

Horse Racing Awareness Week 2012

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Instead of betting
on the **cruel**
Grand National...



... why not help us to fund care
and shelter for rescued horses?



Tyneandthyneagain running loose
moments before his death in the
Grand National

www.stopkillinghorses.com

Rescued horses and ponies enjoying life at Hope Pastures

Jason Maguire, whip in hand, after thrashing Ballabriggs to the finishing line in the 2011 Grand National



Same old story

There was, however, nothing unique about the 2011 race. Since 2000, 20 horses have died on the Grand National course, with others badly injured.

The basic problem is that the course is too long and too gruelling. Thirty punishing fences have to be jumped over an extreme distance of four and a half miles, making it the longest race in world Thoroughbred National Hunt racing. Despite modifications to the course, more horses have been killed in the past decade than ever before.

The usual excuse!

Defenders of the Grand National – and racing in general – often argue that ‘if the horses didn’t like it, they wouldn’t carry on running after their jockeys fall off’. Yet horses sometimes try to continue running when they are clearly injured – even after a heavy fall and with a broken leg. They don’t do so for pleasure! Horses are herd animals. They feel safer when part of a group, especially in the noisy, often unfamiliar race-day environment.

Remember 2011?

The 2011 Grand National brought home to the public as never before that the race is – as Animal Aid Director Andrew Tyler told the media – ‘straightforward animal abuse that is on a par with Spanish bullfighting’. Many who had previously supported the race were sickened by television film of the deaths of two horses – Ornaïs, who crashed to the ground and broke his neck, and Dooneys Gate, who suffered fatal spinal injuries in an horrific pile-up at the infamous Becher’s Brook.

Further outrage was caused by the repeated whipping of eventual winner Ballabriggs to get him over the finishing line first (an offence for which jockey Jason Maguire was suspended but kept his prize money).

Similarly distressing was the sight of buckets of water having to be thrown over exhausted and dehydrated horses at the end of the race. Ballabriggs’ condition caused such concern amongst his handlers that he was hastily led back to the stables, out of public view, instead of being taken to receive the crowd’s cheers in the winner’s enclosure.

Changing the Aintree course – a feeble package of ‘reforms’

Following the public outcry over last year’s race, the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) has introduced a new round of ‘improvements’ to the course, heralded by the industry as an answer to previous welfare problems. Measures include changes to Becher’s Brook – a treacherous fence that is deceptively lower on the landing than on the take-off side. The drop has now been reduced slightly. **But the package of changes as a whole is fashioned with a view to quelling public disquiet rather than saving horses.**

Yet again, it is a case of the ‘same old story’. Every time the National proves particularly brutal, the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) reacts by making small adjustments. For example, when only four runners finished the course in 2001, the maximum number of horses who can take part was fixed at 40 – still far too many for safety. Since then, high numbers of fatalities have led to modifications of the fences and widening of the track. Yet still the deaths and injuries continue.

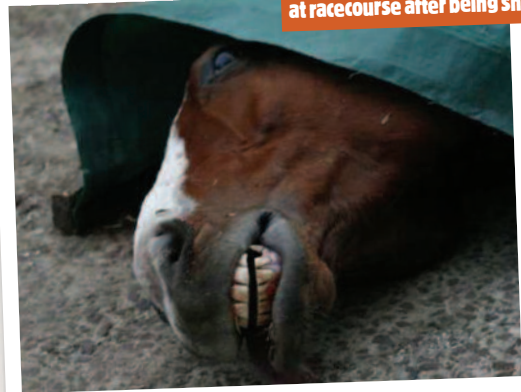
La Vizelle at Hillside Animal Sanctuary



Death of Dooneys Gate at Becher's Brook



Dead horse under a green sheet at racecourse after being shot



Lady Margaret, ex-race horse and broodmare – abandoned by the racing industry and left to die

Sanctuary Not Cruelty

Animal Aid has, for many years, called for the Grand National to be banned. But in addition to our traditional annual protest, this year we are adding a new element to our Horse Racing Awareness Week, with the launch of Sanctuary Not Cruelty. If you are concerned about the National, we are offering you a positive alternative to betting or boycotting by instead helping two specialist sanctuaries that are struggling to rescue horses in need, including ex-race horses.

Rather than placing that yearly 'flutter' on the deliberately hazardous Aintree race, why not donate the money to making a real difference to horse welfare?

Or, if you hold a Grand National sweepstake at work, please try to persuade your colleagues to raise much-needed funds for sanctuaries instead.

We have two designated sanctuaries for 2012 and you can donate directly to them:

Hope Pastures Sanctuary, Weetwood Lane, Leeds, LS16 5PH Tel: 0113 261 4344
www.hopepastures.org

Hope Pastures (The Phyllis Harvey Horse and Donkey Trust) houses 20 permanent equine residents on its site near Leeds, and also finds suitable foster homes for other horses and donkeys in need.

