

BRITISH RACING: EQUINE WELFARE FACTS

Cheltenham Festival 2024

A LIFE WELL LIVED: THE CARE WE HAVE FOR OUR HORSES

- In Britain we are a nation of sport and animal lovers and horseracing provides the best of both – loved equine superstars competing at the top of their game as athletes.
- British racing is the UK's second largest spectator sport behind football, with millions tuning in at home or going along to one of Britain's 1,500 individual race meetings.
- The horseracing industry has a clear and moral responsibility and deep ethic of care for the welfare of the racehorse, a responsibility we take extremely seriously.
- Thoroughbreds are athletes and racing gives this magnificent breed a purpose with all aspects of their life benefiting from continuous investment and improvement from training and nutrition through to veterinary care and general wellbeing.
- The 20,000-plus horses who race over the course of a year receive almost constant attention from the 6,000-plus stable staff who are dedicated to their care on a daily basis.
- Support is also provided in their post-racing careers and thoroughbreds retrain into many other equine sports including polo, eventing, dressage, hacking and many more.
- As with all elite sports and all activities involving horses, there is an element of risk in racing.
- We've long since recognised this and over the last 20 years the sport has invested over £47 million to continue to minimise that risk, advance equine veterinary science and education, and make sure our athletes are cared for are healthy and have a good quality of life. This investment also brings huge benefits to the whole of the horse population.
- As a result, horseracing today is safer than it has ever been. The number of horses returning home safely after racing is 99.8%. There are around 90,000 runners in a full uninterrupted year of racing. And faller rates have declined for the fourth consecutive year to 2.14%.
- The industry works tirelessly to minimise the risk to its equine athletes and that is why we will continue to evolve and invest to ensure that the safety of our horses above all else is our number one priority as a sport.
- British racing has an independently-chaired Horse Welfare Board which published its five-year strategic plan "["A Life Well Lived"](#)" in February 2020. The plan includes 26 projects covering continuous improvements across the areas of safety, wellbeing, data, and traceability. 22 of these projects are live with £5.5M of funding provided to date by the Horserace Betting Levy Board and the Racing Foundation.
- We absolutely recognise that people have questions about our great sport, enjoyed by millions of people in this country each year, and provide many opportunities for these discussions to take place.
- Racing opens the doors to studs, training yards and aftercare centres nationwide every year for anyone to experience racing behind the scenes for themselves. Last year over 15,000 free places were made available during National Racehorse Week. 2024 will be the fourth year of running this event, with open days taking place during 7-15 September. For more information go to www.nationalracehorseweek.uk

THE USE OF THE WHIP IN BRITISH RACING

- 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 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. 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 on average in only 0.75% of rides in 2023.

LIFE AFTER RACING

- The sport has its own dedicated charity – [Retraining of Racehorses](#) (RoR). Partly through the work of RoR, and due to the adaptability and versatility of the thoroughbred, an active market for rehoming and retraining of racehorses has developed. Tens of thousands of former racehorses have gone on to fulfilling second careers.
- Almost 13,000 thoroughbreds are registered with RoR – which is around 40% of the estimated retired thoroughbred population (estimated at around 34,000). RoR data shows:
 - Around 30% are being found homes direct from training yards and 50% are sourced from private owners. Only 2% have been rehomed via charities and 8% via specialist retrainers.
 - Thoroughbreds go on to have a variety of new lives with the most popular second careers being hacking and leisure riding, dressage, showing, eventing, and hunter trials.
- As part of its ongoing traceability work, the sport's Horse Welfare Board completed the first-ever census of the retired racehorse population in 2023. 8,256 submissions were received, 5,477 of which were not registered with RoR, increasing the sport's data on this section of the thoroughbred population considerably. Detailed results will be issued by the end of March.
- RoR has a vulnerable horse scheme to support any horse that falls on hard times. And has a scheme in place to support and retrain any horse identified as needing a bit more time and specialist help to adapt at its first step out of racing. A new accreditation system for retraining and rehoming centres will be launched in 2024 along with a new framework for the assessment of horses as they leave racing. This assessment will allow a bank of data to be developed in relation to the physical and psychological condition of horses, and will support horses as their retraining and transition from racing is mapped.
- Racing is continuously looking at how it can improve aftercare, and an industry review of funding is underway led by RoR, and supported the Horse Welfare Board

A POSITIVE IMPACT BEYOND THE TRACK

- Horseracing is not just a brilliant sport but a thriving industry that is an important part of Britain's culture and economy.
- Horseracing brings huge benefits to the national economy, with an economic impact of around £4.1 billion.
- From racehorse breeders to trainers, yard staff, jockeys, vets and racecourse staff, the industry supports more than 20,000 jobs directly, or 85,000-plus when including both direct and indirect employment.
- When the sport is thriving, the communities we're part of thrive as well, and the whole nation benefits from a strong racing industry.
- That's a real benefit to the local, rural communities where there are racecourses or equine hubs like Newmarket.

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