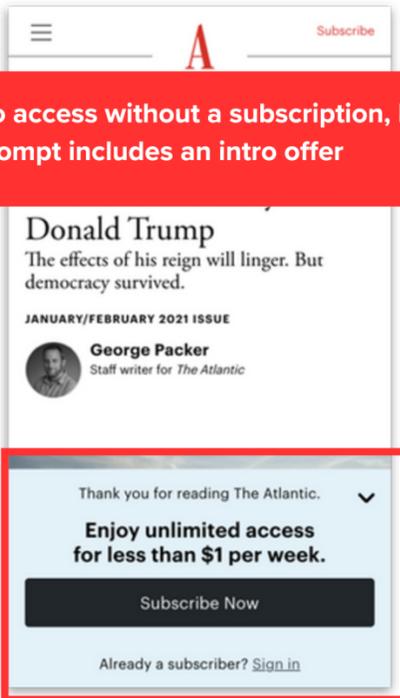
Access barrier when user taps on it without a sign-up or sub. Premium feature sign-posted to explain why they are getting the pbarrier
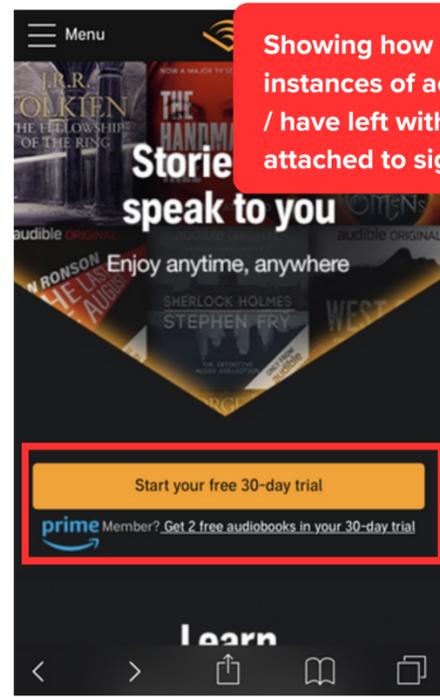
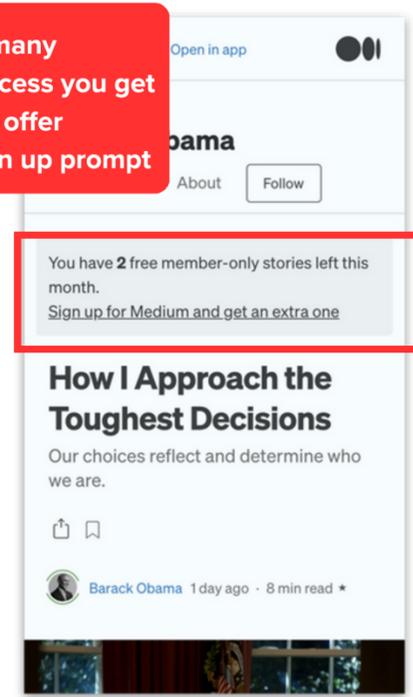Prompts to sign-up or subscribe once free access metering exceeded

