

As featured exclusively on **BBC One's Panorama**

# Horse Slaughter in the UK

An Animal Aid investigation into the killing of horses



A two-year investigation by **Animal Aid** has uncovered the stark reality for horses and ponies who are no longer wanted in our society.

Please sign the petition to bring an end to horse slaughter.

[www.animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-petition](http://www.animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-petition)



SCAN ME



## Unwanted, unloved, unlucky

Between October 2019 and February 2020, Animal Aid filmed inside a UK abattoir that slaughters horses and other equines. This pitiful practice is legal in the UK. However, the findings of our investigation, as well as the exclusive release of our footage on BBC One's Panorama, is, we believe, a matter of public interest.

During our filming, we witnessed horses and ponies – of various breeds and types – arrive at the slaughterhouse. Some would have previously been someone's pet, others from feral herds, or connected to specific breed societies, including cast-offs from the racing industry.

The majority of these unwanted, unloved and unlucky horses were killed for meat – destined to be sold for human consumption. Some animals were housed for a week before their deaths at the slaughterer's lairage – a barren, dirty and inhospitable place. Here we identified ongoing suffering: a small white pony had the extreme pain of laminitis (a disease of the foot), whilst another horse held an injured leg high off the ground. Others were destroyed within minutes of arrival at the slaughterhouse, or after standing in the on-site lairage with a period of waiting between a few minutes and a few hours. Some equines waited overnight before entering the kill room. Their deaths were by rifle bullet to the head. Some looked to be killed almost instantly, whilst others looked to attempt to raise themselves for a few moments before succumbing to their fate. We repeatedly saw stressed ponies and horses killed in pairs (a practise condemned by Panorama's veterinary expert), even three ponies huddled together shot one after another – the third having seen the other two killed in full sight.

Using the Freedom of Information Act, Animal Aid discovered that in 2019, 2,165 equines were slaughtered in the UK and, of this figure, 16 per cent held passports issued by Weatherbys – the passport-issuing agency for the racing industry. During our

**“In the kill room one of our cameras records the last moments of each horse – being led into the room and circled into position.”**

undercover filming, 267 horses and other equines were killed in just four days, including some who we believe to have been Thoroughbreds from the horse-racing and breeding industry.

Our heart-breaking investigative footage has revealed, in graphic detail, the fates of unwanted horses of all ages who – through no fault of their own – have suffered an awful death due to the absence of human compassion. There is no morality to this, and it could be stopped. But it first requires an expression of public and political concern followed by a mandate for this to end.

Animal Aid has launched an e-petition, which calls on the government to take political action against the unregulated breeding of horses. If you would like to help to end the slaughter, please sign our petition to the Government.

**“I will never forget the anger and brutality of the slaughterman swearing at frightened horses he was about to kill. And the awful scene of two tiny ponies led into the kill room – the first one shot while the other watched. How have we lost any sense of what is right?”**

**Iain Green, Director of Animal Aid**

## BBC One Panorama exclusive

It was quite a shock when researchers from Nine Lives Media contacted us regarding a programme they were making on the dark side of horse-racing for BBC One's Panorama. By coincidence, we had recently filmed inside a slaughterhouse that kills horses.

Two veterinary surgeons, and experts in animal behaviour, who viewed our footage for Panorama were shocked by what they saw in the slaughterhouse, and raised concerns over how far the animals had been transported, injuries and distress to the horses and how they were slaughtered.

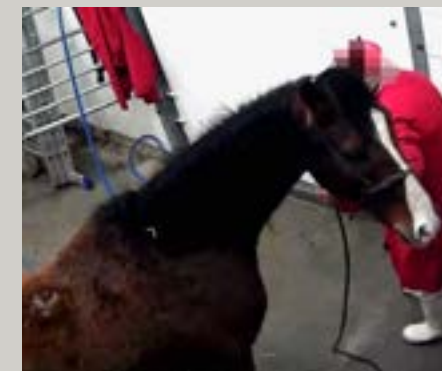
Over many months, the programme researchers worked hard joining the dots and looking for clues. They were able to identify several race horses who passed through the slaughterhouse when our cameras were recording.

Here are just three individual horses whose names we now know, from thousands of horses each year whose lives ended at the slaughterhouse. Blunt and brutal.



### Vyta Du Roc

Beautiful dappled grey gelding Vyta Du Roc was an outstanding French-bred race horse. He earned his connections over £175,000 in prize money, including winning at Ascot and Cheltenham Racecourses. His last race was 17 November 2019. Less than three months later in February 2020 he was slaughtered for meat. What does a race horse have to do to deserve a retirement?



