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# BRED TO DEATH

How the racing industry's drive for profit and  
glory is ruining the Thoroughbred horse

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**Front cover: Stallion statue outside the National Stud, Newmarket, England (© Dene Stansall)**



## GLOSSARY OF HORSE RACING TERMS

<b>Bloodstock Sales:</b>	The selling of horses at auction
<b>Boxwalking:</b>	A horse who constantly walks around the stable in which he or she is housed
<b>Broodmare:</b>	Female breeding horse
<b>Classic Races:</b>	Five top races for three-year-old colts and fillies
<b>Colt:</b>	Male horse under five years of age
<b>Covering:</b>	The mating of horses
<b>Dam:</b>	Mother of a horse
<b>Filly:</b>	Female horse under five years of age
<b>Foal:</b>	New-born horse
<b>Gallops (on the...):</b>	Training ground on which horses are given a run
<b>Graded Stakes:</b>	Top American races
<b>Grandsire:</b>	Grandfather of a horse
<b>Group 1:</b>	The top category of race in which a horse can compete
<b>National Hunt:</b>	Racing that involves horses jumping fences and hurdles
<b>Pinhooker:</b>	A person who buys and sells horses in the hope of financial profit
<b>Rating system:</b>	Horses are ranked according to their performance on racecourses – the top being 'rated' 120-plus, while those below 45 are not greatly valued
<b>Shuttle Stallion:</b>	Male breeding horse who is transported between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, where mares are biologically receptive at different times of the year
<b>Sire:</b>	Father of a horse
<b>Stallion:</b>	Male breeding horse
<b>Staying Horse:</b>	One who is able to run comfortably over a distance exceeding one mile and a half
<b>Stud:</b>	A farm where horses mate
<b>Teaser:</b>	Horse used by studs to detect – by smell – a receptive female
<b>Thoroughbred:</b>	A breed of horse used for racing
<b>Weaving:</b>	A horse who, as a result of stress, constantly sways his or her head from side to side
<b>Windsucking:</b>	A stressed horse who bites at anything in reach, whilst sucking in air
<b>Yearling:</b>	A horse aged about one year



## SUMMARY

- The chase for glory and profit by the global horse racing industry's dominant forces has led to over-production of a swift but physically weak Thoroughbred.
- The leading breeding operations are drawing on an increasingly narrow gene pool when producing 'high status' foals, which results in inherited weaknesses.
- The situation in Britain is typical of the global picture: three times as many horses are being produced than 40 years ago and a decreasing proportion – currently about 35% – are sufficiently robust and healthy to start racing.
- Breeding stallions are effectively enslaved by an industry that regards them as mere semen-producing machines. They are kept isolated from other horses and, for as long as 20 years, can be required to impregnate three mares a day during the six-month breeding season.
- The industry subjects breeding mares to an almost constant cycle of pregnancy and birth. To control when the foal is delivered, they are injected with hormones and other drugs, and subjected to long periods of artificial light during winter months.
- Many of the 'defective' newborns end up slaughtered for meat, while those who do enter racing suffer a high level of fatal injuries and stress-related illnesses such as gastric ulcers and bleeding lungs.
- Despite the high attrition rate, the obscene level of over-production means that the racing authorities are still unable to accommodate many of the lower-ranked horses in the racing calendar.
- Some of these 'surplus' but healthy horses will also end up being slaughtered for meat.
- It is the increasing power of bookmakers and of the leading horse breeders and owners, set against the relative impotence of the regulatory authorities, that has produced the dismal picture described above.
- British bookmakers now generate a combined annual profit of £1 billion from horse racing.
- Leading stud owners and breeders are producing horses from 'proven' ancestry and marketing them not only as good racecourse prospects but also as animals who will supposedly earn even larger sums at stud – when their racing days are over – than they can in racecourse prize money. The English Derby offers a first place cheque of £740,000 (\$1,350,000). The owner of a leading stallion can charge \$500,000 for a single 'covering' of a mare. That stallion might cover 200 mares in one year.



- Only a tiny minority of horses are capable of excelling on the track and in the stud yards. But because the potential rewards are so high, the Thoroughbred commodity market (i.e. the bloodstock sales) is buoyant.
- There is now a thriving breed of get-rich-quick speculators, known as pinhookers. They buy and sell young horses purely for profit, in the way that other market speculators trade in zinc or coffee.
- Two breeding operations dominate the global Thoroughbred market – Darley and Coolmore. Between them they own more than 100 breeding stallions and produce about 10% of all Thoroughbreds in world racing. Their share of the closely-linked British and Irish racing scenes is even more impressive. In 2002, Darley and Coolmore stallions covered 43% of the entire breeding mare population.
- Darley and Coolmore breed heavily from stallions descended from the 1960s North American flat racing champion runner, Northern Dancer.
- The Northern Dancer 'brand' is very saleable but the obsessive focus on this bloodline is leading to a dangerous level of inbreeding with all the attendant inherited weaknesses in the offspring.
- Northern Dancer was a flat race horse, specialising in mile-and-a-quarter events that are popular in the US. This is true of most of his male descendants who form the 'raw material' of the Coolmore and Darley operations.
- Because so many horses racing today around the world come from the Northern Dancer bloodline, they too are best suited to mile-and-a-quarter racing. Yet they are often required to race for far longer distances and even over jumps.
- Jump racing is largely confined to Britain, Ireland and France. The majority of horses racing in such events used to be selectively bred for the task and were given time to develop physically. Now they are often cast-offs from the more lucrative flat racing scene and are likely to be thrown into jump events without even being given sufficient training. This adds to their chances of coming to grief in what is already an intrinsically hazardous discipline.
- An Animal Aid analysis of the 11 equine fatalities at the four-day 2006 Cheltenham Festival shows that every one of the victims came from flat racing bloodlines. The same is true of the two horses who died at the 2006 three-day Aintree meeting.
- Racing's regulatory authorities in Britain have been inadequate in their response to the destructive trends outlined above. Their failure even to acknowledge the deep-rooted problems that confront racing make them complicit in a process of systematic horse exploitation, injury and destruction.





## INTRODUCTION

**Every year, more than 100,000<sup>(1)</sup> Thoroughbred horses are produced by the global racing industry. This output is steadily increasing.**

Some breeders produce horses with a key objective of selling them for profit at bloodstock sales. However, while modern race horse breeding is a production line industry turning out equine successes, it also produces financially non-viable 'output'. The 'failures' are consigned to lower-grade equestrian activities or are simply slaughtered for meat or abandoned. Just as the total number of horses being bred is on the increase, so there is a rise in the percentage of animals who are failing to make the commercial grade.

The breeding trend now is to select for speed – at the expense of skeletal strength and general robustness. This report will show that, whereas horses were once bred with different characteristics, depending on whether they were to race over jumps or race short or long distances on the flat, the world's dominant



The death of Terivic (foreground) at the infamous Becher's Brook, Aintree in 2006

© EMPICS



breeders are now producing a 'one model fits all' animal who is asked to do a variety of jobs that he or she can no longer undertake safely.

The model in question is inbred for optimum performance on standard, flat American courses in events extending from just one mile, to one mile and two furlongs. The raw material for this heavily marketed equine 'product' is a small number of fashionable stallions and mares who themselves derive from ultra-fashionable breeding lines. By fixating on this narrow marketing objective, breeders will have a major detrimental impact on generations of horses to come. This report will demonstrate that there is already evidence that a fragile and weaker Thoroughbred is emerging, and this is despite breeders' insistence that 'improvement' of the performance horse is their paramount objective.