No access without a subscription, but prompt includes an intro offer
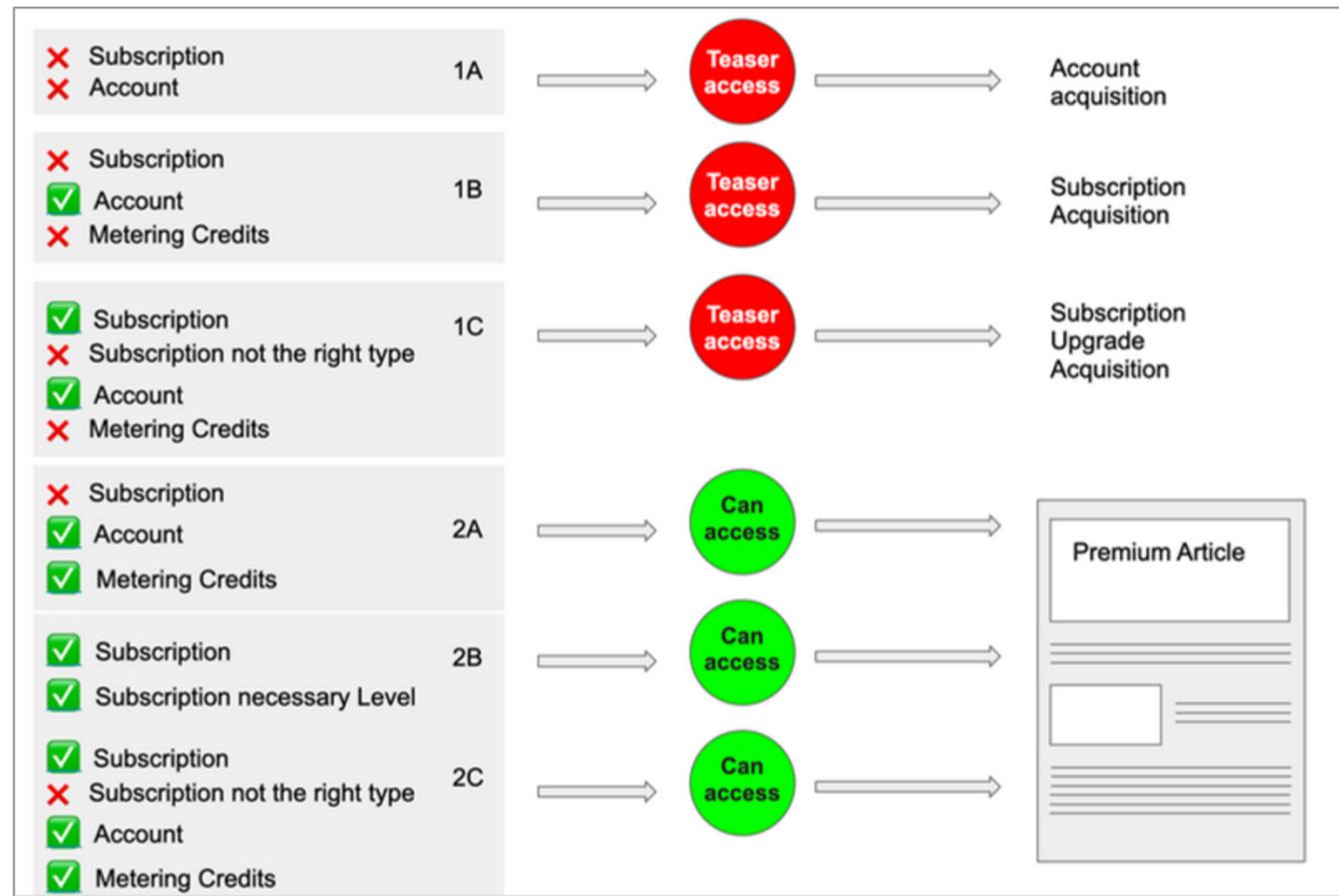