### High Expectations

Despite being a winner there was no compassion left for High Expectations. A week before being shot he had to endure a dark, damp lairage where his beautiful light bay coat had turned grimy and matted. His name forgotten, now just the number 0707 crudely sprayed on his back for identification – as if it should have ever been needed.



### Beneficial Quest

Many race horses have to literally run for their lives. Beneficial Quest was unlucky to be one of these. At four years old he had just a few races to show his ability. Just ten days after his last race, Beneficial Quest was at the slaughterhouse destined for human consumption.

Vyta Du Roc and High Expectations endured long journeys to the slaughterhouse, travelling hundreds of miles to their deaths.



**“Seeing innocent horses and ponies being killed because they were unwanted or, in many cases, surplus to the sport horse industry's requirements is heartbreaking. It shows a need for compassion by people in the horse world and also, importantly, action to prevent this happening in the future. With your help Animal Aid will do all we can to bring an end to the killing.”**

**Dene Stansall, Horse Consultant, Animal Aid**

No animal should ever have to face slaughter. [animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-petition](https://animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-petition)  
Please encourage your friends and family to sign.



## What it's like to watch horses being slaughtered

It's night-time when a truck arrives at Drury & Sons in Wiltshire. The ramp at the back of the truck is lowered, and our cameras capture the first grainy images of horses skittering down the ramp into the lairage. This shed is where they will spend the last night of their lives. The gates are closed with a clang, the lights go out, the lorry leaves, and we wait – listening to the rustle of the hay, the occasional whinny, but mostly the silence.

The workers and government vets arrive early the following day, coming and going, switching on lights. Business as usual. The horses watch. Eventually, the slaughterer arrives, and, one by one, the horses are taken into the kill room. Every so often a shot rings out. Many of the horses are scared by the sound, as well as by the metallic clanking that dominates the atmosphere.

In the kill room one of our other cameras records the last moments of each horse – being led into the room, circled into position. The slaughterer holds the halter with one hand, mounts his gun onto his shoulder and aims at the middle of the horse's head. You want to close your eyes. Instead, you clench your fists and force yourself to watch.

Most collapse sideways in a sea of blood, urine and faeces, their bodies convulsing and shuddering violently until the last moments of life leave their bodies and they become motionless, eyes staring blankly, mouths lolling.

The metallic clanking that we could hear comes from the shackles that are secured around the back legs of each victim as they are winched from the kill room into the butchery. Another camera transmits the work of the butchers, business-like as they 'stick' the throats and then remove the head of each horse. The



**“Our world-leading investigations team work tirelessly to expose the animal suffering that takes place behind closed doors. It's our duty to turn their hard work into meaningful, effective change for animals. Please do everything you can to support this campaign by helping us reach 100,000 signatures on our petition.”**

**Fiona Pereira, Campaign Manager**

legs are sawn off, the skin peeled away. There is so much blood. It's the stuff of nightmares.

Back in the lairage, the number of remaining horses is decreasing rapidly. Anxiety builds as the last few horses watch their companions depart and not come back. On the occasions we filmed there, it was not uncommon to see the last remaining horse become more and more terrified – wide eyes, flaring nostrils, vocalising – they can smell the blood.

We continue to watch, rewind, make notes, count the numbers being killed, look for patterns, look for clues. It's heart-breaking, and you feel utterly and completely powerless to help.

## How you can help

It is no exaggeration to say that this has been one of the most heart-breaking and difficult investigations we have ever undertaken.

It isn't enough for us to demand a ban on horse slaughter. We need to see a government-led root and branch review of the current system for breeding and disposing of horses – which is currently failing horses who are no longer wanted.

Government intervention could impose limits on the numbers of horses produced each year – including by the racing industry which speculatively breeds horses in the hope of finding the next big winner. Fewer horses being produced means fewer horses becoming unwanted, meaning fewer horses ending up at the abattoir.

We have launched a petition – which calls for a government-imposed reduction in the number of equines being bred – in order to prompt a government debate on this important issue.

You can also view Animal Aid's campaign film and find out more about our campaign at [animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-investigation](http://animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-investigation)

As a vegan campaigning organisation, we do not think that horses are more important than any other poor animal who enters a slaughterhouse. We campaign for all of them – including horses.



Please do everything you can to spread the word about the petition – we need 100,000 signatures by 17 November. It's a tall order, but with your help, we can do it! [animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-petition](http://animalaid.org.uk/horse-slaughter-petition)