Moreover, rather than getting to grips with the problem, the shockingly high rates of injury and death are being cynically defended by racing's regulatory authorities around the world.

Just as the Thoroughbred 'bloodstock' market is locked into trading in animals who are inbred in the hope that they will thrive in a specific type of flat mile-and-a-quarter event, so the current 'over-production' of horses is driven by a number of market-led factors:

- Stud farms want maximum profit from stallions through all-year breeding.
- Breeders want broodmares to be kept almost constantly pregnant in order to provide them with a young colt or filly to sell each year.
- Bloodstock Thoroughbred sales want horses in all conditions – young, old or pregnant – to sell on.
- Speculators involved in buying and selling of 'bloodstock' (known as 'Pinhookers') exploit the young equine 'product'.
- Bookmakers also demand more and more horses, on whom punters can bet around the clock – increasingly through the internet and in all parts of the world.

In short, the immensely profitable international bloodstock industry has become dominated by a handful of racing 'clans' that seek to swell the market with their narrowly-defined 'product'. The consequences of this trend – many more physically similar but physically compromised horses being produced for a global Thoroughbred market – are detailed and analysed in the pages that follow.



## THOROUGHBRED BREEDING NUMBERS

The table (below) shows the Thoroughbred breeding record of the most dominant countries.

The latest available figures are from 2003,<sup>(2)</sup> when almost 114,000 horses were born, of whom 83.7% were foaled in ten countries.

Top 10 Thoroughbred Breeding Countries 2003	Numbers of Foals Born	% of World's Breeding
USA	34,025	29.89%
Australia	15,300	13.44%
Ireland*	10,576	9.29%
Japan	8,488	7.46%
Argentina	6,631	5.83%
Great Britain*	5,432	4.77%
New Zealand	4,750	4.17%
France	4,402	3.87%
Brazil	3,236	2.84%
South Africa	2,493	2.19%

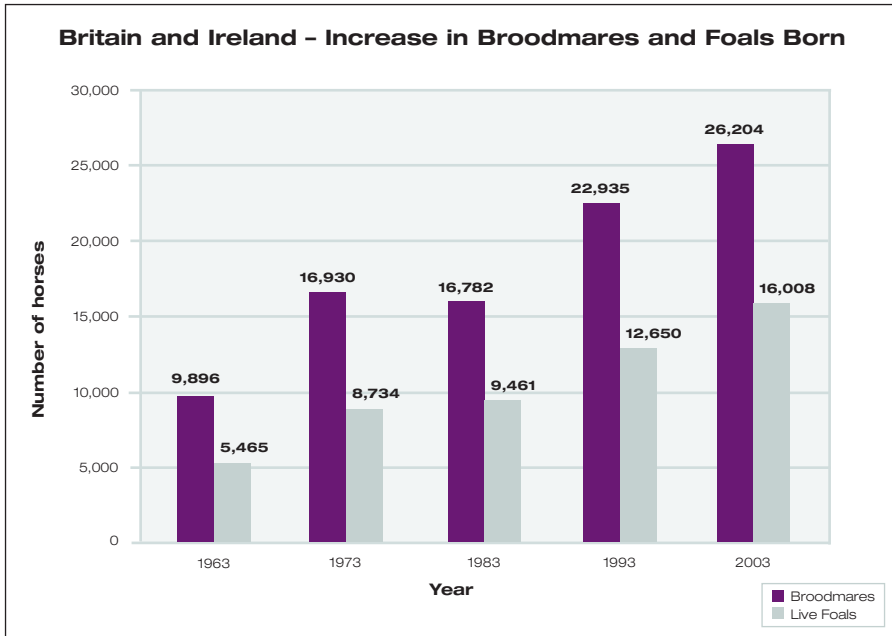
\*Outside of Great Britain and Ireland, these figures do not include twin births. Around 0.05% of live births are twins. Therefore, a few dozen more horses could be added to the figures above. In fact, around 11% of actual pregnancies potentially could result in twins. However, the vast majority are discovered early on and, to avoid potential complications, vets 'pinch' out one foetus, so that a single birth can take place.

Britain is the world's sixth largest breeder of race horses but is frequently grouped with Ireland – the third largest – when international horse numbers are collated. This is because of the close relationship between the breeding and racing communities of the two countries. When their 'foal output' is combined, they rank second in the world – topped only by the USA.





## RECENT BREEDING RECORDS



During the past 40 years, the number of foals produced by the Irish and British racing industry has nearly tripled – up from 5,465 to 16,008.<sup>(3)</sup> The number of Thoroughbred broodmares retained for breeding has shown a corresponding increase. About 60% of these animals give birth each season – an imposing percentage, given that a horse pregnancy lasts for 11 months and that rates of stillbirth and abortion are high due to the heavy physical and mental demands imposed upon the horses by the modern breeding regime.



## THE FATE OF THE STALLION

**Male breeding horses are known as stallions. They are owned by specialist stud operations of various sizes, by individuals and by groups of people, who are sometimes brought together through commercially-run syndicates.**

Other than in the breeding shed, stallions are kept separated from mares and other males. When not housed in their stable, they are confined behind high fences. And to minimise any chance of a costly injury, insurance policies usually state that they must not be ridden. It is a life of near isolation and deadening routine that – barring physical breakdown – can go on for 20 or more years. The 'successful' stud horse can fairly be described as being enslaved to the racing industry. He is regarded as no more than a semen-producing machine, whose own needs and troubles are of no consequence to his owner unless they interfere with his efficient functioning.



Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro held by his jockey having just shattered his off-hind leg at the start of the 2006 Preakness Stakes, Pimlico, USA

Teaser stallions are kept isolated too. These animals are used by studs to signal when a mare is biologically receptive. If she accepts the teaser then the breeding stallion is quickly brought in to facilitate the mating. Teasers never get to mate, provoking in them considerable frustration and distress. It is the female who is generally taken to the male and a fee paid by her owner for her to be 'covered' by the stallion. The broodmare owner then retains the foal, who is generally sold on within a year.



During a six-month breeding season, stallions can be asked to cover three mares a day. Payment is made only for 'successful mating', whereby a live foal is born.

Whereas 30 years ago, covering 100 mares in a year was almost unheard of, it is now not unusual for leading stallions to impregnate twice this number.

An example of a hard-worked stallion is Encosta de Lago, a grandson of Northern Dancer (see page 13). He covered a record 242 mares in 2005<sup>(4)</sup> generating an estimated £14 million for the Coolmore business. This was not the first time he had topped the 200 mark for a season. Another example of an over-worked sire is Redoute's Choice, who covered 214 mares in 2004<sup>(5)</sup>.

Stallions are selected for foal production on the basis of their bloodline and their racecourse performance. The top males can command fees of up to \$500,000 for impregnating a female.

Whereas fashionable bloodlines are in demand, the soundness of a horse does not necessarily determine whether or not he will be profitable for his owners. For example, the Coolmore-owned horse, One Cool Cat – unable to withstand the pressures of training and racing – retired with an injury at just three years of age. He, nonetheless, has gone on to become a vogue breeder covering broodmares all over the world. Another recent star of the flat racing circuit, the now deceased Dubai Millennium, also retired to stud, having proved unsound on the track. He is owned by the Darley operation, which – along with the Coolmore business – dominates the global bloodstock industry.

