

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 c.20,000 horses who race over the course of a year receive 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 **£47 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. 22 projects are now live covering safety, data, traceability, and aftercare with £5.5million of funding secured from the Racing Foundation and 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 and construction 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.
- Retraîner Approval Scheme: focused on ensuring consistency of standards across retraining providers
- Assessment Framework: pilot scheme to assess horses as they leave racing, to create a bank of data in relation to the physical and psychological condition of horses exiting racing.

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 0.20% of on average of just under 90,000 runners. Faller rates during jump races have decreased to 2.14%.** This figure has fallen for the fourth consecutive year and is the lowest figure on record as a result of initiatives to make racecourses and jump racing safer. The five-year fatal injury rate in jump racing in 2023 was at 0.42%.

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 BHA equine welfare criteria. Requirements include provision of veterinary surgeons and state-of-the-art facilities. The BHA also works with racecourses to ensure continual improvement, 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. **At the 2024 Cheltenham Festival there will be nine vets, three veterinary nurses, six horse ambulances, six horse catchers 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 will 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 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.

As the result of a comprehensive consultation, updated rules were introduced in 2023. 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. The new rules were breached in 0.75% of rides in 2023.

WHOLE-LIFE CARE

Traceability is a key priority in the sport's welfare strategy and good progress is being made. Thoroughbred foals must now be registered and **micro-chipped within 30 days of birth**, meaning that racehorses born after 2018 can now be tracked and identified throughout their life. In 2021, racing's "ePassport" system was launched and is the world's most advanced equine digital passport. To date, it holds details of **206,000 horses from the GB and IRE stud book, including 238,000 vaccination touch points.**

In 2023, the Horse Welfare Board undertook Britain's first **Thoroughbred Census** for horses retired from racing partnering with research experts at Hartpury University. Over 8,000 respondents took part with results and recommendations to be shared at the end of March 2024. In 2025, the aim is to integrate racing IT systems with RoR's database to ensure new owner details at the first step out of racing are captured, and an ongoing relationship built.

Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) is the sport's official aftercare partner and responsible for developing longer-term, sustainable solutions for the support of horses retiring from racing. RoR has grown to over 12,800 members, 40% of the estimated former racehorse population, and aims to grow this membership over the next five years. 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 now go on to fulfilling second careers** ranging from polo, eventing, dressage, horseball, team chasing right through to leisure riding and supporting equine therapy programmes for humans.

Analysis of over 6,000 new horses registered with RoR over four years 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.**

In 2022 RoR introduced a **Retraining Assessment Programme** to identify and help any thoroughbred struggling to adapt at their first step away from racing. A new **Retrainer Approval Scheme** has been piloted and will be rolled-out this year as well as a pilot for a new horse **Assessment Framework** to assess the physical and psychological condition of horses as they leave racing, which will then help map retraining requirements and build an essential data bank. RoR also provides a welfare safety net to ensure any racehorse identified as in need of charitable support is suitably and properly cared for.

REDUCING RISK IN JUMP RACING ORANGE TO WHITE

- Pioneering research by Exeter University proved the clarity of obstacles in racing for horses could be improved by using white markers rather than the traditional orange
- As a result, all markers on all hurdles and fences at every British racecourse were changed from orange to white during 2022
- The 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