

INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF SPECIALIST RACING VETERINARIANS

Welfare Guidelines for Horseracing

The International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians (IGSRV) encourages those involved in horseracing to act responsibly towards horses engaged in the sport. At all times the welfare of the horse must be paramount and should never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences.

These Welfare Guidelines for Horseracing have been produced by the IGSRV to assist individual racing jurisdictions.

These Guidelines may be modified from time to time and the views of anyone interested in horse welfare are welcomed. Particular attention will be paid to new research findings, and the IGSRV encourages further funding and support for welfare studies.

1. AT ALL STAGES DURING THE PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION OF HORSES FOR RACING THEIR WELFARE SHOULD TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER ALL OTHER DEMANDS

Good horsemanship

The housing, feeding and training of racehorses should be compatible with good horsemanship and should not compromise their welfare. Any practices which cause physical or mental suffering, whether in stables, training or racing, should not be tolerated.

Training methods

Training methods which cause fear or impose undue restrictions on the normal behaviour of racehorses should not be used. Horses should only be given training schedules which match their physical capabilities and level of maturity. They should not be subjected to programs for which they have not been properly prepared.

Shoes

Horse-shoes should be designed and fitted to minimize the risk of injury.

Transport

During transport to and from training grounds and racecourses, full attention should be paid to protecting horses against injuries and other health risks. Vehicles should be well ventilated and maintained and disinfected regularly.

Rest periods

Long journeys should be planned carefully, and horses allowed regular rest periods and access to water. Respiratory problems can often be reduced if horses are able to lower their heads to floor level during rest periods.

2. HORSES SHOULD BE IN A FIT AND HEALTHY CONDITION BEFORE BEING ALLOWED TO COMPETE

Veterinary inspections

No horse showing symptoms of disease, lameness or other ailment should be raced when to do so would be against its best interests. Whenever there is any doubt, a veterinary inspection should be requested and this should be undertaken before the horse is allowed to race.

Immaturity

Horses mature at widely different rates. Training and racing schedules should be planned carefully to minimize the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

Surgical procedures

Any surgical procedures which threaten a horse's welfare or the safety of other horses and riders should not be allowed in racing.

Severe or recurrent clinical conditions

Horses with severe or recurrent clinical conditions, e.g. 'bleeders' should, on veterinary advice, be excluded from racing temporarily or permanently.

Pregnant mares

Mares should not be raced beyond 120 days of pregnancy.

3. CONDITIONS AT RACE MEETINGS SHOULD NOT PREJUDICE HORSE WELFARE

Surface conditions

Race tracks and racing surfaces should be designed and maintained to reduce risk factors which lead to injuries. Particular attention should be paid to crossings, uneven racing surfaces and extremes of surface quality.

Steeple chasing and hurdling

Participation in these races should be restricted to horses with demonstrated jumping ability. Weights to be carried, race distance, number, size and design of fences should all be assessed carefully when planning these races.

Extreme weather

Common sense should be used when racing in extreme weather. Provision should be made to cool horses quickly after racing in hot and/or humid conditions. Horses which have raced in cold weather should be moved inside as soon as possible.

Misuse of the whip

Abuse of the whip cannot be condoned, for example to make a beaten horse run faster, or if a horse is unable to respond, or if a horse is clearly winning. Any post race whip welts clearly indicate injury.

Medication

The main purpose of the rules for controlling medication is to protect the welfare of the horse and the safety of the rider or driver. After any veterinary treatment, sufficient time should be allowed for full recovery before competition. Drugs should not be allowed to affect the racing performance of the horse or to conceal defects which may be hereditary.

Racecourse stabling

Racecourse stabling should be safe, hygienic, comfortable and well-ventilated. Horses should be able to lie down in comfort without risk of injury. Fresh drinking water, and washing-down water, should always be available.

Starting gates/barriers

Horses should be prepared adequately so as to be familiar with loading procedures. Barriers should be properly designed and safe. Aids to loading should be limited to encouraging a horse without causing alarm or fear.

4. EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO ENSURE THAT HORSES RECEIVE PROPER ATTENTION AFTER THEY HAVE RACED, AND THAT THEY ARE TREATED HUMANELY WHEN THEIR RACING CAREERS ARE OVER

Veterinary treatment

When a horse is injured during a race, jockeys should dismount and the horse should be collected by ambulance whenever necessary. Veterinary expertise should always be available on the racecourse. If required the horse should be transported to the nearest referral centre for further assessment and therapy. Injured horses should be given full supportive treatment before transport.

Racing injuries

The incidence of injuries sustained in racing and training should be monitored. Track conditions, frequency of racing, immaturity, and any other risk factors should be examined carefully to indicate ways to minimize severe injuries.

Euthanasia

If injuries are sufficiently severe the horse may need to be destroyed on humane grounds. Euthanasia should be undertaken as soon as possible with the sole aim of minimizing suffering.

Retirement

Owners should make every effort to ensure that their horses are treated sympathetically and humanely when they leave racing. Racehorses should be identified permanently and registered, so that their welfare in retirement can be monitored.

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