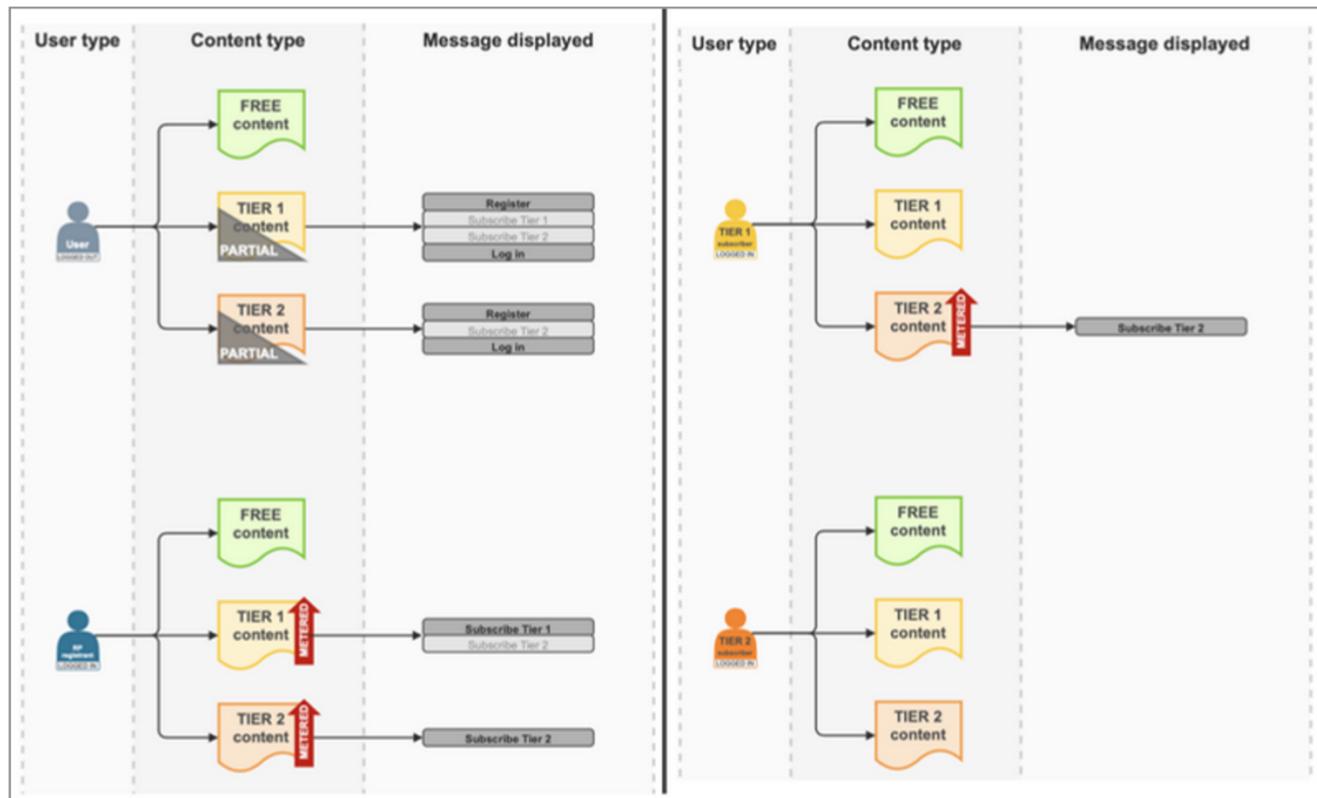
Showing the access is gifted next to a prompt to sign-up for more access

