

HORSES IN RACING

Racehorses lead an exceptionally high quality of life. They are bred for the sport and benefit from being involved in racing. They receive unparalleled care and attention, the best possible feed, bedding, facilities and a healthy lifestyle involving regular exercise. **The 20,000+ horses who race over the course of a year receive almost constant attention from the 6,000+ stable staff who are dedicated to their care.** The quality of care they receive is visible through the condition and health they clearly carry on to the racecourse.

Moreover, a career in racing benefits horses in their later life too. Their high health status, and the versatility that comes from being athletic and having had experience in training, makes them ideal animals to go on to further careers.

While the sport carries some risk for its participants – as with all sporting activities or activities involving animals – this level of risk is very low and is outweighed by the benefits of racing, not only to humans but to horses too.

Over the last 20 years British Racing has invested over **£40 million in veterinary research and education** with funding invested by the Horserace Betting Levy Board and, more recently, the Racing Foundation. The sport's substantial investment in veterinary research and education brings benefits for all breeds of horse in Britain.

“A LIFE WELL LIVED” – BRITISH RACING’S WELFARE STRATEGY

In February 2020, the sport's independently-Chaired Horse Welfare Board published its [five-year strategic plan](#) for the welfare of horses bred for racing. 26 projects have been identified to help British Racing continuously improve all aspects of racehorse welfare in the sport. 20 projects are now live with £3million of funding secured from the Racing Foundation in 2022, and ongoing financial support from the Horserace Betting Levy Board.

- Four key outcomes for British racing are identified as part of the strategy are: Best possible **QUALITY OF LIFE**; Collective **LIFETIME RESPONSIBILITY**; Best possible **SAFETY**; Growth and maintenance of public **TRUST**.

The sport has already invested significantly in the delivery of the strategy and, in addition to a host of ongoing work, will this year aim to deliver:

- The Jump Racing Risk Model: a powerful data and epidemiology hub to identify risk factors in jump racing
- On course safety: improvements in the design, construction, and visibility of obstacles plus research into ground and going
- Thoroughbred Welfare Database: centralised data hub to help the industry inform welfare strategy gleaned from 30-day foal notification, throughout a horse's racing career and post-retirement.
- Aftercare accreditation: focused on ensuring consistency of standards across all providers and to assist in benchmarking best practice

REGULATING WELFARE IN BRITISH RACING

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) is the Government-recognised, independent body responsible for the regulation of horseracing.

The welfare of our participants is the number one priority for the BHA and it demands the highest standards of welfare from all licensed jockeys, trainers and racecourses.

The BHA is responsible for setting and enforcing the welfare standards that all participants must adhere to. These standards are embedded in the sport's rules, raceday regulation, education, licensing and disciplinary procedures, and are enforced by teams of vets, racecourse inspectors, stable inspecting officers and raceday officials.

MAKING HORSERACING SAFER

As with all elite sports and all activities involving horses, there is an element of risk. It is the responsibility of the BHA and everyone involved in the sport to ensure that we do everything possible to minimise that risk and to ensure that no injury or fatality occurs which could reasonably have been prevented.

As a consequence of British racing's investment in safety, welfare and health, **the number of horses that have suffered fatal injuries on racecourses has decreased to just 0.21% of runners.**

Faller rates during jump races have decreased to just 2.25%, their lowest figure on record as a result of initiatives to make racecourses and jump racing safer. The fatal injury rate in jump racing is 0.43%.

Despite British racing's excellent safety record, it always strives to improve, constantly investing in welfare research and education. The approach the BHA takes is one of constant assessment and improvement, identifying causes of risk and working with racecourses to address them, and investing in new approaches, science and innovation.

TRAINERS, JOCKEYS AND RACECOURSES

No trainers or jockeys are licensed by the BHA unless they are proven to be suitable persons to look after or ride racehorses and they are subject to strict welfare standards, which are continuously monitored. The BHA's inspecting officers carry out around 600 stable inspections each year.

No racecourse is licensed, and no racing can take place unless the premises and facilities meet strict BHA equine welfare criteria, which far exceed those demanded by animal welfare legislation. The requirements include the provision of experienced veterinary surgeons and state-of-the-art veterinary facilities on course.

