



# EFTBA Veterinary Newsletter 19



Business  
and  
Ethics  
of  
Racing  
  
Part III

## Welcome to EFTBA's veterinary newsletter

Dear European breeders,

News prove that the subject covered by the symposium in Baden-Baden, whose presentations are reported by Hanspeter, is still current. Indeed, the last MEP Horse Lunch held in the European Parliament in early March focused on the question of 'Responsible Ownership' and referred to the creation of Codes of Practices to improve the minimum standards of horse welfare in Europe. The message brought to our industry is that we should be proactive

in this field of particular concern for the public interest. The racing industry has a potential to lead the way for the other branches of the equine sector and should not be shy in communicating on its best practices and exchanging views with scientific researchers, sociologists or members of the public.

With kind regards

Hubert Honoré  
*Hubert Honoré*

Chairman, EFTBA

## Editorial

The third and final part of the conference-report in Baden-Baden covers subjects of ethics of racing and the role of the veterinarian. As the title of the symposium did suggest, these contributions were its primary intentions and themes. On one side, the presentations did analyse the situation of to-days racing, and on the other side, improvements for possible short-comings were sought.

In this connections we must consider that racing is a sport which operates under a social license. We therefore shouldn't venture to lose

confidence of the public and must respect and adhere to community standards. Public opinion is of importance for us, especially in regard to ethic standards in our days.

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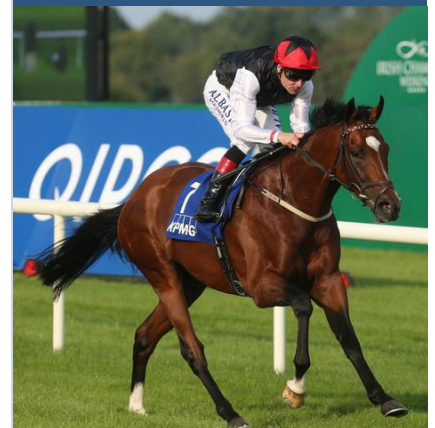
## March 2016

. Racing is a sport which operates under a social license and must adhere to community standards

. The ethics of horse racing are more and more important as a matter of public interest

- Today's world requires responsibility, ethically and morally justifiable behavior well beyond rules and regulations

**"Many thanks to Mrs. Eva-Maria Bucher-Haefner, Moyglare Stud Farm, for her valued sponsorship of this newsletter."**



Free Eagle (IRE, 2011) by High Chaparral – Polish Gem (Danerhill) bred and owned by Moyglare Stud

## Introduction

The following presentations refer both to ethical and even philosophical aspects of using high-performance horses in our days.

They were given by people being deeply involved in the business of racing and breeding and by ethicists, in their discipline also professionally employed. These fields are very comprehensive and one certainly agrees that it simply isn't possible to be a master of both. But the common discussion allows to learn from each other and also to put right possible misunderstandings. But at any rate, the horse is the common interest and the synthesis of such conferences is above all meant to be in its favour.

## Business and ethics of racing

### Is horseracing ethically justifiable in the 21st century and what can the Racing Industry do to ensure that it is ?

Already the opening speech of the conference by **Dr. Andreas Jacobs** did find greatest interest, as he really is involved in racing and breeding, e.g. as the chairman of Baden Racing and the German Breeders' Association. He also is an active breeder (Fährhof, Newsells Park Stud and Maine Chance Farms) and beside many duties in several companies he also serves in further racing and breeding boards all over the world.

He introduced his presentation with reflections on strategic analysis and planning in today's business world, the so-called value chain. In his opinion, in the world of racing, the value chain is in line with the circle of life of the horse, from birth to retirement. Moreover, he also clarified the meaning of ethical justifiability and expressed himself clearly and bindingly: *"Today's world requires responsibility, ethically and morally justifiable behavior well beyond rules and regulations."*

Therefore, all parties in an industry are obliged to constantly test their behavior, their rules and regulations with the eyes of a more and more educated, morally competent public mass. One has to meet the expectation of the public, often well beyond tradition and existing regulations.

In regard to the circle of life, Andreas Jacobs highlighted 9 points:

1) In our times, the living conditions of foals and yearlings improved significantly. Here, we made immense progress and he also mentioned that his

young horses are checked more often in their development than his own children.