Showing how many instances of access you get / have left with offer attached to sign up prompt

Initial Ideation Process

I facilitated workshops on feature triggers and metering conditions with stakeholders

- Discussing and gaining consensus on the amount and type of content a users could access before needing to sign up to an account vs a sub
- Which content would qualify for metering (vs a hard sign-up / paywall), how many credits would users get
- Working with marketing on how to handle messaging to current subscribers so they wouldn't feel they were being ripped off (ie premium content being metered)

I facilitated further workshops with stakeholders, designers and researchers on journey mapping and additional metering conditions

- Rough sketching to see how the proposed metering would work
- Concepts around the journey to create a RP account
- Additional journeys and metering conditions considered if the user logged into or signed up to a bookmaker on the platform
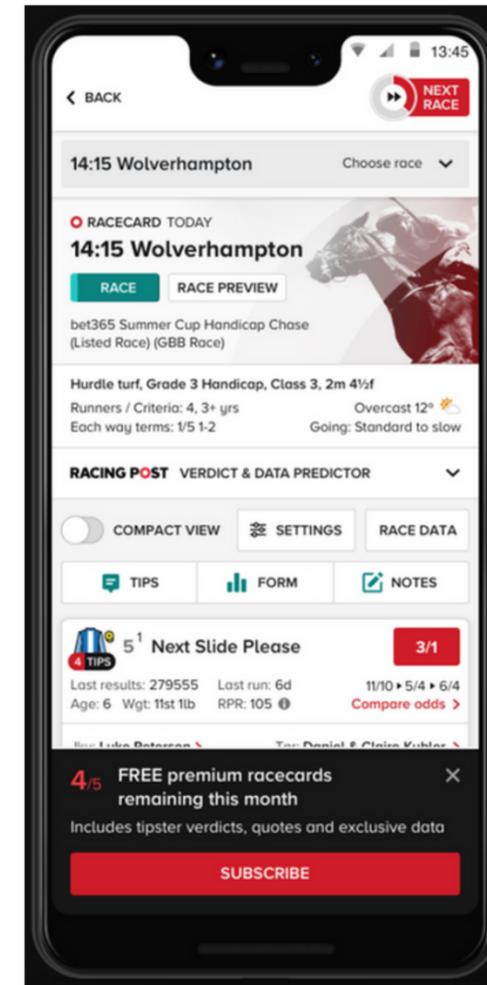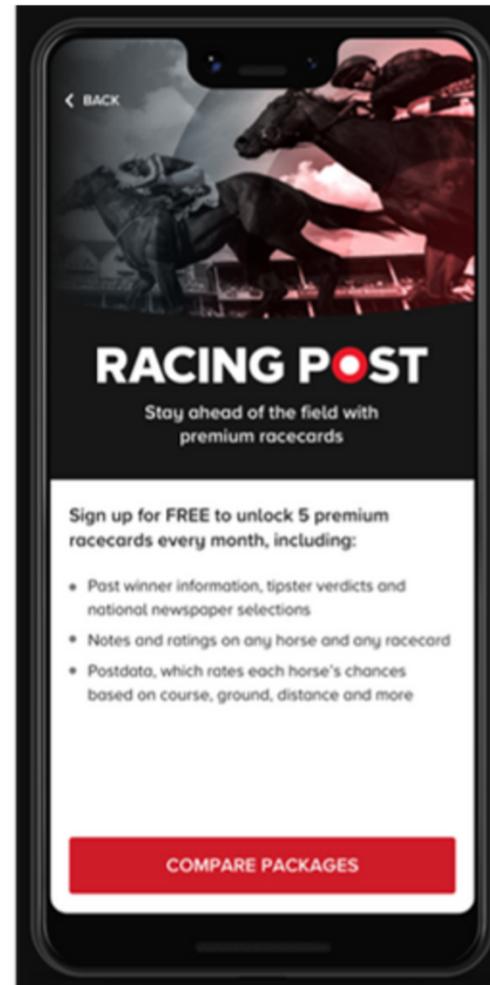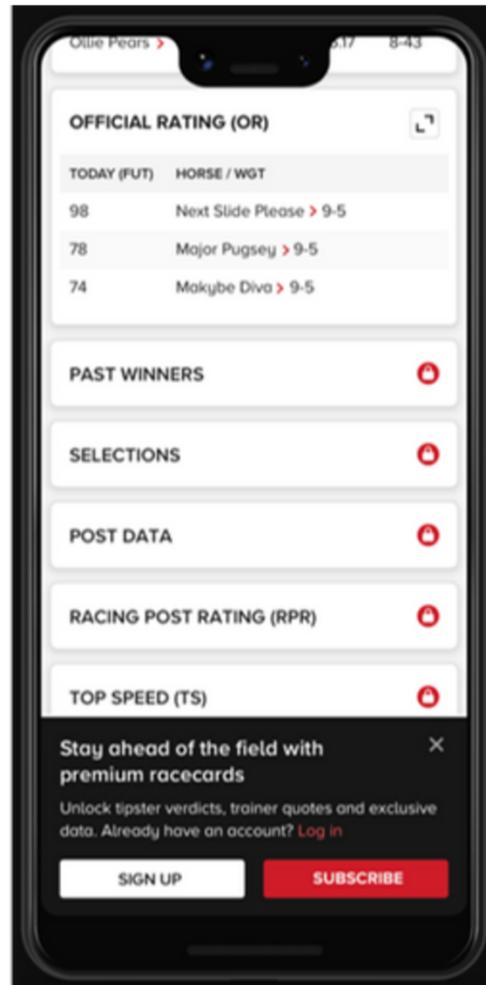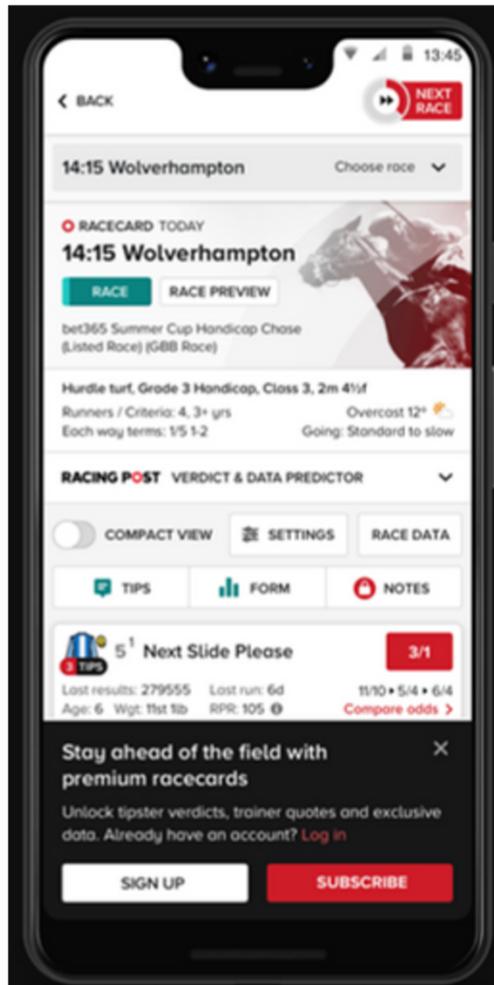
Creating content barriers to introduce the freemium tier and the metering to go with it.