Leading racing commentator, Tony Morris, has observed:

'Breeders seem quite content to abandon any thoughts of applying discernment and are readily sucked in by deals offered by big studs, often over horses who, in more enlightened times, would not have been allowed in the breeding population.'<sup>(6)</sup>

Racing authorities around the world still forbid the use of artificial insemination (AI) and any other such interference in the natural coming together of male and female breeding animals. This traditional 'covering' of the female by the male is preserved primarily at the insistence of the big owners, who know that prices per covering would decline markedly if AI were to be introduced.



## THE FATE OF THE STALLION

At the time of writing, 17 horses had a publicly-declared covering fee of \$100,000-plus, with the five highest priced being:

<b>Storm Cat</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>
<b>A.P. Indy</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>
<b>Giant's Causeway</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>
<b>Kingmambo</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>
<b>Ghostzapper</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>

Many stallions die prematurely and while there has been no published analysis as to the causes, exhaustion, stress and inbreeding problems are all likely contributors.

## SHUTTLE STALLIONS

To increase their 'score' rate – but adding to their burden – fashionable males are flown between the Northern and Southern hemispheres so that owners can exploit the fact that broodmares are in season at different times of the year depending on their geographical location. The flying of males on the punishing journey from north to south and vice-versa is known as shuttling. The increasing popularity of this practice means that sires' covering records will continue to climb.

Nearly 100 horses currently travel between Europe, the USA, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South America. The stallion is kept for half a year in the northern hemisphere and for the other half in the Southern. In each location he might cover 100 mares.

Again Coolmore and Darley are the main exponents, as each seeks to extend its global influence. Half of Coolmore's 42 flat sires are shuttled, primarily to Australasia. Darley shuttles 17 of its 49 sires.



## THE FATE OF THE BROODMARE

**Broodmares are often subjected to a life of near-constant pregnancy and giving birth.**

Young maiden mares are usually frightened of the stallion and, according to Professor Twink Allen of the Equine Fertility Unit in Newmarket, 'are screwed down and doped and raped'.<sup>(7)</sup> Mares well into their twenties (towards the end of their natural lifespan) are still bound to a cycle of pregnancy, birth, pregnancy – and are even sold in the auction ring whilst carrying a foal.

Recent examples of this include Ireland-based broodmare Sin Lucha, 22 years old and carrying her seventeenth foal when offered for sale; and the US-based Golden Petal, aged 24 and also carrying her seventeenth foal. What's more, requiring broodmares to foal so late in life gives rise to health-related complications that see many of them die during or shortly after labour. In early 2006, Darley's 19-year-old Moon Cactus died in Newmarket from a uterine haemorrhage after foaling a colt 24 hours earlier. Her death followed that of her daughter, 14-year-old Moonshell, two weeks before in similar circumstances.

Whilst the power of the big commercial breeders ensures that artificial insemination (which would depress the price of each impregnation) is prohibited by racing authorities around the world, other aspects of the breeding regime are far from natural. To maximise the return from their broodmares, breeders seek to control precisely when they are biologically receptive. Notably, long periods of artificial lighting are employed to extend 'daylight' time in winter months in order to bring the females into season (oestrus) earlier than they would do normally. Where the mare 'stubbornly' refuses to come into season, powerful drugs (prostaglandins) are used to kickstart her.

Numerous injections of artificial hormones are also administered to control when ovulation itself occurs and thereby ensure that the mare is presented to the stallion in 'optimum condition' at the time booked for the covering.

Unlike a colt, a broodmare does not even have to race. Providing her sire (father's) line is in vogue she will be courted by bloodstock agents as a valuable asset. Because she is not necessarily tested on a racecourse, any unsoundness in her health may not be picked up and could be passed to her offspring.





## THE FATE OF THE BROODMARE



**A neglected retired race horse and her foal at last find sanctuary**

The emphasis on fashionable breeding lines can be taken to ruthless extremes. New Zealand's leading stud owner/breeder Sir Patrick Hogan stated after the 2006 Karaka bloodstock sales that breeders who fail to get a good financial return for their equine product should, 'look at their bloodlines. A number of broodmare owners are still relying on older families that were fashionable 15 to 20 years ago but which are not in fashion now. If a mare's family is not performing, breeders should be prepared to cull, and cull heavily.'<sup>(8)</sup>

If this advice is followed, thousands of mares will be destroyed – an outcome that would not only be pitiless but also short-sighted, given that a narrowing of the gene pool tends to lead to health problems that are passed on through the generations. Hogan is himself a dedicated follower of bloodline fashions. Among the male breeders in his stables are Zabeel and the conspicuously inbred Stravinsky, as well as shuttle stallions One Cool Cat and Viking Ruler. All four horses are Northern Dancer-related.

## INFLUENCE OF NORTH AMERICAN SIRE LINES AND THE RISE OF THE COOLMORE AND DARLEY OPERATIONS

**The racing industry has always identified certain stallions as ideal breeding stock, placing greater emphasis on the male over the female bloodline.**

The process of selection goes back to the early foundation sires who gave rise to the Thoroughbred breed itself following a breeding programme conducted in Britain between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most famous of those founding stallions are reported to be the Byerly Turk, Curwen Bay Barb, the Darley Arabian and the Godolphin Arabian, who came from North Africa and the Middle East. They were paired with founding mares who were native to Britain. Other famous early stallions include King Herod, Highflyer and Eclipse.



At the end of the 1960s, European racing and breeding started to come under the influence of North American sires, particularly the Canadian-bred horse, Northern Dancer. On the racecourse he was a top class performer, winning two legs of the American Triple Crown: the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness Stakes. At stud he was able to pass on his racing qualities to his offspring – his son Nijinsky going on to win the English Triple Crown (three of the Classic races). A near contemporary of Nijinsky was Sir Ivor, another North American-bred colt, who triumphed in two Classic races.

These successes led to a breeding exodus from Europe to America in search of further 'stars' who could win their owners fortunes on the racecourse and provide a lucrative income in stud for many years. Irish trainer Vincent O'Brien was one who plundered American bloodstock sales in the hope of repeating the triumphs of Nijinsky. He was successful a number of times and this sharpened the demand for American equine blood.

O'Brien trained for Robert Sangster, a major Thoroughbred owner and heir to the Vernons pools empire. Sangster later joined forces with John Magnier, and the modern Coolmore operation took shape in the 1970s. Its successful and lucrative showing on the racecourse was repeated when its horses went to stud. Coolmore filled its stallion stations – originally located in Ireland but then also in Australia – with Northern Dancer bloodlines. It was in a commanding position when an equally strong player entered the racing world. This was the ruling Maktoum family of Dubai. Sheikh Mohammed and his brothers started buying up winning, blue-blooded race horses



## INFLUENCE OF NORTH AMERICAN SIRE LINES AND THE RISE OF THE COOLMORE AND DARLEY OPERATIONS

and, thereafter, consolidated their own stud empire under the title of Darley during the '80s and '90s.

The Coolmore versus Darley financial war was heaven to commercial and independent breeders, as well as to the bloodstock sale centres. Prices for young, untried horses reached phenomenal levels, with \$13.1 million being paid in 1985 for the Nijinsky yearling Seattle Dancer. More extraordinary was the \$10.2 million paid for the Northern Dancer yearling, Snaafi Dancer, who – despite the huge price on his head – was never fit or fast enough to race and was found to be infertile when tried at stud.