2) Sales preparation seems to be the first time to question our attitude. In this respect he referred mainly to the level of surgeries to straighten legs and removing chips. He thinks that we are doing too much surgery, purely for economic reasons as the genetical value of these animals is low. In the long run, we all want a natural selection process and not horses with lots of remodeled parts.

3) For the sales themselves, he wonders how many yearlings are under drugs when they hit the sales ground? Are tranquilizers and pain killers ethically justifiable?

4) Referring to starting and breaking horses, he reminds of the situation, that after the sales big numbers of yearlings enter training yards. At that stage, our business becomes a numbers business and the care of the horses is too often in the hands of low trained staff. Each horse needs personal schooling and time to get familiarized. Though it costs more time and money, this patience pays out in the long run.

5) Our industry is pretty old fashioned in regard to the living conditions of the horses in training, especially the stabling and the time for their exercise. Squeezing horses in small, badly ventilated and dark boxes makes the handling of racehorses ethically questionable.

6) Race track owners and operators also have to contribute to make racing ethically justifiable, e. g. the stables for horses which come in for a raceday and one has to work hard to have the track up to standard for the prevention of injuries.

7) The dependency on betting was looked at comprehensively, especially how ethically questionable horse-racing got by becoming a betting product. Of course, betting also has positive aspects for the breeding industry, but the balance must be right. A huge negative consequence of betting is the massive increase of "betting races", events which support the betting industry rather than the selection process. In the long run, these handicaps will not be seen as ethically justifiable, as in tomorrow's world, a sensitive public doesn't want horses being beaten up as a base product for addicted punters.

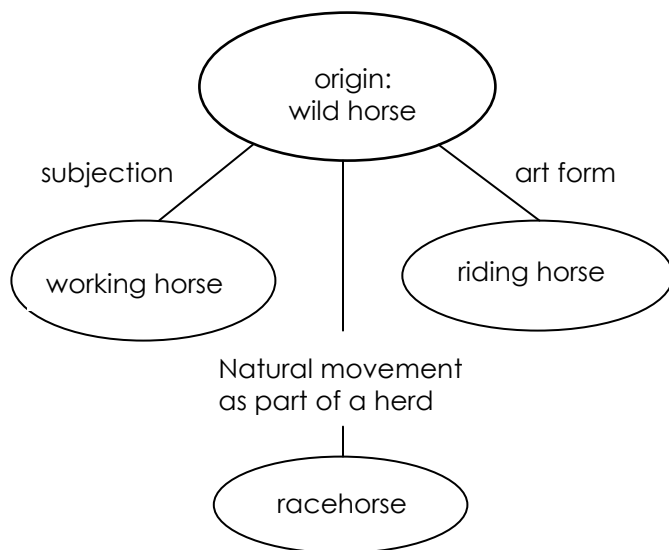
8) This point – the use of the whip – was for Andreas Jacobs the most sensitive topic of ethical methods. In this respect, he didn't mention any often heard generalities but presented interesting thoughts on the biology of the flight animal horse. He concluded that running full speed must be based on their confidence in human beings, and that the willingness to run fast stops with the lack of confidence in human beings. When we lose the horse's confiden-

ce, the moment of ethically unjustifiable horse-handling and -racing starts. In his view, the whip is a tool to break the confidence – and the most visible one for the public.

9) The last point was the use of drugs and here, Andreas Jacobs was also bindingly out-spoken. In his opinion, this is not justifiable and morally, politically and economically wrong in all dimensions.

### Ethics and dilemmas of high performance sports medicine

A more general and philosophical outlook on sports medicine was the contribution of **Dagmar Borchers**, a philosopher at the University of Bremen. She isn't very familiar with racing - but can't just such a precondition be most valuable to get to know how the general public might assess our endeavors? Her view was that economic aspects in a global industry are more important than ever and that animal welfare has become an important topic within our industry. Thus, the ethic of horse racing is becoming more and more important as a matter of public interest, and – be on guard – in every respect. In her opinion, doing things in a morally acceptable way is a general demand with regard to all human activities, irrespectively of what subjects we are talking about. In her opinion, morality in animal ethics means a fair treatment of those creatures that are subjected to our human ambitions. She thinks that racing might be an activity which horses enjoy and that corresponds well to their natural capabilities.



