

Trainer Information Pack
Pre-race Examinations and Suitability to Race Requirements

This document provides information for trainers about why and how horses are examined on racecourses by the BHA's Veterinary Officers (VOs). It is not exhaustive, but details protocols that cover the most likely encounters your horse could have with the Equine Health and Welfare Department. This document is the basis from which BHA VOs will work to ensure consistency across the team. In the past, there have been many words used to describe mildly lame horses, such as 'poor mover', 'questionable gait' and 'atypical gait'; throughout this document mildly lame horses will be described as horses with 'asymmetrical' gaits.

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1. Veterinary Officer process for Pre-Race Examinations (PRE) on racecourses

a) Purpose

The racing industry is united in our desire to minimise the risk of injuries and fatalities on racecourses. The pre-race veterinary examination (PRE) is performed by a BHA veterinary surgeon and documents the suitability of the horse to race. It is not intended to question or undermine the expertise of the horse's connections, but instead to provide an additional layer of cover for trainers. The purpose of the PRE is to establish that:

- the horse does not have any detectable pre-existing injuries that make it more likely to suffer catastrophic breakdown (serious or fatal injury).
- the horse has no obvious veterinary issues that may affect its suitability to race, or which may give rise to concerns over its welfare.

b) Reasons for horses requiring Pre-Race Examinations

The BHA has carried out analysis of industry data to determine the categories of horses that carry a greater risk of catastrophic breakdown and long-term injury. Some of these categories have been recognised for a long time whilst some additional understanding has been gained more recently through the industry's Jump Racing Risk Model (JRRM). The JRRM was commissioned following the Cheltenham Review of 2018 and used industry data and academic guidance to develop a predictive model for risk factors in jump racing. This information has been used to refine some of the categories listed below. In addition to the welfare-related categories below, occasionally, horses will be subjected to pre-race examinations for integrity reasons.

| | Reason: | Rationale: |
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| 1 | Recorded injury at last run or a lay off greater than 300 days | The risk of injury to a horse that has previously suffered a long-term injury is 21-37% greater for each previous injury suffered. It is likely that any horse that has a prolonged time off the track might have suffered a long-term injury. |
| 3 | Ran within last 48 hours | These are primarily integrity-based examinations to provide confidence that horses running in quick succession are suitable to race. The length of time coincides with declaration time. |
| 4 | Age | Horses aged 11 years (Flat) and 13 years (National Hunt). Data from the JRRM indicates that horses that are aged 13 years or over are nine times more likely to suffer a fatal injury compared with younger horses. (N.B. age checks are annual checks on the flat, and within the last 90 days for horses running in National Hunt races, when they are aged 13 years and over). |
| 5 | Failed to complete in the last four consecutive races | Data from the JRRM indicates an increased risk of long-term injury or fatality to horses if they have previously made errors or failed to complete in a race. |
| 6 | Monitored horses | Horses that are being monitored because they have had a previous Suitability to Race examination or history of lameness (monitoring is usually performed every third time the horse runs). |

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| 7 | Non-runner-Veterinary Certificate | If a horse has been deemed ineligible to race because of a veterinary reason the BHA Veterinary Officer will examine the horse to ensure the problem has fully resolved. |
| 8 | Recent clinically significant cardiac arrhythmia | Examination of the horse will occur to ensure that the heart rhythm is normal before racing. |
| 9 | Faller last time out | Horses running in hurdle races are 30% more likely to suffer a long-term injury if they fell last time out. |
| 10 | National Hunt horses out of the handicap | The JRRM found that horses running out of the handicap were more likely to suffer a long-term injury than those in the handicap. Only around 3.5% of horses run from out of the handicap. |

It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive, and other horses may be selected for examination at the discretion of the VO. The list is also subject to review as further information becomes available through the development of risk models.

c) Pre-Race Examination (PRE) procedure

VOs will usually examine horses in racecourse stables unless circumstances dictate otherwise. The examination consists of:

- a. Requesting any relevant veterinary history for the horse*
- b. Cardiac auscultation.
- c. Palpation of locomotor structures in the standing horse.
- d. Trot up and back in a straight line on a firm surface for a distance of about 20-30 meters.
- e. Palpation of the limb in passive flexion may be performed following the trot.

d) Horses with asymmetrical gait

If the VO has doubt regarding the suitability of the horse to race at the initial examination, they will:

- a. Inform the attendant that there is a question regarding the horse's suitability to race.
- b. Request that the trainer/representative is informed.
- c. Advise that any veterinary history should be provided as it can help support the decision to allow the horse to run*.
- d. Recommend that the horse be given the opportunity to warm-up by walking.
- e. Re-evaluate the horse after a suitable time by trotting on the same firm surface.
- f. If there is still doubt regarding the suitability of the horse's gait the VO will endeavour to examine the horse at trot on the racing surface or similar.
- g. If in the opinion of the VO, the gait is still of concern the horse will be withdrawn on veterinary advice.
- h. If the VO is satisfied that the horse has improved, the horse will be monitored during the canter-down and may be re-examined at the start.

*It should be noted that any veterinary history or information provided will remain confidential within the veterinary team and will not be passed to the stewarding team or be made public.

A horse that is presented with an asymmetrical gait will be approached as follows:

a. Gait unsuitable

The horse will not be allowed to race. A welfare 'stop' on declarations will be placed until the trainer has engaged with the suitability to race process (see below).

b. Gait just suitable to race

1. First occasion: If the horse has a borderline gait but the VO assesses the horse as suitable to race, it is highly recommended that a veterinary report be provided before the next time the horse races. This will help the examining VO understand better the cause of the lameness and can give confidence that the horse is suitable to race. The horse will undergo a PRE before its next run.
2. Second occasion: If the horse presents at a pre-race examination for a second time with a borderline gait and without a veterinary report, a 'stop' on declarations will be placed for this horse until receipt of an appropriate veterinary report. The horse will still be required to undergo and pass a pre-race examination the next time it races.

2. Veterinary Officer Lameness Grading System

The VOs will use the following grading system, adapted from the Association of American Equine Practitioners (AAEP) 5-point Lameness Scale, when assessing lame horses and horses with asymmetrical gaits.

Horses should be evaluated in-hand on a firm surface at walk and trot.

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| Grade 1 | Sound at walk, affected limb(s) just identifiable at trot. |
| Grade 2 | Sound at walk, affected limb(s) clearly identifiable at trot. |
| Grade 3 | Affected limb(s) just identifiable at walk, clearly identifiable at trot. |
| Grade 4 | Affected limb(s) clearly identifiable at walk, very obvious at trot. |
| Grade 5 | Unwilling or unable to walk. |

As a guideline, a lameness grade of 1/5, without any obvious abnormalities that would place the horse at greater risk of injury or catastrophic breakdown, is likely to be judged as suitable to race. A lameness grade consistently 2/5 will be subject to significant consideration for withdrawal. A lameness grade 3/5 or greater will be considered unsuitable to race.

If a horse is found to be lame in an examination requested by the Stewards post-race, only a lameness grade of 2/5 or greater will be reported to them and the horse will be requested to present for pre-race clearance examination on the racecourse the next time it is declared to race.

3. Veterinary Reports

a) Background

Should a horse have an asymmetrical gait, a full veterinary history can support a decision for the horse to race. This is most helpful if it is provided to the BHA Veterinary Panel (see Section 4) two weeks before the planned race as this allows time for discussion and/ or any further assessments

to be carried out as necessary. When evaluating the risk of catastrophic injury, the presence of a diagnosis is extremely helpful.

We would like to emphasise that information given by the trainer will be treated confidentially and will not be passed to the stewarding team or be made public.