- Placing formerly fully free and valuable RP specific content behind metering barriers
- Making subscription and metered content more obviously "locked" prior to sign up
- Locked items and tables behind padlocks
- Bottom banner with free sign up or subscribe CTA
- Dialog appears when any padlock is clicked
- Copy is contextual to screen being viewed at the time
- CTA goes to the features matrix for freemium, Essential and Ultimate paid subscriptions
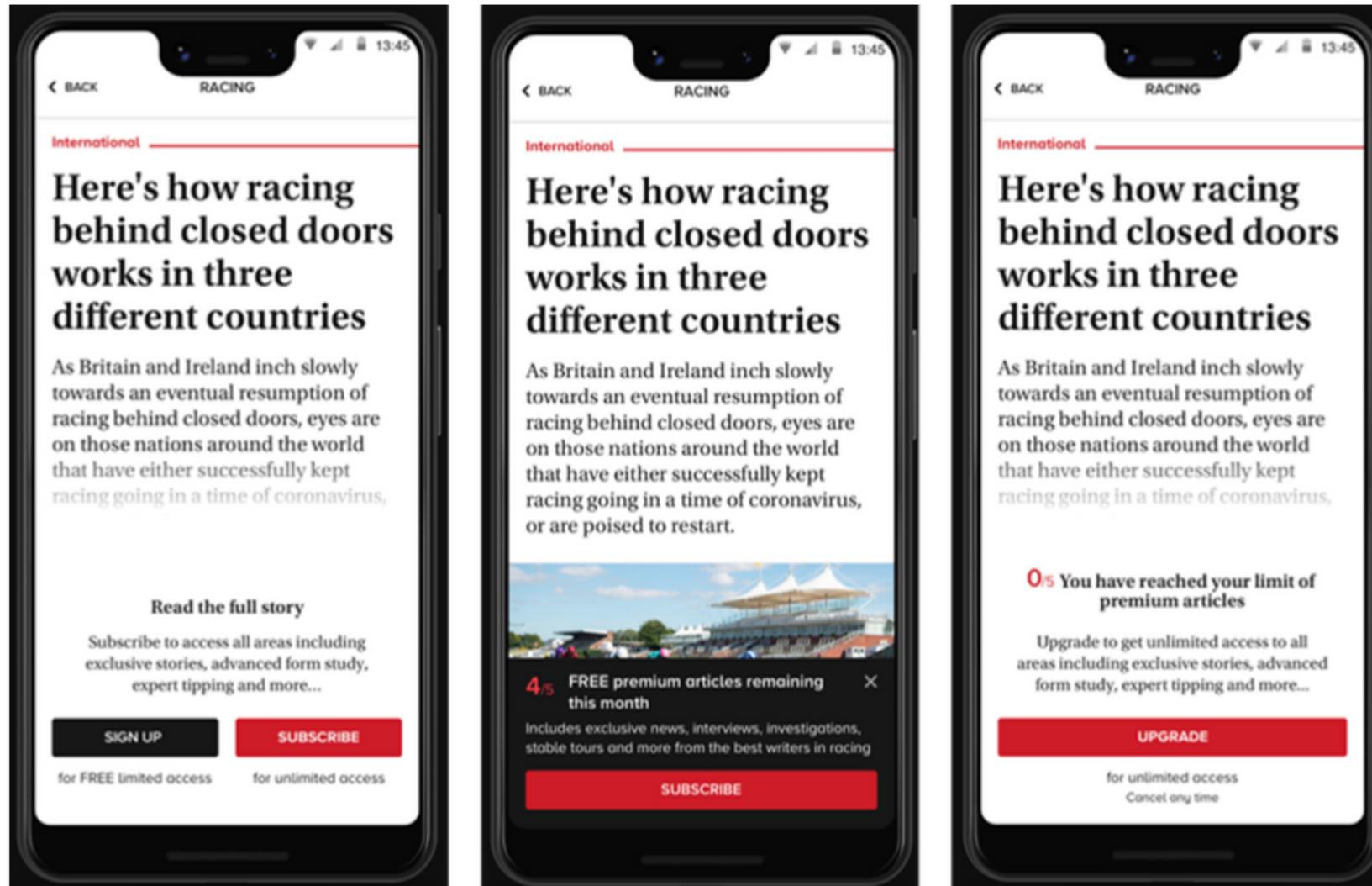
A lot of premium content in editorial laid behind a subs paywall - introducing metering to that premium content to encourage account creation and paid subscription sign-up.

