

Fatalities at Southwell racecourse, 1 July – 3 September 2020: Summary

The investigation involved the Racecourse and the BHA's Veterinary team, Racecourse Department and Racecourse Inspectorate, alongside Arena Racing Company, looking into the specific circumstances around the fatalities at Jump fixtures at Southwell from 1 July – 3 September 2020.

Current and historic data has been collected and analysed to help draw comparisons, conclusions and make recommendations, if and where appropriate. The work considered all race types, racecourse factors and potential factors relating to the relevant horses.

Analysis of the hurdle races showed there has been a downward trend in the percentage of horses who have fallen, unseated or been brought down over hurdles over the past three years. No common factors were identified and as such analysis focused on the chase races.

It is worth noting that Southwell has held more races in that period compared with previous years, picking up the extra meetings from other courses, and has also seen an increase in the average field size. Despite this increase, no evidence could be found to attribute the condition of the ground as a cause of the fatalities.

In relation to the chase course, the majority of incidents occurred at fences either side of the bottom bend of the track, with specific measures suggested to address these. Feedback from stakeholders was that some modifications to all of the fences, above and beyond those recently undertaken at the track would be of assistance to both horse and rider.

Changes were also suggested to the race programme, to ensure a more even spread throughout all levels of ability, for all that it was noted the suspension and resumption of Jump racing had led to a very unique set of circumstances in terms of the make-up of the race programme.

Investigation into other factors such as the going did not produce any suggestion that these had an impact on the number of fatalities.

Recommendations

1. Modifications to be made to all plain fences, including a shoulder cut into the apron. This should encourage the horse to improve the shape of the jump over the fence.
2. Specific modifications to fences either side of the bottom bend – the open ditch prior to the bend to be modified to again encourage horses to improve the shape of their jump of the ditch, and the first fence in the home straight to be re-sighted as far from the bottom bend, as is feasible.
3. The volume of fixtures from July – September should be considered for 2021 and beyond.
4. Changes to be made to the Jump race programme at Southwell to ensure a more even spread throughout all levels of ability. The race programme will be assessed in order to ensure such opportunities are not lost entirely from the programme, but instead placed elsewhere.

The recommendations which relate to the racecourse itself are to be carried out prior to the next fixture at the racecourse, on 13 November.