Veterinary reports can be submitted directly to the VO that requested the report or to vetreports@britishhorseracing.com. Reports can/ are to be submitted under the following circumstances:

- i) Voluntarily - when a trainer elects to highlight an asymmetrical gait and to provide the relevant veterinary history to support the decision to race.
- ii) If requested - when a VO has detected an abnormal gait at pre-race examination.
- iii) As a requirement - when a 'stop' on declarations has been placed against a horse following an assessment of gait. In this instance the horse will be required to undergo a 'Suitability to Race' examination (details at section 5).

b) Recommendations of content of a veterinary report

When evaluating a horse with an asymmetrical gait, the Veterinary Officer will be better placed to support the decision that the horse is suitable to race when a full veterinary history is made available. The history should detail all diagnostics and imaging that have been used to understand the cause of the lameness and any treatment given. Reports ideally should include:

- i) Date lameness first noted
- ii) Grade of initial lameness
- iii) Details of diagnosis of lameness (including date, techniques used and the results of any imaging)
- iv) Treatment given including any periods of rest
- v) Description of current gait
- vi) Recent confirmation that the lameness still originates from the same source.

NB. Recent confirmation need not be a full diagnostic work-up but at the very least should include a veterinary examination sufficient for the veterinarian to satisfy themselves that the lameness originates from the same source.

If in doubt, please ask your veterinarian to discuss the horse with the VO who has requested the report or ask for more information from vetreports@britishhorseracing.com

4. The BHA Veterinary Panel

To facilitate the process of assessing horses with asymmetrical gaits, the BHA Department of Equine Health and Welfare has created a Panel of VOs to evaluate the veterinary report and the videos of the horse's gait to give a preliminary assessment of the likely outcome of the pre-race examination. This process has been developed following the success of the Cheltenham and Aintree pre-race examination protocols. Each horse submitted to the Panel will be evaluated by two VOs. Should there be a difference in opinion as to whether or not a horse is regarded as suitable to race then the Director of Equine Health and Welfare will have ultimate authority.

This process aims to reduce dispute and disappointment at the racecourse and to provide consistency in decision-making.

5. Suitability to Race Examination

a) Purpose

The purpose of a Suitability to Race examination is:

- i) to provide opportunity for a trainer to highlight a horse with an asymmetrical gait, or one that might be questioned as 'suitable to race'. The trainer can use this process to discuss the veterinary history of the horse with the BHA Veterinary Panel before travelling to the racecourse.
- ii) to allow the Veterinary Panel to establish, as best as is possible, whether the horse has a significantly greater than normal risk of catastrophic breakdown and to give an opinion of the likely outcome of a pre-race examination (PRE) with the aim of avoiding dispute and disappointment at the racecourse.
- iii) occasionally a necessary process that the horse must undergo if it has been regarded as unsuitable to race at a pre-race examination. It requires the trainer's own veterinarian to provide an opinion to the Veterinary Panel which is beneficial as they are familiar with the horse's clinical history.

The Veterinary Panel are most likely to support a horse's suitability to race if they are provided with a full and detailed history of the lameness.

It is requested that the videos and reports detailed below are sent to the Panel in advance of an entry so that there is time, if necessary, for the Panel to work with the trainer and their vet in discussing the horse's diagnosis to establish whether the horse is suitable to race.

b) Requirements

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| 1. | A pre-exercise video of the horse trotting away and back, taken from immediately behind the horse. The horse should be trotted on a loose rein for 25-30 metres on a firm surface. The horse should be reasonably behaved, trotting at medium speed and not be wearing a rug, boots or bandages. |
| 2. | A video of the horse at exercise. The horse should be shown cantering past the camera for approximately 10 seconds approaching and 10 seconds going away. |
| 3. | A video of the horse trotting (as pre-exercise) after a period of 30 minutes cooling down. |
| 4. | A report from the home Veterinary Surgeon detailing the diagnosis of the lameness, which should include a summary of any imaging and nerve blocks undertaken. |

Note: If the Panel permits the horse to be entered for races, the horse will still undergo a pre-race examination at the course on at least the next occasion on which he or she is entered.

