

WHITE PAPER

Putting the Horse First:

Veterinary Recommendations for the Safety and Welfare of the Thoroughbred Racehorse



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The American Association of Equine Practitioners was founded in 1954 by 11 racetrack veterinarians. While the association has grown to serve nearly 10,000 members worldwide who work with all equine breeds and disciplines, the AAEP's horse racing origin brings a unique understanding of the health and welfare needs of the racehorse.

It is with this perspective and commitment to equine safety and welfare that the AAEP formed its Racing Task Force in July 2008 to evaluate the safety and welfare issues affecting Thoroughbred horse racing. Catastrophic injuries, medication usage and a changing societal view of the appropriate use of horses in competition present formidable challenges to those entrusted with the care of the racehorse and the structure of the industry.

The AAEP Racing Task Force developed this white paper with the intent of recommending practices that place the welfare and safety of the horse first while supporting those who seek to make meaningful change. As equine veterinarians, we are committed to working with the Thoroughbred racing industry to implement procedures that protect the horse. In addition, the AAEP expects its veterinary members to abide by the rules of all jurisdictions where they practice.

General Principles

The AAEP has long held position statements that address many aspects of racehorse health and safety. We encourage the Thoroughbred racing industry to support the following essential elements of an overall industry structure that promotes horse safety:

- The adoption of uniform rules of medication usage, testing, security and enforcement by all industry participants.
- Increased funding for regulatory functions, including state-of-the-art testing and racetrack security.
- Continued identification and implementation of procedures and strategies that will significantly reduce the injury rate of horses, such as the recent recommendations to eliminate the use of toe grabs other than wear plates with a height no greater than 2 millimeters.

The AAEP makes the following recommendations for the Thoroughbred racing industry in four key areas: societal change and the public perception of horse racing, the racing business model, the veterinarian-owner-trainer relationship, and medication.

Societal Change and the Public Perception of Racing

Since the turn of the century, American society has drifted far from its agrarian roots to the point that only 15 percent of Americans today are involved with agriculture of any form. The horse, which was once a staple of American agriculture and general transportation, has become less of a beast of burden and is now viewed by many in the

public to be a companion animal, much the same as a dog or cat. In this societal context, welfare issues affecting the horse resonate with the public like never before.

In order to address the impact of societal change upon the Thoroughbred racing industry, the AAEP recommends:

- Racing industry support for a strategic plan that places the safety and welfare of the horse among its highest priorities. It is imperative that the industry urgently demonstrate an ability to affect sweeping change without government intervention. The AAEP recognizes and supports efforts by the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA) to accomplish this goal.
- The continued collaboration of multiple racing organizations (NTRA, TOBA, HBPA, ARCI, The Jockey Club, AAEP, racetracks and sales companies and others) to address the challenges affecting racing. An excellent opportunity for a cooperative industry-wide effort is the NTRA Safety and Integrity Alliance, and the AAEP enthusiastically supports this effort.
- When the substantive issues of race horse welfare have been addressed by the industry, an aggressive public relations effort must be mounted to educate the public about what is being done to protect the welfare and safety of the horse (e.g.: racetrack injury reporting program, racetrack surface testing and medication studies).

The Business Model of Racing

Thoroughbred racing is a \$15 billion industry in the United States, and the business model has evolved over the years to favor training and racing of two-year-old horses that compete for championship purses late in their two-year-old year. Their peak earning potential is in the three-year-old year, with a gradually diminishing emphasis on continued racing into the four-year-old year and later.

Thoroughbred racing operates on a year-round schedule in 38 separate racing jurisdictions. Because a larger field of horses promotes more wagering, which in turn increases purse size, small field sizes have caused racing secretaries in some instances to apply pressure to trainers to enter horses who might not otherwise be suitable for racing. This practice must be eliminated, as it encourages entry of horses at shorter intervals that may place them at increased risk of injury due to increased frequency of high-speed cyclic loading. Another concerning trend is an increasing number of racino executives that do not have experience in horse racing or horse care. We believe it is imperative that senior racetrack management become knowledgeable about the issues and business practices that directly affect the welfare and safety of the horses that race at their tracks.

As noted, two-year-old racing is an important aspect of the industry business model. Some degree of training and racing of two year olds is not harmful to the welfare and safety of the horse. In fact, a review of Jockey Club information indicates that horses that race as two year olds are more successful and race longer than horses that do not race at

the age of two. However, not all horses are able to sustain the same level of training without significant stress or injury. There is a need for continued investigation of the welfare and safety implications of current policies and procedures employed to sell, condition and race two-year-olds.