Coolmore and Darley are not only the biggest international players in terms of breeding animals, but they also dominate on the racecourse through their ownership of horses in training. This is exemplified by the list of early entries for the 2007 Epsom Derby. The two businesses have entered almost 48% of the 579 horses, with 182 coming from Darley and 95 from Coolmore. Dominating races in this way allows them to further their breeding potential should any of their horses win this Classic or other top races around the world. The result – in addition to guaranteed prosperity for Coolmore and Darley – is an ever more closed Thoroughbred gene pool, with all the attendant health problems associated with excessive inbreeding.

Today, the two operations have studs established at the heart of breeding centres around the world. They remain equally matched in terms of horse numbers and investment potential. By Spring 2006, Coolmore had 42 flat stallions and 11 National Hunt (jump racing) stallions (*see box below*), while Darley weighed in with 49 flat stallions. If each of their horses is covering enough mares to produce 100 foals a year – some will be responsible for 200, others for 30 – the Darley and Coolmore foal 'output' would be 10,000 annually. That is close to 10% of the world total.

Their dominance of the British and Irish industries is even more comprehensive. In 1997, their horses jointly covered 33% of racing's entire mare population in those countries. Five years later, this had risen to 43%. Such buying and selling power has pushed up average and record sale prices at the bigger bloodstock sales.

Although breeders often 'market' some stallions as suitable for producing National Hunt race horses, the breeding males concerned invariably have little or no experience of jumping fences. They are put into the National Hunt breeding category because, during their racing careers on the flat, they fell just short of the top ranking colts.





Furthermore, their financial clout means that if there is a horse they are determined to buy, they cannot be outbid – except by each other.

In terms of the equine ancestry of the Coolmore and Darley breeding stallions and mares, the absolutely central figure, as we have seen, is the Canadian champion Northern Dancer. More than 120 of his sons are or were at stud, and their sons and grandsons are continuing to produce thousands of foals. Northern Dancer's most prolific son has been Sadler's Wells – a stallion who sired both Flat and National Hunt runners. He was champion sire for 14 years and was recognised – upon his father's death – as the world's pre-eminent stallion.

Among Northern Dancer's grandsons is a horse named Storm Cat – currently the world's most expensive and sought-after sire. The present fee for a breeder's mare to mate with him is \$500,000. He has already sired more than 1,200 foals, many of whom have gone on to produce hundreds of their own foals.

Of Darley's 49 sires, 39 are connected to the Northern Dancer line, while 46 of Coolmore's 53 sires are descendants of the Canadian. And the cult of Northern Dancer shows no sign of weakening. In 2006, one of his great, great grandsons was bought by Coolmore for \$16 million and subsequently named The Green Monkey.

Just as Northern Dancer's male descendents have been central to the Darley and Coolmore operations, so his daughters and, in turn, their female offspring, have been used to underpin the insular breeding strategy of the two big operators.



## TOP TEN FLAT SIRES IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND 2005

Top 10 Flat Sires in Britain and Ireland 2005					
	<b>Sire + Number of Runners 2005</b>	<b>Sire's Sire or Dam</b>			
<b>1st</b>	<b>Danehill</b> 139 runners	Danzig	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic	Nearco
<b>2nd</b>	<b>Montjeu</b> 80 runners	Sadler's Wells	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic	Nearco
<b>3rd</b>	<b>Sadler's Wells</b> 194 runners	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic	Nearco	Pharos
<b>4th</b>	<b>Halling</b> 67 runners	Dance Machine <i>Dam Sire line</i>	Green Dancer	Nijinsky	<b>Northern Dancer</b>
<b>5th</b>	<b>Pivotal</b> 123 runners	Polar Falcon	Nureyev	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic
<b>6th</b>	<b>Night Shift</b> 122 runners	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic	Nearco	Pharos
<b>7th</b>	<b>Machiavellian</b> 97 runners	Mr Prospector	Raise a Native	*Native Dancer	Polynesian
<b>8th</b>	<b>Danehill Dancer</b> 147 runners	Danehill	Danzig	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic
<b>9th</b>	<b>Giant's Causeway</b> 77 runners	Storm Cat	Storm Bird	<b>Northern Dancer</b>	Nearctic
<b>10th</b>	<b>Indian Ridge</b> 97 runners	Ahonoora	Lorenzaccio	Klairon	Clairon

\*Native Dancer was a Grandsire of Northern Dancer

The chart above shows the top ten flat sires of Britain and Ireland for 2005. Northern Dancer breeding plays a dominant role in eight of the ten. In one of the other two, the Canadian's own grandsire is in the bloodline. Northern Dancer himself is from the Darley Arabian line of foundation sires who helped give birth to the Thoroughbred breed. This further highlights the narrowness of the gene pool from which the current breeding population is drawn. Only the tenth horse on the top ten list – Indian Ridge by Ahonoora – is from a different line: that of the Byerley Turk.

The leading ten receive their rating by adding up the prize money of their progeny. The ten are listed in bold on the left hand side of the chart, with their male ancestors shown in the columns to the right – beginning with their father. The exception is fourth-placed Halling, whose connection to Northern Dancer is indicated by showing his dam (Dance Machine) and then her male bloodline (Green Dancer, Nijinsky and Northern Dancer). The number listed under each leading sire (e.g. 139 for Danehill) refers to the number of progeny from each of the sires who were running during the 2005 season.





## ‘IMPROVEMENT’ OF THE BREED

In seeking to explain the vastly increased annual production of Thoroughbred foals, industry figures, often claim to be engaged in a programme to ‘improve’ the breed.

But is there evidence of such improvement over the last century, when racecourse performance and levels of general health are examined? The answer is a resounding NO.

**SPEED:** The best equine performers are entered each season into European ‘Classic’ and American ‘Graded Stakes’ races. Over the past century there has been no discernible improvement in race times for such events. This is despite there being a larger annual foal ‘output’ and, therefore, a larger pool from which to draw winning horses. Only Secretariat’s Belmont Stakes victory – part of his 1973 Triple Crown triumph – stands out for the exceptionally fast finishing time and distance between him and his nearest challengers.

**HEALTH:** A recently published study<sup>(9)</sup> by the Equine Fertility Unit in Newmarket reported on 1,022 foals who had been tracked from birth to three years of age. Among the dismal conclusions were the following:

- 39% of the horses entering training as two year olds failed to make the racecourse
- 62% of the two year olds suffered at least one veterinary problem
- 29% of the two year olds suffered sore shins
- >10% had experienced non-specific respiratory disease, joint problems and fractures
- 72% had never won a race

By the end of the study, fewer than 200 of the 1,022 horses remained in flat training as four year olds. Around 150 had been consigned to breeding, most of whom were fillies.

Even before the horses reached the age of two, ‘many’ of them had died or were untraceable. Disappointingly, the report’s authors did not specify the percentage who met this fate. There is also a mystery as to what happened to the 28% of the 1,022 horses who were exported.



1976 photograph of Security Council, a foal of the legendary Secretariat

© DENE STANSALL



## ‘IMPROVEMENT’ OF THE BREED

On the other side of the world it is also recognised that the attrition rate of young race horses is high. Whilst it has long been known that around 30% of older horses will be troubled by degenerative cartilage and soft tissue damage at some time in their racing lives, recent studies<sup>(10)</sup> undertaken at the University of Melbourne have shown that bone and cartilage damage (osteochondrosis) afflicts more than 15% of young, growing race horses in Australia. The evidence to support these findings came from the mandatory X-rays carried out on young horses prior to them being sold.