Please contact the Panel at vetreports@britishhorseracing.com in advance of submitting a report to discuss individual circumstances and requirements. You will also be given a phone number (which will vary depending upon which member of the Panel is on duty) to forward videos to by *WhatsApp*, as this is the easiest way of sending videos.

6. Irregular Heart Rhythms and Sounds

a) Background

Cardiac arrhythmias or irregular heart rhythms are commonly detected in horses. On the racecourse, they are most often found when examining a horse that has performed below expectations, but they can also occasionally be discovered before racing. The most common cause of clinically significant cardiac arrhythmia in horses is paroxysmal atrial fibrillation (PAF), a condition that generally occurs during racing and usually corrects itself within hours of being detected, but which can occasionally persist and require veterinary intervention. PAF causes a rapid decline in performance. Occasionally, rhythm disturbances are caused by more sinister problems that can lead to sudden death.

Whilst irregular heart rhythms can usually be readily detected using a stethoscope, it is not possible to identify unequivocally the different types of irregularity without the use of an ECG. Due to the possible fatal nature of some arrhythmias, the Department of Equine Health and Welfare requires horses that have been detected with potentially significant, or repeated cardiac rhythm disturbances, to undergo a suitability to race process in line with the protocol below.

Many horses have or can develop abnormal heart sounds or murmurs. The significance of these vary from not concerning to very worrying. Murmurs are graded on their loudness and, generally, the louder they are, the more significant they are. Most murmurs are of no clinical significance, but some will necessitate that the horse undergoes an advanced cardiological examination before being allowed to race. This can be particularly important in older racehorses because the risk of heart valve damage increases with age.

b) Veterinary Officer process

The VO may listen to a horse's heart before or after racing for many reasons, e.g., during a pre-race examination, at the trainer's request, at the stewards' request, or for a pre-existing concern.

i. Irregular rhythm detected before racing:

- Should the VO detect an irregular rhythm on initial auscultation of a horse, the trainer or their representative will be informed.
- If there is an irregular rhythm the VO may attempt to perform an ECG.
- A second opinion will be sought before a horse is withdrawn (this may be obtained from the ECG trace or from another veterinary surgeon).
- If the veterinary surgeons agree that an irregular rhythm exists, the stewards will be informed and the horse will be withdrawn.
- A welfare 'stop' will be applied to the horse.
- The welfare 'stop' will be lifted once the trainer's own veterinary surgeon has examined the horse and confirms in writing to vetreports@britishhorseracing.co.uk that the horse's heart has returned to normal rhythm.
- If it is possible to obtain an ECG trace of the horse's cardiac rhythm, the trainer can elect for the BHA to have a cardiac specialist evaluate the trace to assess whether there are any significant findings. The expense will be covered by the BHA.
- Any horse detected with a significant cardiac arrhythmia at the previous run will be examined before racing next time out.
- On the second or any subsequent occasion that a horse has a significant irregular rhythm detected (before or after racing), a welfare 'stop' will be applied to the horse until the requirements set out in [section 6c](#) are satisfied.

ii. Irregular rhythm detected after racing:

- Should the VO detect an irregular rhythm on initial auscultation of a horse, the trainer or their representative will be informed.
- A second examination will be performed at least 20 minutes later, which allows the horse's heart rate to return to a more normal rate.
- If an irregular rhythm persists the VO may attempt to perform an ECG.
- If the irregular rhythm persists, the stewards will be informed and a welfare 'stop' will be applied to the horse.
- The welfare 'stop' will be lifted once the trainer's own veterinary surgeon has examined the horse and confirms in writing to vetreports@britishhorseracing.co.uk that the horse's heart has returned to normal rhythm.
- If it is possible to obtain an ECG trace of the horse's cardiac rhythm, the trainer can elect for the BHA to have a cardiac specialist evaluate the trace to assess whether there are any significant findings. The expense will be covered by the BHA.
- Any horse detected with a significant cardiac arrhythmia at the previous run will be examined before racing next time out.
- On the second or any subsequent occasion that a horse has a significant irregular rhythm detected before or after racing, a welfare 'stop' will be applied to the horse until the requirements set out in [section 6c](#) are satisfied.

