



# New York State Humane Association

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June 3, 2019

To: The Senate Standing Committee on Racing, Gaming, and Wagering & The Senate Standing Committee on Domestic Animal Welfare

RE: the Welfare of Racehorses

To introduce myself, I am a veterinarian and practice owner in the Albany area with a lifetime of experience with horses, including my 40 years as a practicing veterinarian and one year of galloping racehorses in Lexington, KY as an "exercise girl." I also have served as an expert witness for investigators seeking information on the disturbing and unacceptably high mortality rate for Thoroughbred horses in training and racing. The current state of this "sport" and its high fatality rates demand a change in how the horses are trained, the condition of the tracks that they race on, and the current state of medicating horses to improve speed and mask severe pain. Please note that the victims are euthanized primarily due to their catastrophic limb breakdowns and also heart failure, claiming approximately 2,000-plus horses each year.

First, to analyze the unreasonable physical and mental stresses young Thoroughbreds face, their training begins at a very young age---early adolescence-- while they are still developing and have open growth plates that can be damaged by undue physical demands. Since all the big-money races are for 2- and 3-year olds, they must begin carrying weight and pounding on hard track surfaces at an early age, while horses in other sports (dressage, stadium jumping, 3-day eventing) are permitted to develop at a more natural pace without such undue stresses placed upon them.

Furthermore, in the past the breakdown rates were miniscule compared to today's rates as horses were then bred for soundness as well as speed and ability. If one examines the list of Triple Crown winners from the title's inception in 1919 to the present, we find that there were 3 in the 1930's, 3 in the 1940's, and 3 in the 1970's, followed by a 37-year long "drought" before American Pharaoh's win in 2015. In other words, in past decades horses were bred and then trained to better survive the rigors of their exercising, conditioning, and racing so that three successful races in short order was a survivable experience. Now, between the horses' health and the stress on their young limbs, performing successfully is increasingly a challenge. In addition, track surfaces have been modified in this country to permit more record-breaking performances *if* the horse can survive the increased grueling impact that such firmer surfaces have on their musculoskeletal systems. Note that

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the 23 racing deaths from breakdowns in the first 3 months at the Santa Anita track at the beginning of this year are being attributed to the altered composition of the track surface due to heavy rains.

I know that other advocates for humane horse handling will speak in more depth about the effect that the many drugs given before and on the day of the race—118 that we know of—on the horse. These drugs serve to either enhance performance or to mask pain, meaning that any horse with a mild injury may too often cross the finish line with much more pain and disability than when the race started. These injured athletes are rarely given adequate rest to properly heal: as the trainers and owners state, a horse standing in his/her stall makes no money. Thus they can be dosed with a plethora of stimulants and pain-relievers that (the owners hope) will boost their chances of bringing home the money. The drugs that have appeared on drug screening tests include thyroid supplements, Viagra, cocaine, --you name it. Lasix (furosemide) is used routinely on race days as a performance booster: it lessens the occurrence of Exercised-Induced Pulmonary Hemorrhages and causes a drop in the horses' water weight. Arguably, horses should not be driven to exercise so excessively as to cause the lungs' bleeding to begin with. Some drugs (such as phenylbutazone) can have negative impacts on human health, making the use of race horses for slaughter and eventual human consumption a major concern.

I will leave to other advocates a discussion of the horrors of horse slaughter: suffice it to say that the victims are not "old and used up" but instead are often young and healthy Thoroughbreds who are discarded due to lack of the necessary ability or temperament to make a successful racer. Since slaughter involves the use of a pneumatic bolt or gunshot placed in a specific site on the forehead to stun the victim into unconsciousness, it is inhumane in a species that is "head shy", as opposed to species such as cattle and swine who lower their heads in defense and create an easily approached target. Sadly, a horse may require successive attempts to place the bolt or the bullet in the correct part of the brain.

The list of additional reasons to change the 'sport' of Thoroughbred racing is much longer than time permits me to delineate. Please consider the well-deserved current unpopularity of this form of equine abuse as a priority to address and remedy the physical breakdowns that these animals endure. I thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Holly Cheever, DVM

VP of the New York State Humane Association

Leadership Council member of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association