

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 and the **6,000 stable staff whose role it is to care for the 14,000 horses in training at any one time.**

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.

UK Government – via the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – recently endorsed the BHA's regulatory role in relation to the safety of jockeys and horses, given that overall racehorse welfare is improving and fatalities at racecourses are falling:

"The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) is responsible for the safety of jockeys and horses at races in this country. The BHA works with animal welfare organisations like the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare to keep racecourses as safe as possible for horses."

Defra, 2018

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 by 1/3 in the last 20 years, to 0.19% of runners, the lowest on record.**

Faller rates during jump races have decreased to an all-time low of just 2.43%, a reduction of 33% in the last 20 years as a result of initiatives to make racecourses and jump racing safer. The fatal injury rate in jump racing is 0.39%, also the lowest on record

Sport horses are at risk whatever activity they are engaged in, whether in competition or when turned out in the field – a recent study by Liverpool University found that **62% of traumatic injuries in horses occurred in the field, compared to 13% while in ridden exercise.**

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.

Since the year 2000, British racing has invested £35 million in veterinary research and education which benefits all breeds of horses, not just thoroughbreds.

British racing has assembled a cross-industry welfare board which will have responsibility for developing the sport's wider strategy towards welfare, including further measures to enhance safety.

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 through the annual licence renewal process.

Additionally, the BHA's inspecting officers carry out around 600 stable inspections each year to ensure standards are being maintained.

No racecourse is licensed, and no racing can take place unless the premises, facilities, and the way the course is operated meet strict BHA equine welfare criteria, which far exceed those demanded by animal welfare legislation.

These standards are enforced by the BHA's team of racecourse inspectors who visit courses frequently on and before racedays to ensure that courses are safe.

The requirements include the provision of experienced veterinary surgeons and state-of-the-art veterinary facilities on course – such as horse ambulances – to ensure the very best treatment of any injury.

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 minor alterations to racecourse facilities, through 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 required testing, as appropriate.

One Veterinary Officer and three Veterinary Surgeons are required on a racecourse as a minimum requirement for all Jump racing fixtures. For festivals, there will be at least five Veterinary Officers and eight Veterinary Surgeons present. At the Cheltenham Festival there will be seven Veterinary Officers and 10 Veterinary Surgeons.

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 the first class veterinary facilities at each racecourse
- If necessary, horses can be transported from the course to receive further treatment at the nearest 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. There is only one current accredited supplier of whips for use in British racing.

Why do we use the whip?

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. By "encouragement" we mean using the whip as an aid to activate and focus the horse, so the horse realises its potential by giving its best. Use of the whip to coerce is not permitted.

The rules and limits on use

Following a detailed 2011 Review of the use of the whip in horseracing, the rules regarding the use of the whip in British racing were revised. The basic rules are as follows:

- The whip can be used a maximum of seven times in a Flat race or eight times in a Jump race. Any more than this will prompt the stewards to review the ride
- As well as the number of times the whip is used, the stewards will look at the force with which it is used, whether the horse has been given time to respond, the purpose for which the whip was used, whether the horse was in contention or clearly winning at the time it was used, and whether the whip has been used in the correct place (i.e. on the horse's hindquarter rather than flanks)

Any rider found to have contravened the rules will face a period of suspension, and any rider picking up five offences in a six month period will be referred to the BHA for a more substantial penalty.

Since implementing the revised whip rules, the frequency of whip offences has reduced significantly despite the threshold for permitted use being halved. Breaches of the whip rules now occur in less than 0.6% of rides.

Because of the low thresholds for use and the foam padded design of the whip, even a serious breach of the whip rules would be unlikely to impact negatively on a horse's welfare.

Defra endorsed the BHA's whip rules, stating that:

"The BHA policy on the whip was drawn up in consultation with animal welfare groups, such as the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare. The latest rules include a threshold on the number of times the whip is used before racing stewards can consider an enquiry. If the rules are broken, the jockey may be banned from racing for a certain number of days depending on the seriousness of the offence. Defra is satisfied that the rules in place are sufficient to restrict and limit the use of the whip in horse racing."

- Defra, 2019