iii. Abnormal sounds detected:

- Should potentially significant cardiac sounds be detected, a welfare 'stop' will be applied to the horse until the requirements set out in [section 6c](#) are satisfied

c) Cardiac Abnormality Suitability to Race requirements

The following sets out the requirements that must be satisfied before the horse can be declared to race again when a welfare 'stop' has been applied due to detection of abnormal cardiac sounds or recurrent cardiac rhythm disturbances:

- Pre and post-exercise cardiac examination which as a minimum includes auscultation with a stethoscope.
- Pre-exercise, exercising and post-exercise ECGs. The exercise must be sufficiently strenuous to ensure that the heart rate rises above 200 beats per minute for at least thirty seconds.
- When abnormal sounds have been detected, the horse will require ultrasound examination of the heart performed by an expert.
- A written report by the examining veterinary surgeon, confirming that these examinations have been completed and summarising findings, which should be forwarded to vetreports@britishhorseracing.com.

Should you or your own veterinary surgeon wish to seek further guidance or require information about the appropriate equipment with which to perform the exercise ECG, help can be obtained from equine@britishhorseracing.com. If you are in any doubt about any part of the process, please enquire before unnecessary expense is incurred.

7. Post-race examination and reporting

Post-race examinations are usually performed for integrity reasons on the direction of the stewards. If there is a perception that a horse has performed below expectations, or a jockey has reported a 'lost action' for example, the VO will be asked to conduct an examination to see if there is an obvious veterinary reason that might give an explanation to the betting public.

The examination will consist of listening to the horse's heart and an assessment of any blood at its nostrils, obvious injury or lameness. If a horse shows a lameness of a grade 2/5 or greater this will be reported to the stewards. The trainer or representative will be informed of the findings and that this report will be made. The horse will also be marked for a pre-race examination the next time it races.

If a lameness of 1/5 is recorded the horse may be re-examined after cooling off, not for a regulatory examination, but to be sure that a more severe lameness has not become apparent that needs further attention or investigation. Details of this examination would be shared with the trainer or their representative, but not with the stewards, however the horse would be marked for a pre-race examination the next time it raced.

Occasionally, the stewards will expect a second examination after 40 – 60 minutes when they are conducting a Running and Riding Enquiry, the findings of which would be reportable to them. This would be to establish whether evidence developed of a clinically significant problem after the horse had had time to recover.

8. Glossary of Terms

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| STR | Suitability to Race Examination | Examination of a horse by the Veterinary Panel. |
| PRE | Pre-Race Examination | Examination performed by a Veterinary Officer on race day, at a racecourse, before a horse is permitted to race. |
| Stop | Instruction to Weatherbys to prevent a horse being declared to race. | Stops are applied to horses following detection of an issue that precludes the horse from racing until determined otherwise. |
| Flag | A comment on a horse's confidential welfare report. | Notice to Veterinary Officers that a horse has previously had an issue and should be monitored intermittently. |
| LTI | Long-term Injury | An injury that will prevent a horse from training for greater than three months. Usually, a bone or tendon injury. |
| Cardiac arrhythmia | Irregular heart rhythm. | Most often a result of Paroxysmal Atrial Fibrillation but occasionally caused by more sinister issues. |
| VO | BHA Veterinary Officer. | Veterinary Surgeon employed by the British Horseracing Authority to perform regulatory functions with regard to integrity and welfare of horses. |
| Veterinary Panel or the Panel | Panel of BHA Veterinary Officers. | Collectively review horses that require Suitability to Race examinations |