The story of Paddy – an ex-race horse now enjoying a long and happy retirement at the sanctuary – is instructive. He raced 15 times on the flat under the name Patrician Magician, winning one race when ridden by champion jockey Kieren Fallon. He competed at the ages of two and three and then left racing (at a young age, as most horses do).

He had two trainers and two different owners, having been sold on. On or after his final race he must have suffered an injury that ruled him out of competitive 'sport', since his record suggests that he was a horse with racing ability.

We are not sure about his life after racing and before finding a home at Hope Pastures, but he has certainly been luckier than most in living to a contented old age. He's now well into his 20s and suffers from stiff joints, but otherwise he acts much younger than his years and loves people and other animals.

Adoptions at Hope Pastures cost £15 per annum.

Hillside Animal Sanctuary, Hall Lane, Frettenham, Norwich, NR12 7LT
Tel: 01603 736200 www.hillside.org.uk

Hillside has around 2000 animals of different kinds, and over 500 of these are rescued horses, ponies, donkeys and mules. Hillside Shire Horse Sanctuary, at West Runton near Cromer on the North Norfolk Coast, is home to 60 or so heavy horses and more than 50 ex-race horses who have been saved from slaughter after rejection by the heartless racing industry. Their only crime was being just seconds too slow on the race track. Among their horses are those who descend from racing's most marketable bloodlines, Mill Reef and Northern Dancer. But their supposed 'good breeding' wouldn't have saved them from an untimely end had Hillside not stepped in and saved them. One of these horses, La Vizelle, was snatched from the slaughterman's grasp when Hillside purchased her cheaply at an Epsom race horse sale.

La Vizelle, who was rescued in 1997 having run in four races at just two years old, is now a contented 17 year-old, and can be sponsored for as little as £10 per year.

Unhappy retirement

Unlike the fortunate animals at Hope Pastures and Hillside, many ex-race horses face a miserable fate when their careers are over.

In the face of mounting criticism, the racing industry set up Retraining of Racehorses Ltd (RoR) in 2000 and now provides some funds to four sanctuaries. The money it gives is only a tiny fraction of its vast resources. According to RoR's own statistics, 4,000 thoroughbreds need rehoming each year, yet – in the words of top ex-jockey Richard Dunwoody – 'only a small proportion... live to enjoy a happy retirement'.

The British Horseracing Authority's (BHA) own figures show that there was a 61 per cent increase in thoroughbreds sent to the abattoir over two years to the end of 2010. Animal Aid believes that the actual number of ex-race horses who end up as meat for the overseas market may be far higher than the figure of around 500 acknowledged by the BHA. Many others end their days uncared for and neglected.

The last word on the poor treatment of ex-race horses can be left to *Horse & Hound* magazine. 'Despite all the [racing industry] initiatives and PR', it comments, 'there is a black hole in the records on the fate of ex-race horses.'

The long economic downturn will clearly make matters even worse.

420 horses killed every year

Many thoroughbreds don't make it to the end of their careers. Indeed, as we shall see later, some don't even get to race at all. Animal Aid compiles the only published record of horse racing deaths and the latest figures show that approximately 420 horses are killed every year. Some 38 per cent of these fatalities occur during or immediately after a race and result from a broken leg, back, neck or pelvis; fatal spinal injuries; heart attack; or burst blood vessels. Stress-related illnesses such as gastric ulcers and bleeding lungs are also common. The other victims perish from training injuries or are killed after being assessed by their owners as no-hopers.

The problem is getting worse, with the majority of fatalities occurring in jump racing. In the past, horses used for this sector were selectively bred to be heavier-boned and more robust than the faster animals racing on the flat. But because of the increasing emphasis on speed in both flat and jump racing, horses entered into the latter are now more often 'cast-offs' from the flat.

Ban the whip

Horses are the only animals who may be beaten in public for entertainment and Animal Aid has been campaigning for a ban on the whip in horse racing for many years. The much-criticised thrashing of Ballabriggs towards the close of the 2011 Grand National brought matters to a head and forced the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) to take action at last.

While it failed to announce a complete ban, the BHA has limited the number of times a horse can be beaten and imposed tougher penalties on offending jockeys. However, while recent figures do show that whip abuse has diminished as a result of the steps taken, many jockeys are determined to fight against these and any other improvements, resulting already in some slackening of the new regime.

Animal Aid is continuing to press for a complete ban on the use of the whip and many within the racing industry agree with us

'Too many professionals and managers have a moral blind spot about this issue,' explains television pundit John McCririck. 'There is nothing entertaining about seeing horses suffer. Any sporting activity that believes it can survive only by the infliction of cruelty on noble animals has lost sight of basic ethical principles.' And John Francome, affectionately known as 'The Greatest Jockey', says: 'We could try racing without whips for a fortnight and I think at the end of it we would be wondering why we didn't do it years ago.'

A horse being whipped despite giving his all



To learn more about Sanctuary Not Cruelty, go to our website:
www.stopkillinghorses.com



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