The BHA also works with racecourses to ensure the continual improvement of welfare standards, and constantly monitor injury rates to identify where improvements can be made. Improvements range from alterations to facilities, to significant reviews and changes to racecourse layout.

WELFARE ON RACEDAY

All of the BHA officials who operate on raceday are there to ensure the health and welfare of our participants, including stewards, equine welfare integrity officers and BHA vets.

The team of BHA Veterinary Officers is on the racecourse to oversee equine welfare. Their role includes:

- Ensuring that the sport's strict welfare rules and standards are adhered to
- Overseeing teams of veterinary surgeons employed by the racecourse
- Carrying out pre-race and post-race checks on horses to ensure they are healthy and fit as well as any testing

There are minimum numbers of vets who officiate at every fixture. For example, **at the 2023 Cheltenham Festival there are six Veterinary Officers and eight Veterinary Surgeons and every runner will be checked by a vet before competing.**

In the event of an incident on a racecourse any horse affected will receive immediate attention from the racecourse veterinary team. If further assessment is required horses can be transported in specially designed horse ambulances to first-class veterinary facilities. If necessary, horses can be transported from the course to receive further treatment at equine hospital.

THE WHIP

In British racing the use of a foam padded, air cushioned whip is permitted, with strict controls on its use. The current foam padded design of the whip was developed with input from the RSPCA.

Whips are carried first and foremost as an essential aid to horsemanship and safety. This is consistent across all equine activities which involve exertion on the part of the horse. The use of the whip in British racing is restricted to safety, correction and encouragement. Use of the whip to coerce is not permitted.

Horses are checked by vets after every race. **In 2022, from 92,000 runners, just one horse was found to have been marked or 'wealed' from a ride in which a rider breached the whip rules.**

As the result of a recent review, which followed a major consultation process, the whip can only be used a maximum of six times in a Flat race or seven times in a Jump race without incurring a suspension. Use of the whip four times or more above the permitted level will lead to disqualification, and suspensions are doubled in major races.

WHOLE-LIFE CARE

The sport takes steps to look after horses at all stages of their lives, from the mandatory microchipping and registration of a foal within 30 days of its birth, through to the sport's own charity – Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) – which is responsible for developing longer-term, sustainable solutions to the question of what happens to horses when they finish racing by generating a demand for these horses across a range of equine disciplines.

Partly through the work of RoR, and due to the adaptability and versatility of the thoroughbred as a breed, an active market for the rehoming and retraining of racehorses has developed. **Tens of thousands of former racehorses go on to fulfilling second careers** ranging from polo, eventing, dressage, horseball, team chasing right through to happy hacking and supporting equine therapy programmes for humans.

In addition, RoR provides a welfare safety net to ensure any racehorse identified as in need of charitable support is suitably and properly cared for. **In 2022 RoR set up a Retraining Assessment Programme** to identify and help any thoroughbred struggling to adapt at their first step away from racing.

Thoroughbred foals must be registered and micro-chipped within 30 days of birth, meaning that racehorses can now be tracked and identified throughout their life. Owing to world-leading notification, microchipping and passport requirements within British racing, the sport is among the most advanced when it comes to traceability and aftercare for its participants. The sport has recently developed an "ePassport" system, which is the world's most advanced equine digital passport. **The ePassport now includes details on 200,000 horses from the GB and IRE stud book, including 160,000 vaccination touch points.**

Traceability is a key priority in the sport's welfare strategy. In terms of ambition, as a starting point, racing is working to ensure it has 100% traceability of a horse's first step away from racing and a clear understanding of where these horses go.

Analysis of over 3,000 horses registered with RoR shows **that in the vast majority of cases - 77% - horses are sourced either privately or direct from the trainer, and 91% are acquired by their new owners without going via a charitable rehoming or commercial retraining operation.**

REDUCING RISK IN JUMP RACING

Orange to White

- Pioneering research by Exeter University showed that the clarity of obstacles in racing for horses could be improved by the use of white
- As a result, during 2022 the markers on all hurdles and fences at all racecourses across Britain were changed from orange to white
- Research was commissioned by the BHA and funded by the Racing Foundation
- Implementation was led by the Horse Welfare Board and funded by the Horserace Betting Levy Board
- Changing the colour on obstacles is one part of a bigger body of work by the Horse Welfare Board and British Racing to continuously find ways to reduce risk in the sport