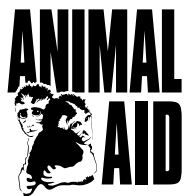




The case against Horse Racing





INTRODUCTION

The image the racing industry promotes is of a harmless sport in which its main asset – the Thoroughbred race horse – is treated like a ‘king’. Race horse deaths are, according to the industry, accidents or part of a sport that carries an element of risk.

In reality, no other sport has the fatality rate of racing, but because the victims are horses rather than humans, the suffering is allowed to continue.

Roughly 1 in every 60 horses who starts a season’s racing will have perished by the end of it. They will have died prematurely as a result of a racecourse or training injury, or they will be killed after being judged to be no longer financially viable.

Far from being treated like kings, race horses are typically confined to their stables for much of the day. They are released for short, intense periods of exercise and to travel to and from race meetings.

There is little financial provision for race horses at the end of their careers. The Horseracing Betting Levy Board draws money from the industry by way of a levy. In 2018/2019 its income was £93.5m, yet in 2019 it awarded less than 0.5 per cent to Retraining of Racehorses (ROR) – the official charity for the welfare of horses who have retired from racing. However, due to a lack of provision, many unwanted race horses are shot or lethally injected at their stables, or they are sent for slaughter. Animal Aid covertly filmed apparently healthy but unwanted Thoroughbreds being shot in the

head and butchered at a slaughterhouse in the UK.

BREEDING

Between 13,000 and 14,000 foals are born into the closely related British and Irish racing industries each year. There has been an increase in foal production of around 200% since the 1960s. Some of the 'failures' are taken up by other equestrian sports but many cannot be accounted for. Many foals will never race, and a significant proportion may be killed at their yards, fed to hunting hounds, or butchered for meat.

Breeding stallions face an existence of near isolation and tedious routine. Outside of the breeding shed, they are kept separated from mares and other males. When not housed in their stable, they are likely to be confined behind high fences. Barring physical breakdown, they may be used for breeding up to 20 years.

During the six month breeding season, a stallion can be required to 'cover' (mate with) a mare every day during this period.

Breeding females are subjected to drugs and prolonged periods of artificial light to control and speed up reproduction. They deliver in the spring, after a pregnancy lasting 11 months. Left to their own devices, mares in the wild have one foal every two years, or perhaps two every three years. The racing industry forces many mares to produce a foal every year until late in life - a burden of almost constant pregnancy.

Why is there so much 'over-production'?

The answer is that owners and breeders are hooked on the promise of big financial returns and glory. They breed speculatively – not only horses for racing but for the bloodstock sales – hoping to produce a racing superstar. When horses come up short – as most inevitably will – there is a good chance that they will be disposed of.



A yearling foal at Doncaster bloodstock sales



Mukaynis with broken leg - waiting to be shot

IN-BRED FOR SPEED

Horses were once bred with different characteristics, depending on whether they were to race over jumps or over short or long distances on the Flat. Jump-race horses would be heavier-boned and sturdier. But the world's dominant breeders now produce a 'one model fits all' animal who can be forced to do a variety of jobs that he or she may not be able to safely undertake. Speed is a key factor for this modern all-purpose Thoroughbred – at the expense of skeletal strength and general robustness.

The consequences are felt especially by horses entered into jump racing – the sector responsible for around 80 per cent of racecourse fatalities. Typically, the animals die – or are killed – as a result of a broken limb or neck; severe tendon injuries; spinal

injuries; or a heart attack. Animals racing on the Flat also suffer a high casualty rate. Around 50 horses are killed racing on the flat in Great Britain each year.

Racecourse deaths equate to one horse dying on a British racecourse approximately every two days. Animal Aid's Race Horse Deathwatch is the only reliable platform where deaths are publicly reported - even above that of the industry itself.



Wigmore Hall shot on the racecourse

Serious racing-related illnesses such as bleeding lungs and gastric ulcers are now also endemic. Up to 75% of race horses suffer from bleeding lungs, which can cause blood to leak from their nostrils. Gastric ulcers are present in around 93% of horses in training, in whom the condition gets progressively worse. If horses are retired, the condition improves.

USE OF THE WHIP

Thoroughbred race horses are the only animals who can be legally beaten in public for sport. The BHA allows the use of the whip for two purposes: to keep rider and mount safe, and for 'encouragement'. Animal Aid is calling for the removal of the second purpose – 'encouragement' – from the rules, so that the whip may be carried and used only for safety.

Whip advocates claim that horses do not feel the whip because of the adrenalin from racing and because they have thicker skin. However, according to a 2020 study, funded by RSPCA Australia, and co-authored by veterinary pathologist Dr Lydia Tong and the Sydney School of Veterinary Science's Professor Paul McGreevy, '... although horse skin is thicker overall than human skin, the part of the skin that is thicker does not insulate them from pain that is generated during a whip strike', and that 'humans and horses have the equivalent basic anatomic structures to detect pain in the skin.'

Some horses are whipped so hard that they are wealed (a raised ridge on the skin caused by a strike).

Jockeys are periodically penalised for excessive use of the whip – usually amounting to a riding ban of two days – but



they and the owner of the horse do not forfeit their prize money.

Norway banned the whip in 1982. There is no reason it cannot be banned in the UK as well.

RETIREMENT

About the same number of horses who enter racing each year, leave it – currently over 7,000.

Even by the industry's own optimistic estimates, over a third of the 7,000 are killed or unaccounted for.

There is, in any case, precious little provision for the survivors. The industry



receives nearly £100 million each year from bookmakers' profits. It spends the majority of it on prize money. The Horseracing Betting Levy Board recently approved just £0.3M for 'Equine welfare'. Thoroughbred rehabilitation centres have accused the racing industry of failing to take care of vulnerable race horses for whom no second career can be found.

CONCLUSION

The evidence points to a hard-headed, exploitative industry that treats race horses as disposable commodities. It routinely produces more Thoroughbreds than racing can accommodate but takes no responsibility for the 'surplus'. Unwanted horses are sold to whoever wishes to buy them or they are killed in their yards or sent for slaughter. The hundreds of annual racecourse and in-training deaths are cynically written-off as unforeseen accidents. As many as four horses have perished in a single day at one racecourse. Terms such as 'statistical blip' are used to explain such carnage.

Animal Aid has investigated the horse racing industry for more than two decades, producing several detailed reports and conducting a series of undercover investigations. Our evidence leads us to the conclusion that it is an industry that does not warrant public support in the form of betting income, racecourse attendance fees or commercial sponsorship, due to the appalling welfare aspects of racing and breeding horses.

The Things They Say...



...in defense of horse racing

If the horses didn't like it, they wouldn't carry on running after their jockeys fall off.

Horses sometimes carry on attempting to run with a severely broken leg – not out of enjoyment. Horses are herd animals. They feel safer when part of a group, especially in the noisy, often unfamiliar race-day environment. So strong is this natural instinct that horses have been known to carry on attempting to run with a severely broken leg.

The horses enjoy the challenge

They are often not equal to the challenge. The modern industry, as we have seen, concentrates on breeding lighter-boned, speedier animals for Flat racing. Less successful Flat race horses, or those good at clearing fences, are consigned to jump racing. But, because they are fine-tuned for speed rather than skeletal strength, they risk fatal injury when they fall.

Horses in the wild die too – death is natural

There is nothing natural about whipping highly inbred horses to force them to run as fast as they can and jump a series of life-threatening obstacles.



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