These studies have also indicated that the majority of current race horse lower limb injuries result from underlying biological weaknesses, whose incidence is gradually increasing. The weaknesses themselves can most likely be explained by inbreeding and/or repetitive exercise trauma.

In fact, the decline of the breed has been recognised for decades. Former leading trainer Ian Balding summed up the crisis facing the industry when he told *Racing Post* in 2001<sup>(11)</sup>: ‘We get far more injuries than we used to. During the 1970s, as many as 90% to 95% of my two year olds ran at least once in the first season. In the 1980s, it dropped to 75% to 80% and in the 1990s it dropped to 65% to 70%. The only reason for not running is due to injury. The fashion now is for speed and more speed. We have gradually lost [the] strength, stamina and durability, temperament, extra bone and courage that those horses have. If we carry on like this, then slowly but surely we are ruining the breed.’

His view is supported by renowned American equine specialist, Dr. Robert Cook FRCVS PhD. In a letter to the *Thoroughbred Times*<sup>(12)</sup>, he declared: ‘Because of the annual increase in the coefficient of inbreeding that occurs in any population with a closed stud book, the Thoroughbred horse is getting more fragile with every succeeding generation. It will undoubtedly take less stress and less of an impact to break down today’s Thoroughbred than it might have taken 100 years ago. A program of genetic conservation is needed to safeguard the future of this endangered breed.’

Both Coolmore and Darley horses have suffered the effects of inbreeding. Top racecourse performers and potential stallions for Coolmore were the Derby favourites ‘Gypsy King’ and ‘Horatio Nelson’. Both three-year-olds were descended from Northern Dancer, and both became victims of shattered legs during racing. Additionally, a potential breeding stallion for Darley – Electrocutonist – the second highest rated horse in the world, died of a heart attack in September 2006 aged just five years.



## DRUGS DISGUISE WEAKNESSES

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**Race horses all over the world are becoming increasingly dependent on drugs to enable them to race without breaking down, and to mask pain and suppress symptoms of injury.**

Such drugs allow a rapid return to racing but often at the cost of long-term damage. One such 'masking' substance is a powerful steroid called MPA, which is commonly given to young race horses who suffer lameness due to their punishing training regime. This product actually appears on a very long list of drugs banned by the racing authorities in Britain – or rather it is an offence for these substances to be found in the urine of horses when they are selected for testing post-race. The prohibition does not extend to animals – young or old – while they are training rather than racing.

In a similar vein, and also on Britain's banned-for-racing list, is phenylbutazone (or 'bute'), a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug that is widely used in Britain to treat bone, tendon, joint and muscular injuries. Again, its use masks the pain that is a natural and protective reaction to injury.





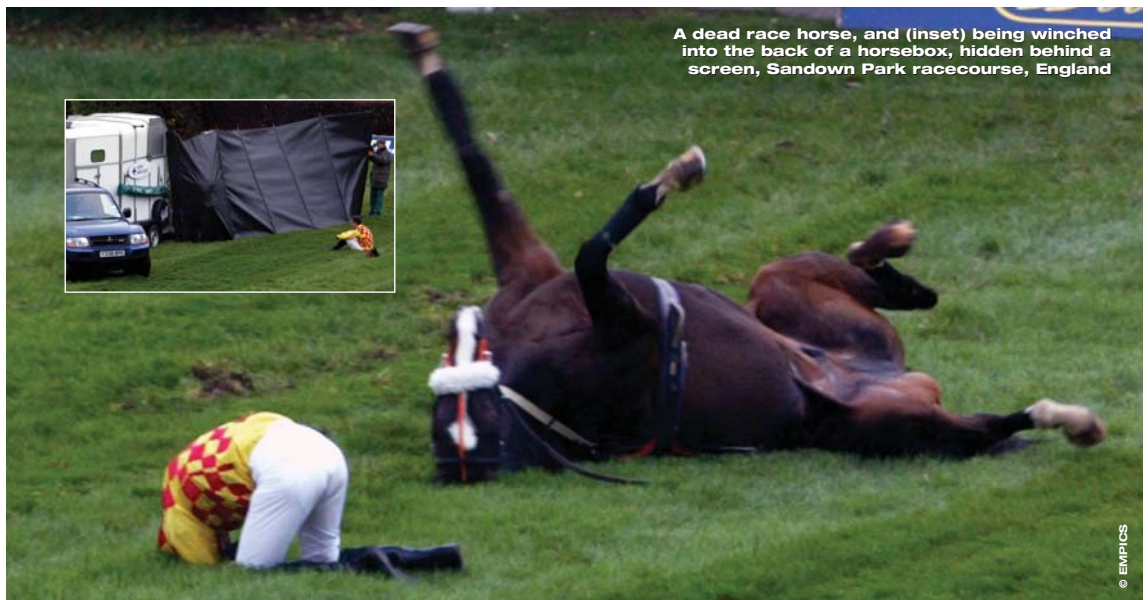
## NATIONAL HUNT HORSES: NOT BRED FOR THE JOB

There are fewer than 10,000 jump races held worldwide every year – which is just 2.35% of all races. Around 40% of these jump events take place in Britain (where the discipline is known as National Hunt racing), while a further 50% of the total are staged in the rest of Europe.

Traditional National Hunt horses are selected for their robustness and stamina, and are not rushed into training. They are given four or five years to grow into their frames before seeing a racecourse – and are schooled specifically for a career over the jumps. A new breed of jumpers, by contrast, is bred from flat-racing bloodlines, and are consigned to National Hunt racing if they are unable to succeed in the more lucrative flat sector, or if they show a particular aptitude for clearing obstacles.

Requiring flat specialists to compete over jumps can lead to serious welfare problems. This is because flat race horses are selectively bred for speed rather than for skeletal strength. Modern jump horses, as a consequence, run a considerable risk of suffering fatal injury when they do fall. The vast majority of the 370-plus horses who die while racing or in training each year in Britain are connected with National Hunt racing.

**A dead race horse, and (inset) being winched into the back of a horsebox, hidden behind a screen, Sandown Park racecourse, England**





Recent high-profile victims of National Hunt racing who have a flat racing pedigree include the horses listed below:

- **Best Mate**, three times Cheltenham Gold Cup winner, died November 1, 2005 of a suspected heart attack whilst racing. He had suffered bleeding lungs months earlier. Among his flat racing ancestors were four Classic winners, including Mill Reef.
- **Farmer Jack**, strongly fancied to win the 2005 Cheltenham Gold Cup, died of a heart attack just days before the race, while on the gallops. His name was suggestive of National Hunt 'stock' but he was of a thoroughly flat racing bloodline – having been inbred 4 x 4 to Northern Dancer. (This means that, when looking back on both his father's and mother's side, Northern Dancer is found four generations back).
- **Rooster Booster**, Champion Hurdler, died December 20, 2005 of a heart attack, while on the gallops. He came from 'top drawer' flat racing pedigree, with Northern Dancer and Bold Ruler in his bloodline, both of whom were fathered by Nearco.
- **Jair Du Cochet**, the top French jump race horse, who was one of the few horses to out-run Best Mate, shattered his off-hind leg during a workout on March 9, 2004. He was inbred 4 x 4 to French flat champion Clarion, a top 6-furlong sprinter.