Other practices that will improve the safety of the racehorse include the development of a consistent protocol for pre-race examinations by regulatory veterinarians as well as uniform criteria for scratching horses. Currently there is variation in these procedures among the 38 racing jurisdictions. There also is lack of uniformity in reporting racehorse injuries, particularly those that occur during morning workouts. Judicious application of a standardized reporting system will increase the racing industry's ability to monitor and address racing and training injuries.

In most racing jurisdictions there is no institutional program to care for horses that can no longer race. The view of most racing facilities is that the responsibility for the care of horses rests entirely with the owner. This view is entirely appropriate. However, if a horse owner does not provide responsible care for retired racehorses, the industry becomes vulnerable to attack for apparent lack of concern for equine welfare. The resulting negative impact on horse racing's image can contribute to disenfranchisement of racing fans.

The AAEP acknowledges that the following recommendations for modification of the business model of racing will have significant economic implications (some positive, some negative) for racing managers. We do not make these recommendations lightly. Further, we emphasize that one of our highest priorities as an industry must be to reduce equine injuries. The greatest potential for decreasing injury exists in making procedural and policy changes within the business model of racing, particularly in the claiming arena.

In order to put the safety and welfare of the horse first in the business model of racing, the AAEP recommends:

- A critical analysis by the racing industry of the safety and welfare implications of the current schedules, procedures and policies surrounding the conditioning, sale and racing of two-year-old horses.
- A period of rest for all horses to provide an opportunity to refresh and diminish the volume of persistent cyclic loading that occurs in the absence of rest.
- No horse shall be permitted to race within 10 days of its last start.
- Every horse entered to race shall be on association grounds in sufficient time to have a pre-race veterinary inspection for racing soundness by the regulatory veterinarian.
- Standardization and enhancement of pre-race and post-race veterinary examinations with mandatory cross-jurisdictional sharing of information.
- In those jurisdictions that practice it, racetrack management must discontinue the coercion of trainers to enter horses according to stall allotment.

- Uniform participation by all jurisdictions in injury reporting for both racing and training injuries.
- Investment by all racing venues in capital improvements of the racing oval that will enhance horse, rider and personnel safety, such as safety rails, padded starting gates, and helmets and vests for starting gate personnel.
- Immediate adoption of ARCI riding crop and shoeing standards in all racing jurisdictions and at in-training sales.
- The development in all racing jurisdictions of a program for rehabilitation, retraining and adoption for horses whose racing careers have ended. These programs should reinforce owner responsibility and support a secondary market for racehorses. The Finger Lakes Thoroughbred Adoption Program in Farmington, N.Y., is an example of successful collaboration between racetrack management and horsemen. Any new programs can be linked nationally with the Unwanted Horse Coalition, currently operated by the American Horse Council.
- The generation of funds by the industry to assist in the transition of horses from racing into second careers.
- Governance change within the horse racing industry to establish uniform regulatory authority to accomplish widespread and consistent compliance throughout the industry.
- Development of continuing education and accreditation programs for owners, trainers, stewards, jockeys, grooms, starters, farriers, veterinarians and security personnel.

Claiming Races

There are essentially two groups of horses that compete at the racetrack. The sport's top level competitors, representing approximately 30 percent of the total racing population, compete in stakes and allowance races, while the majority of horses compete in condition or claiming races. Because the schedules and physical demands on these two groups of horses are unique and quite disparate, the AAEP recommends the following changes to the structure of claiming races in order to protect the welfare and safety of claiming-level horses:

- Claimed horses must be tested post-race, as is currently the rule in New York. Horses that test positive shall have the claim rescinded at the discretion of the buyer.
- No claiming race should have a purse that exceeds the claiming price by more than 50 percent.
- If a horse is claimed, it shall not start in a claiming race for a period of 30 days since the date of claim for less than 25% more than the amount for which it was claimed.
- When appropriate, horses must demonstrate a work between races that displays fitness and soundness.
- Horses that do not finish the race or those that sustain a catastrophic injury during the race remain the property of the original owner.

Veterinarian-Owner-Trainer Relationship

Open and consistent communication between the owner, the trainer and the veterinarian will develop a relationship built on trust and shared philosophies. The result will be decisions that are made in the best interest of the horse. The current reality of racetrack operations is that the owner is often excluded from the communication chain, and we as veterinarians would like to change that. Veterinarians also are sensitive to the costs of services that are provided. It is important for owners to know that veterinary care is not given to any racehorse without the trainer's direct or implicit approval and that their trainer is acting as their legal agent when requesting veterinary services for their horses. Without open communication, differing management philosophies often result in confusion and dissatisfaction.