- News story partially obscured by banner when logged out or if meter has expired
- Bottom banner to indicate how many premium articles are left to view
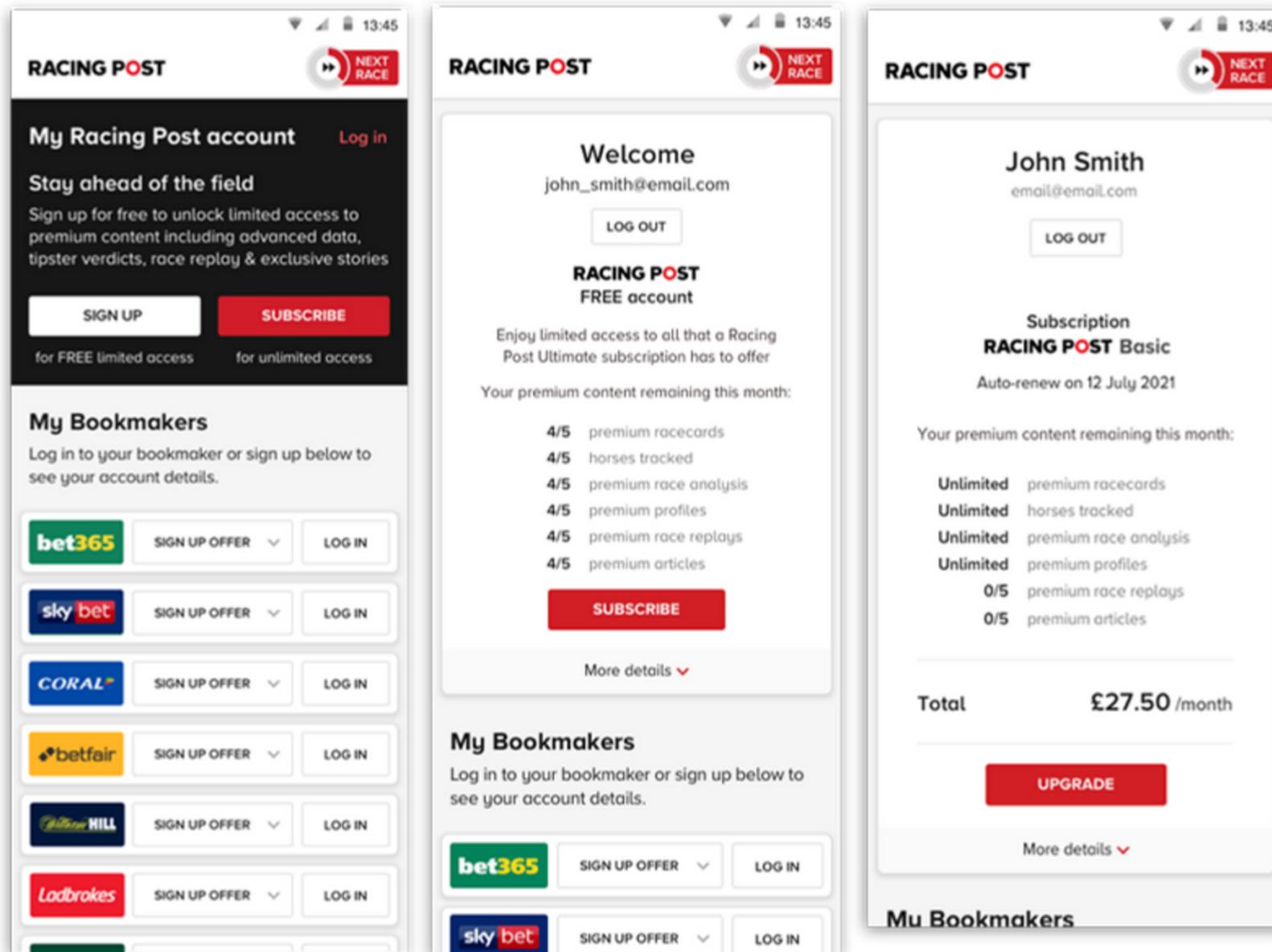
Account section - showing the users what they've signed up for / paid for:

- My accounts has the option to sign up or subscribe to RP account if logged out
- When logged in, message changes depending on user state
- Premium content allowance
- Subscription details
- CTAs to subscribe or update depending on user state

Changing the names, showing the benefits

- The Members' Club name and logo were ditched, Essential subscription changed to Basic to simplify messaging for the users
- Presenting a better features matrix: Changing what had been a features list into groupings of features with explained benefits
- Making the metering limits obvious and the benefits of signing up more obvious for each tier
- Visually promoting the Ultimate paid subs tier to be the most attractive option by showing everything that came wit it automatically
- (For mobile) - this design was more of a challenge due to the real estate and had to go through more design and user testing iterations

From both moderated usability testing and user interviews.

Matrix

✅ Matrix design was well-received on desktop; it was visually appealing and clearly showed the distinction between the packages.

ℹ️ Several participants were initially confused about what the 5s represented.

🟠 Perceptions of the value of the offers varied among personas. Manny generally viewed Basic and Free as not worthwhile, while Mike and Wes remarked on the high cost associated with paid packages.

🔴 Few participants believed that the Basic package was significantly different to a free package.

"Basic is too much of a halfway house - it feels cheap, giving away bits of content" - Manny

"I wouldn't have a Basic subscription... it's an upgrade but it's not significant" - Mike

"There isn't enough information, I'd need to see more of the article" - Manny

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive for adding in the freemium tier and allowing access to metered premium

- **After comparing the current subscription journeys to this new metered and optimised subs journey, 92% of testers chose the new journey and messaging**

- Users appeared more willing to consider a paid subscription in the future if they had some initial "try before you buy" access to premium content, especially to tools like Horse Tracker, Verdicts and Comments (price still came up as a blocking factor)

- Users gave great feedback on how to improve the messaging and metering barriers to reduce frustration and encourage engagement