That National Hunt horses invariably come from flat racing bloodlines is not a fact that the industry is keen to advertise. The National Stud's leading sire, Silver Patriarch, is marketed as a National Hunt sire, even though he never jumped a hurdle or fence in his racing life! Coming second in the Derby and winning the St. Leger – both famous flat racing events – seems, incongruously, to have qualified him for siring animals destined to race over jumps. He too is from the Northern Dancer line, and his own grandsire, Sadler's Wells – Coolmore's champion breeder for 14 seasons in Ireland – is a former leading flat racing horse.

Looking at other leading National Hunt sires of 2005, their flat pedigree and lack of a jump racing career is equally evident, as is the influence of the Northern Dancer line:





## NATIONAL HUNT HORSES: NOT BRED FOR THE JOB

**Presenting** – ran in Group 1 (G1) flat races, bred from a flat raced sire

**Supreme Leader\*** – ran in G1 flat races, bred from a flat raced sire

**Anshan\*** – ran in G1 flat races, bred from a flat raced sire

**Be My Native (USA)\*** – ran in G1 flat races, bred from a flat raced sire

**Sadler's Wells** – ran in G1 flat races, son of Northern Dancer

**Old Vic** – ran in G1 flat races, son of Sadler's Wells

**Oscar** – ran in G1 flat races, son of Sadler's Wells

**In The Wings\*** – ran in G1 flat races, son of Sadler's Wells

*\* Now dead*

It is nonsense to suppose that 'staying' or 'not so fast' flat horses should give qualities to their offspring that enable them to jump obstacles. Yet huge sums of money are invested in young prospects. This inevitably leads to disappointment and financial failure for the owners and trainers, and injury and death to the horses who have to participate in a branch of racing that is concentrated in just three European countries – Ireland, France and Britain.

Trainers search the world for former flat horses who may give their owners an edge over the jumps. This becomes apparent by an analysis of the horses entered into a typical, low-profile meeting – say, January 12, 2006 at Ludlow, a small provincial National Hunt course close to the Welsh border. Fifty-five of the 94 horses (almost 59%) were bred outside Britain. Countries of origin included Ireland, the USA, France, Germany, Poland, New Zealand and Italy. However, such is the quality of the contemporary National Hunt horse that, of the 94 horses who raced on that January day – on good ground and in fine weather – only 68 could finish their races. Fourteen horses were pulled up by their jockeys, seven fell, three unseated their riders and two refused to continue racing.

One of the horses running that day in a hurdle race for 'maidens' (a male or a female horse who has not won a race) was called Avalon. He was bought for more than £1 million as a yearling and raced on the flat but failed to make the top grade. He managed to finish a well-beaten third in his race at Ludlow, picking up a mere £573.

On the same day at North Yorkshire's Catterick Bridge racecourse – at the other end of the country – 42 of the 89 horses (> 47%) who raced, were bred outside Britain – 29 in Ireland, seven in the USA, two in France and one each in Germany, New Zealand, Australia and Japan.



Unsurprisingly, it is on especially long and challenging courses, such as Cheltenham or Aintree's Grand National, that horses face the greatest risk.

### Cheltenham

The truth of the argument that modern jump racers are not fit for the task is borne out by the carnage at the 2006 Cheltenham Festival, which was staged from March 14-17. No fewer than 11 horses died from injuries suffered at the event and an Animal Aid analysis of the victims' parentage shows that all of them had flat racing ancestry. The nature of the course combined with this breeding background meant that the high 2006

Festival death rate was shocking only with respect to the numbers killed in such a short time. Our research shows that Cheltenham was already the most lethal course in the country, with Aintree a close second. Both courses are owned by the Jockey Club, which was racing's regulatory body until April 3, 2006.

In fact, the media – as well as racing's regulatory body – uniformly reported that nine rather than 11 horses



## NATIONAL HUNT HORSES: NOT BRED FOR THE JOB

perished at Cheltenham. One of the 'invisible' victims was four year old Alfred The Great who, according to his trainer in an April 9 Racing Post report, suffered a badly severed tendon on the first day of the meeting in the Fred Winter Juvenile Novices Hurdle. Despite finishing the race (in last place), Alfred The Great was destroyed a week later. However, it took almost three weeks after his death for the information to come into the public domain – and then only in a specialist racing paper by way of a news story running to a few sentences.

The other unreported Cheltenham fatality was Kalmini, who suffered unspecified injuries in the same race as Alfred The Great and was destroyed four months later.

### Catalogue of Cheltenham Festival 2006 Deaths:

- 1. Bayard** broke his neck
- 2. No Where To Hyde** broke a leg – destroyed
- 3. Holy Orders** broke a hind leg – destroyed
- 4. Sh Boom** died in the night, couldn't be saved from his injuries
- 5. Basilea Star** killed in a fall
- 6. Mr Babbage** broke a shoulder – destroyed
- 7. Millenaire** broke his back – destroyed
- 8. Olaso** broke a leg – destroyed
- 9. Buck Whaley** broke his neck,
- 10. Alfred The Great** severed tendon – destroyed
- 11. Kalmini** unspecified injuries – destroyed

### Grand National

The 2006 John Smith's-sponsored Grand National meeting – staged just three weeks after Cheltenham – produced two more equine casualties. This is unsurprising, given the deliberately punishing nature of the course and the trend for putting light-boned animals into jump events. Thirty-two horses have now perished in a decade at the three-day Aintree meeting.

On the eve of the Grand National race itself, six-year-old Terivic died at the notorious Becher's Brook in a shocking scene that saw five horses fall at the same obstacle. He was seen struggling to rise from a broken back. Behind quickly-erected green screens, vets moved in to destroy the horse. His death rated barely a mention by the BBC racing commentary team, who were more concerned with celebrating the winner.

Tyneandthyneagain became the latest victim of the Grand National race itself. He was one of five horses to fall at the first of the 30 fences but continued to run alongside his companions in an effort to remain with the herd. As he ran past the stands, the roaring crowd jeered the loose horses, in what must





have been a frightening cacophony of screams and shouts. He had completed around three-and-a-half miles of the four-and-a-half mile race when, running alone and in a desperate attempt to remain with the others, he smashed into the huge open ditch of the 27th fence. Out of sight from the Aintree crowd and the BBC Television cameras, he too was destroyed. Tyneandthyeagain was having only his third

race since coming back from an injury that had kept him out of action for almost two years.



The riderless Tyneandthyeagain moments before he suffers horrific fatal injuries during the 2006 Grand National

© EMPIRES





## BLOODSTOCK SALES AND THE 'PINHOOKER' PHENOMENON

**At bloodstock sales, there is trading in horses of all ages – from foals, weanlings and yearlings to horses in training and even pregnant mares. Horses who have come to the end of their careers are also put under the hammer.**

One of the darkest aspects of the bloodstock industry is the 'pinhook' phenomenon. Pinhookers buy young horses, then sell them on, usually a year later, for a profit. They have no attachment to the animal other than a financial one. Pinhooking is also lucrative for those running the bloodstock sales.