In order to provide complete transparency for the veterinary-owner-trainer relationship, the AAEP recommends the following:

- Trainers should include horse owners in all aspects of health care decisions.
- Owners should have a thorough understanding of the medication and training philosophy of their trainer with particular emphasis upon the level of medical care provided to their horses.
- Veterinarians should provide unfettered access to owners and trainers for consultation and discussion of medical treatments.

Medication

While much progress toward uniformity has been made by industry stakeholders such as the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium in recent years, medication remains the flash point for much of the public's scrutiny of horse racing today. U.S. racing jurisdictions impose medication regulations that vary from one jurisdiction to the next. This disparity in medication rules presents significant challenges to owners and trainers who race horses in more than one jurisdiction, and often leads to confusion about how to best implement appropriate therapeutic regimens. In addition, many racing jurisdictions have their own testing laboratory, which currently do not operate by a uniform accreditation standard.

Horse racing in most other jurisdictions throughout the world operates under the medication rules of the International Federation of Horseracing Associations (IFHA). The principle difference in the medication regulations of the United States and the IFHA is the permitted use of anti-bleeder medication furosemide (Salix® and adjunctive anti-bleeder medications in some racing jurisdictions) and permitted levels of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS). With anabolic steroid regulation now in place in the United States, most other differences are largely semantic and are primarily a function of the state regulatory structure of U.S. racing.

All medication treatment programs should be based upon the safety and welfare of the horse. While the veterinarian is ultimately the provider of medical care for the horse, treatment philosophies should be determined in conjunction with input from the owner and trainer.

With regard to medication policy in the United States, the AAEP recommends the following:

- Universal adoption in all racing jurisdictions of the Association of Racing Commissioners International (ARCI) model rules, as proposed by the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTC), including no race-day medication except furosemide (Salix®). The industry should work with the RMTC, where advisable, to make progress toward uniform medication rules that are in the best interest of the horse.
- Continued research, with industry support, to determine the causes and appropriate treatment of exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage (EIPH) in the race horse.
- Collaboration between the RMTC and the IFHA to create an international model rule of racing that can be uniformly administered worldwide.
- Establishment of a limited number of regional confirmation/reference laboratories that are adequately funded to meet the current challenges of drug testing.
- Establishment of minimal requirements, accreditation and monitoring of all testing laboratories.
- Development of uniform testing protocols for accredited laboratories.
- Adoption of uniform out-of-competition testing protocols by all racing jurisdictions.
- Adoption of uniform TCO₂ testing protocols by all racing jurisdictions.
- Universal adoption of the penalty structures recommended in ARCI model rules and proposed by the RMTC.
- Adoption of uniform reporting practices for medication violations by all racing jurisdictions.
- Management of medication violations by racing jurisdictions with three objectives in mind: (1) to discover how the medication entered the system of the horse in order to prevent future positive tests; (2) to manage and report sub-therapeutic levels of therapeutic medication overages in a way that does not further degrade the public image of racing; and (3) to sufficiently penalize the violators and discourage further attempts to violate the rules
- The key to successful implementation of these medication recommendations is **increased racetrack security** to promote enforcement and achieve uniform compliance.

Horses Intended for Sale at Public Auction

The treatment of horses intended for sale at public auction should be regulated in a similar way as for horses that are racing. The adoption of similar regulations will protect the horse and ensure the integrity of the sales process, recognizing that the sales process is a unique experience for immature horses.

The AAEP recommends the following actions in regards to medication usage in race horses intended for sale:

- Yearling and 2-year-old in training sales should institute stringent medication rules that are similar to RMTC guidelines.
- Yearling and 2-year-old in training sales should institute random testing of horses consistent with RMTC testing protocol recommendations.
- Any health problems that require medical treatment on the sales grounds must be announced in a timely manner, giving the buyer time to consult with a veterinarian prior to purchase.
- A list of all medications administered to a horse while the horse is on the sales grounds and being displayed to potential purchasers should be submitted to the sales company. If testing results vary from this list, the sale may be voided at the buyer's discretion.
- Penalties for medication violations at auctions must be significant to deter consignors from medication practices that may place the horse at increased risk of injury and/or compromise the integrity of the sales process.

The AAEP's mission is to promote the health and welfare of the horse. Although the focus of the AAEP Racing Task Force has primarily been the Thoroughbred racing industry, nearly all of the recommendations put forth are relevant to other racing breeds in the United States. To this end the AAEP is eager to assist the racing industry in reforming policies and practices in order to enhance the safety and welfare of the horse by putting the horse first. We believe that this effort, based upon what's best for the horse, will also be the key to restoring public confidence in the racing industry. Simply put, what is good for the horse is good for racing.

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