- The difference between Basic and Free tiers did not seem obvious to many users
    - This prompted larger conversations on if the Basic tier should even exist
    - Further conversations on what to replace Basic with that would generate similar revenue - more of a focus was put on how to engage mid-tier users vs focusing on expert-level users
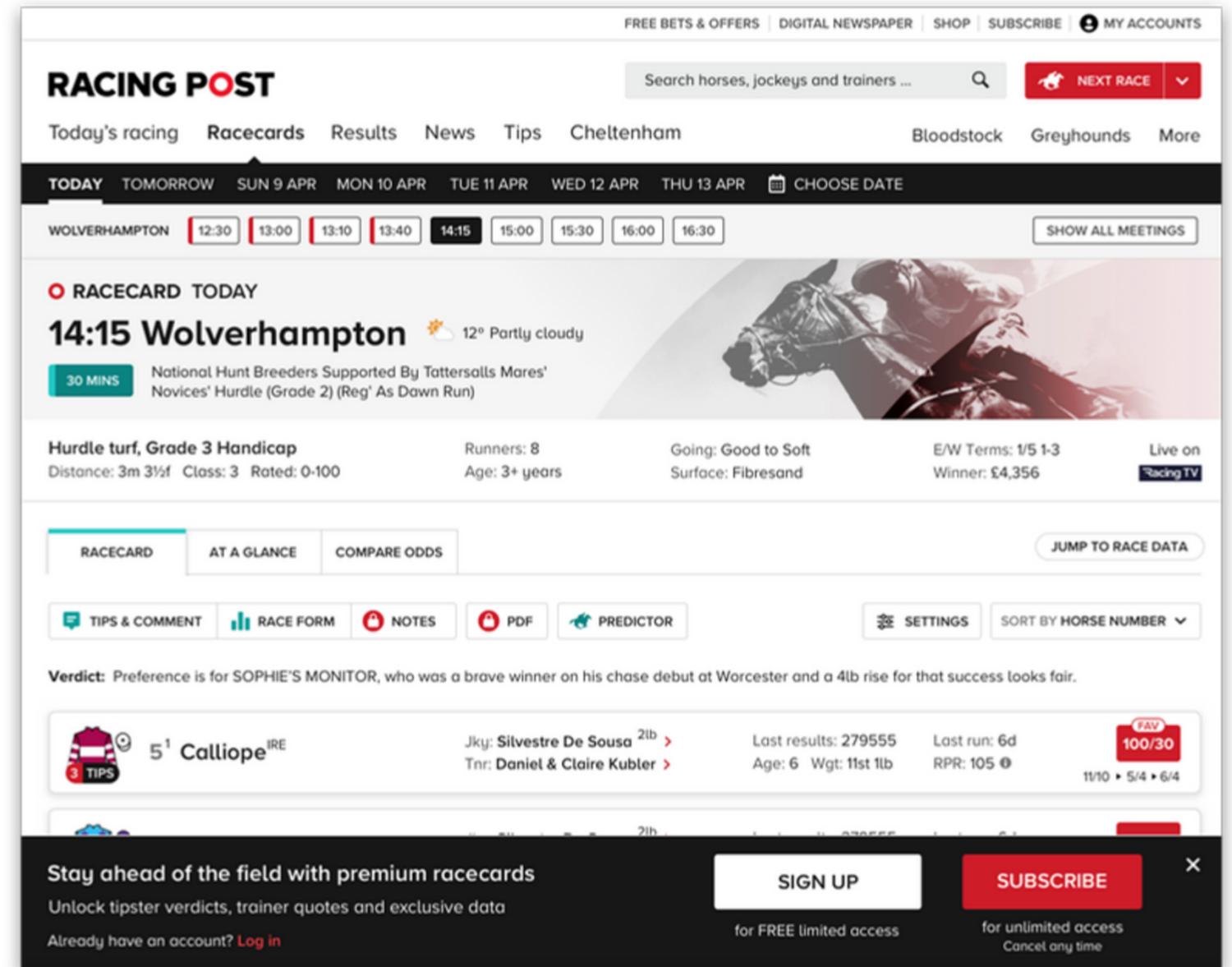
⬤ The Next Steps

This was a proof of concept to help inform the commercial and editorial side of the business on **how to restructure their paid subscription content and tiers.** *(It had not launched live before I left the Racing Post).*

The designed mechanisms for metering, subscription sign-up and account handling went through a brief round of tactical clean up as per the user testing related feedback and were **signed off as ready to implement** once the business had reconsidered the content in each of the tiers.

I worked with the other designers, product management and tech to put together **a prioritised roll-out plan for each tranche of features to be placed under the metering,** along with the related support (e.g. account area messaging, CRM follow up, marketing schedule for each tranche).

I worked with the Head of Product on an A/B testing schedule of specific messaging and barrier implementation in certain areas of the user journey that were seen as most risky or critical.