The world's most expensive horse, The Green Monkey, was 'pinhooked' for \$425,000 before being sold seven months later – on February 28, 2006 – for \$16 million<sup>(13)</sup>. The ruthless commodification of such animals is illustrated by a British bloodstock investment fund, known as Breeding Capital, among whose reported aims<sup>(14)</sup> is 'to purchase blue chip mares in foal and sell off the resulting foals at auction, generally as yearlings'. As well as buying pregnant mares and trading in their offspring, the business also purchases foals and yearlings for pinhooking at sales. Furthermore, it buys mature race horses and resells them overseas. Incredibly, the company is able to boast that 'the fund has a tax incentive under the Enterprise Investment Scheme, giving investors tax-free capital gains'.



**An exhausted yearling awaits his fate at the Doncaster Bloodstock Sales 2006**



## THE SALE RING

**We have seen that it is common for race horses to go through the sale ring several times during their lives: when very young before they start training; as race horses in training; and when no longer of use to the industry. Stress and anguish are evident even before the sales start, with many horses weaving, windsucking and boxwalking.**

When young horses are taken to the sales environment, they may have just been separated from their mothers. Before reaching the sales yards, they might have travelled many hundreds of miles in horseboxes. Often they will have come from abroad, with Ireland, France and Germany sending large numbers of yearlings to Britain. In an exhausted state, the youngsters might be repeatedly paraded in front of prospective buyers.

The newly purchased horses will soon undergo intensive training and assessment, with those receiving the nod being required to maintain a punishing regime of training and racing up and down the country and maybe even abroad. They will encounter the whip on their hindquarters, necks and faces, and will be further coaxed with kicks in the ribs and verbal intimidation. They will be pressed into believing that their herd is under threat and that they, therefore, need to run to keep with them. Death will come early for a significant number of them as a result of injuries suffered in training or in a race. Some die outright from a broken neck or back or from a heart attack. Others are destroyed after suffering bone fractures or tendon injuries.

## REHABILITATION AND RETRAINING: TOO FEW AND UNDER-FUNDED

There is still no meaningful programme of rehabilitation, retraining or other support for retired animals. Nominal amounts of central funding and effort allow a small number of horses a relatively secure life away from the racing stables but there is evidence of a significant need being unmet. Those running the three officially-supported rehabilitation centres report that they are hard-pressed to meet their running costs and one declared<sup>(15)</sup> that horses are having to be turned away due to lack of funds – this in the context of an industry whose profits from betting, bloodstock sales and racecourse income run to several billion pounds. See section *The Regulators* on p 32.



## SLAUGHTERED FOR MEAT



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Many 'failed' or injured young Thoroughbreds are slaughtered every year<sup>(16)</sup> in British abattoirs and the meat exported for human consumption overseas.

Those who don't make the racecourse or who quickly drop down the performance scale might also receive a bullet or a lethal injection – or they will be used for other equestrian events, such as show jumping, eventing, polo, point to point, for hunting or simply as hacks for their owners.

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## DOWNWARD SPIRAL: THE RICHES TO RAGS STORY OF FELIDAE

**Felidae is a prime example of a horse whose monetary value soared and slumped spectacularly.**

He was born on March 19, 2000 in the Blue Grass State of Kentucky, USA – the product of a \$500,000 mating between Storm Cat and Colcon. Taken from his mother at a year old, he was sold for \$900,000<sup>(17)</sup> by agent Lane's End, at the prestigious Keeneland Sales, to Darley Stud Management on September 12, 2001. Felidae failed to show any signs of making the grade as a top race horse. The Darley operation brought him to England and disposed of him at the Ascot horse sales on April 8, 2003 for the sum of just 4,800<sup>(18)</sup> guineas (a guinea is £1.05 pence). Put into training with Mel Brittain in Yorkshire, Felidae

proved to be a very poor performer in even the lowest grade races, finishing nearer last than first. He then disappeared, not racing for two years and was probably tried at stud, though no records of offspring are recorded.

Finally, he ended up at Doncaster Bloodstock Sales on February 2, 2006 and, as lot 486, was sold at a knockdown minimum price of 500 guineas. He was still only six years of age and where this riches to rags no-hoper will end up is anyone's guess. Perhaps he will meet the same fate as the horses on the facing page and be butchered for the human food chain.

Million dollar race horse Felidae, shortly after his 500 guineas sale







## THE REGULATORS



Stallion statue outside the National Stud, Newmarket, England

© DENE STANSALL

As this report was being written, the governing structure of British racing is being overturned, with the traditional lead bodies contemplating their abolition or else a substantially revised role.

The rules, disciplinary matters and welfare are currently the preserve of the newly-established Horseracing Regulatory Authority (HRA), whereas formerly the task fell to the Jockey Club.

The British Horseracing Board (BHB) at present promotes racing and orchestrates the calendar of annual events. The BHB is to disappear, as will the just-established HRA. Both the disciplinary and promotional functions of racing will instead be undertaken by a brand new agency to be called the British Horseracing Authority.

Racing's other key agency – the provider of funding – is the Horserace Betting Levy Board. From 2009, its duties are expected to be taken on by yet another body, over which the government will exert far less control.

The Levy Board was established in the early 1960s, when gambling laws were eased. It takes 10% of bookmakers' annual gross profits obtained from racing and re-channels them into the industry and its associated activities. This includes the promotion of British breeding, medical research on horses and ponies, and the distribution of prize money.

For 2006, the Levy Board was able to draw on close to £100 million. Scandalously, it thought fit to donate just £54,000<sup>(19)</sup> to Race Horse Rehabilitation and Retraining. This is an insultingly small amount (0.05% of the Levy's total income), considering that around 5,000 horses leave racing each year. There is an equal or an even greater need with respect to the annual 'crop' of Thoroughbreds who are produced for racing but never set foot on a racecourse, instead being sold off or destroyed.



Compare the £54,000 horse 'rehabilitation' money with the £1.8 million granted by the Levy Board to horse breeders.

The racing industry is in turmoil as it tries to come to an agreement as to what will replace the Levy Board after 2009. The major questions centre around how much revenue the new system can generate and how this will be distributed. Prizes for top races will no doubt continue to increase, while less glamorous events – those in which the majority of horses are entered – look set to remain inadequately funded. The inevitable consequence of this cash shortfall is that owners of the great mass of horses will continue to struggle to make their animals pay, given the basic costs of upkeep and veterinary cover. The choice confronting such owners will be whether to run their animals at a loss, further compromise their welfare, or kill them. In fact, as the horse population continues its dramatic expansion, there is the real prospect of periodic large-scale 'cullings'.

Meanwhile, as the industry and its trade associations bicker and bargain over the power distribution in the post-Levy Board era, the welfare of race horses is simply a non-issue. There has been no noticeable discussion about provision for retired horses, nor any effort at developing a uniform approach to dealing with injuries on racecourses.

In determining how it spends its £100 million annual income, the Levy Board must pay careful heed to the British Horseracing Board (BHB) – three of whose nominees sit on the Levy Board's governing body.

An important BHB initiative that the Levy Board was persuaded to fund is the so-called Appearance Money Scheme. This was designed to boost the numbers of horses entered into unexciting and poorly attended mid-week meetings.

Under the Appearance Money Scheme, £300 was granted to owners of every equine participant in these under-contested events. While the scheme did indeed have the effect of boosting field sizes, many of the horses the scheme attracted were of such moderate racing standard that they had little chance of winning. Punters and bookies were displeased and the BHB changed the rules so that runners with low handicap ratings were no longer eligible for the £300 payment.