A new paradigm for racing (Borchers 2015b)

Prof. Borchers didn't want to preach morals, but her intention was to present rational philosophical argu-

ments which should be discussed and reflected within those circles that are involved in the racing industry.

### Sustainability, thoroughbred racing and the need for change

In just about any human enterprise of our days, the subject of sustainability has a great meaning. It therefore was very welcome, that a scientist from the second largest racing nation gave a presentation on this. **Dr. Iris Bergmann** from the University of Sydney not only did analyse the situation down under, she even saw a need for change. Interestingly, she also has no background in racing and veterinary medicine at all, but does her research at the department of geosciences. Therefore, she has a completely different approach to our industry as we ourselves. She much more has a point of view as the public, the point of view of social sciences. In this connection she referred to the McKinsey report in the US, where the declining trend of our industry was explicitly linked to the public's concern with animal welfare and the use of drugs. She did admit that even industry participants do call for change, for integrity, structural changes, regulations and transparency. She knows to appreciate this, but nevertheless thinks that these endeavours do not address the principal question for better welfare outcomes. She much more thinks that an ecologically oriented sustainability frame-work is better suited to fully address the ethical and welfare issues. Her proposition therefore is, that the industry needs to engage with issues of normativity and to develop alternative models of what constitutes success beyond winning a race. Engagement with these matters can better address issues of (un)sustainability and move the industry from an economically driven business and management model to a welfare driven model. In her opinion, it would appear that the Thoroughbred industry can expect to greatly benefit from proactively engaging with this process.

### Situating the conception of welfare in the thoroughbred industry

After having promoted a welfare driven model for racing, Iris Bergmann also presented ideas of a welfare conception. Her approach based on presentations at the Annual Round Table Conference on Matters Pertaining to Racing 2012-2015 (Jockey Club in the US).

But she also referred to her own research in the view of welfare in natural and social sciences. She did admit that there are regional and national dif-

ferences in this fields, but argues, that there is an underlying logic within the industry so that the lessons learnt can have international relevance.

In her opinion, it appears the industry sees the horse as a physical resource that can be mined for human purposes. The welfare conception of the industry is reduced to a narrow physical, technocentric model. This, however, has been shown to not address the underlying causes of unsustainability (see e.g. the situation in the ecological crisis). In contrast, a broader understanding of welfare is evident in the natural and social sciences. This method bases on the concept that society at large values naturalness as a criterion for good welfare.

Social and ethical viewpoints within society continue to evolve, while the thoroughbred racing industry continues to lag behind. It appears that the industry is walking a fine line between intervening for positive change for thoroughbred welfare and maintaining the status quo for as long and as far as society allows them to. Consequently, the social sustainability of the industry and the welfare of thoroughbreds continue to be at risk.

## The role of the veterinarian

### ***The responsibility of the veterinary practitioner for the horse, the trainer and the owner – What can the racing veterinarian do to ensure sustainability of horse racing ?***

According to **Dr. Klaus Weigand**, racing veterinarian in Hamburg, the claims of the racehorse, the trainer and the owner are quite different. In this area of conflict, the equine practitioner has the duty to consolidate the rights and needs of the horse, and the aim of his work has to be the health of the animal.

To achieve this target, the racehorse needs an uncompromised quality of stabling and care and the equine practitioner has to be well skilled and equipped to ensure this. He also must be familiar with special requirements of the sport and needs routine to work on the track. The case-load, the time schedule and the public mean a lot of pressure, as all his actions may be filmed and released in the Internet in our days.

The vet also has to deal with the facts that trainers are under permanent pressure and it is also important to make it clear to the owner that for a long and successful career, the horse's health has to be preserved. In the end, the equine practitioner is the one responsible for the health of the horse, not only

for the owner and trainer, but for the public as well; the latter's power is strong.

## Conclusion

Some statements in the ethical and philosophical talks did base on some traditional assumptions, which in the meantime have been proven wrong.

Just one example will be mentioned, the question of exercising young horses. Ethical considerations in this context did contradict with findings of veterinary research as e.g. the presentations of René van Weeren (in newsletter 17) and all the informations in our newsletter 9 (Early training and career length). Therefore, this symposium was a most welcome gathering to sort out misunderstandings like this. But on top of this, it can also be a hint that our communication with the public isn't good enough and some proactive endeavours in this field should be worthwhile. And that was one advice of the ethicists for us, anyway.

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