The rule change may have been a crowd-pleaser but it penalised the lower class horses and their training establishments – the smaller yards that need additional money to ensure their survival. Such establishments already flounder at the bottom rungs of the industry ladder, where there are few racing opportunities.



## THE REGULATORS

Another failed BHB initiative is 'Banded' Regional Racing. This was introduced in 2004 at All Weather tracks in response to the demands of bookmakers and of owners and trainers of lower-ranked horses (those rated 45 or below), who were anxious for more racing opportunities. The initiative has been beset by major problems:

- Horses still can't get entered because of the sheer number of them. While horses rated 50+ are now accepted, many below that threshold are rejected.
- While bookmakers have increased turnover due to All Weather racing, the course operators themselves are complaining that the events aren't profitable because crowds are not attracted to such low quality meetings. As a result, the Banded Regional Race meetings have been ditched.
- Low quality races offer poor prize money and this has led to accusations of jockeys throwing races as part of a betting fraud. Jockeys have responded by making heavy use of the whip as a means of demonstrating their commitment. (See Animal Aid's report on use of the whip '*A Hiding to Nothing*' at [www.animalaid.org.uk/racing](http://www.animalaid.org.uk/racing))

The BHB's failure to provide adequately for lower rated horses is contrary to one of its principle objectives: to ensure a balanced provision of opportunities for the horse population as a whole. In fact, evidence of the BHB's deficient strategic planning is not difficult to find.

Back in 2001, the BHB's Financial Plans included:<sup>(20)</sup>

- To secure a significant increase in the level of income from horserace betting that would 'flow into racing'.
- To secure an annual prize money pool equal to at least 50% of the total upkeep and training cost incurred by race horse owners.
- To promote high standards of care and safety within the racing and breeding industries, and to support arrangements for the welfare of former racehorses.



Five years on, all three targets have been missed.

- Bookmakers – despite huge profits – are now paying 33% less from their gross annual profits to the Levy. Their contribution is just 10%, compared with the 15% that was flagged up during talks with the government prior to the scheme’s introduction in 2000.
- The prize money currently on offer on the British racing scene is sufficient to cover just 28% of the total upkeep cost of all horses who are active.
- Horse welfare has been seriously neglected when judged by the evidence of an annual death toll of 370-plus horses in training; shockingly inadequate on-course medical provision for horses; an increase in horses bred for whom there are not enough races or prize money at the lower end; and a 2006 contribution to Racehorse Rehabilitation and Retraining of just £54,000 by the Levy Board (on whose governing body the BHB has three nominated members).

© DENE STANSALL



Two failed race horses, Shannon Bay and an un-named filly by Timeless Times (foreground) looking for homes - Lincolnshire, England



## BOOKMAKERS



Tyneandthynegain falls at the first fence alongside four other horses in the 2006 Grand National - a race that gives the bookmakers their biggest payday

**Welfare would improve for all horses through increased funding, if that funding were to be allocated fairly.**

However, such a prospect is made less likely as a result of the bookmakers' power. Countries that have a centralised state-run betting industry see more prize money distributed to a greater proportion of owners – an arrangement that results in fewer horses being bought and sold in an attempt to maximise income.

France, which runs a Pari-Mutuel betting system with no private on-shore bookmakers, sees 53% of horse upkeep costs returned to owners; horse owners in the USA receive 51% of costs; in Japan the figure is 69%, and in Hong Kong, 131%. Even countries with less established industries do better than the 28% of costs that are returned to horse owners in Britain. The figure in Tunisia is 77%; in Peru it is 70% and in India 100%.<sup>(21)</sup> Britain generates an annual turnover from racing-related betting of around £9.6 billion<sup>(22)</sup> – the second biggest in the world.



(Profit is about a tenth of this total.) The increase has been particularly dramatic in recent years, with growth of around 60% between 2001 and 2003.

There are more than 8,200 betting shops in Britain, of which some 5,000 are owned by the three dominant players: Ladbrokes, Coral and William Hill. Recent figures for Ladbrokes show that, in their 2,000 betting shops, punters lost a staggering £683.6 million over 12 months. There is also an ever growing number of 'Betting Exchanges', which work by matching up customers who want to strike a wager and who hold opposite views as to the outcome of a race. The largest exchange, known as Betfair, matches around half a million bets per day. The odds are better than those offered by traditional bookmakers and the exchanges also enable punters to back a horse to lose in a race, as opposed to the normal win bet.

What was traditionally just a 'Saturday afternoon bet on the horses' has become a ceaseless activity. Weekend races are publicised as major sporting events and 'Festivals of Racing' are now emerging monthly, as new opportunities arise through sponsorship of events.

Bookmakers' greed for more and more racing has pressured the industry's controlling agencies into meeting their needs. Examples include the 48 hour declaration – whereby trainers are forced to commit horses to races before the nature of the ground surface (the 'going') can be accurately assessed. This can have serious welfare consequences but the practice has been introduced so that races can be marketed abroad. Another innovation is the requirement that horses enter stalls in a uniform manner as opposed to allowing the more nervous ones to enter last. This is done to ensure that races are not delayed and the betting markets are not disrupted.

Such is the financial strength of big bookmakers that they are prepared to legally confront national governments that stand in their way – an example being Ladbrokes' challenge to the existence of a state monopoly over betting in Norway and The Netherlands.



## CONCLUSION

**The racing industry's dominant stud owners and breeders are increasingly focused on marketing racehorses bred from fashionable bloodlines.**

The Northern Dancer bloodline has been, by far, the most successful genepool from which breeders try to create the ultimate race horse.

These animals are designed to run over a specific race distance of a mile-and-a-quarter. They are bred to be swift but pay a price in skeletal strength and general vigour. The result is that fewer foals make the commercial grade. Many of the 'failures' are slaughtered for meat. Amongst those who do start racing, there is a high incidence of injury and death. However, breeding potential winners is a lucrative business and so breeders are driven to produce more and more foals every year.

At the moment, bloodstock sales are buoyant and the big breeders are flourishing. But the process is ultimately self-defeating because their key asset – the Thoroughbred – is being ruined.

While the top breeders, owners and bookmakers are growing increasingly powerful, regulatory authorities around the world have become correspondingly weaker. They lack the willpower or the muscle – or both – to regulate the industry. In Britain, they have also presided over a funding regime that favours the owners of the most successful horses and disadvantages those whose welfare is most likely to be compromised: the least competitive animals.

While horse racing is, from an animal welfare perspective, an inherently exploitative activity that does not merit public support, new trends in breeding – coupled with the demands of the betting industry – are subjecting Thoroughbred horses to a higher than ever risk of injury and death. In order to limit the suffering, Animal Aid calls for the steps opposite to be taken.

**The Animal Aid hat that hit the headlines on Royal Ascot Ladies Day 2005 - in memory of the 375 race horses raced to death every year in Britain**







## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The industry to be compelled to confront the problems of extreme inbreeding and over-production, with financial penalties falling to those who fail in this obligation.**
- **Legislation to ban the killing of healthy racehorses who are not entered into racing.**
- **Adequate financial contributions from breeders for all their horses who are not entered into racing.**
- **Adequate financial contributions from breeders and from the betting industry for racehorses at the end of their careers.**
- **An end to the long-distance transportation ('shuttling') of breeding stallions, not only on welfare grounds but also to prevent the loss of existing bloodlines on different continents.**

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Animal Aid exposes and campaigns peacefully against all animal abuse, and promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle

Animal Aid, The Old Chapel,  
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