

WELFARE GUIDELINES FOR AUSTRALIAN THOROUGHBRED HORSE RACING

The Australian racing industry is committed to the welfare of the Australian racehorse.

The Australian Rules of Racing contain provisions relating to the principles within this document.

These Guidelines may be modified from time to time and the views of anyone interested in horse welfare are welcomed. Particular attention will be paid to new research findings, and the Australian racing industry encourages further funding and support for welfare studies.

1. At all stages during the preparation and presentation of horses for racing their welfare should be a primary consideration.

Good horsemanship

The housing, feeding and training of racehorses should be consistent with good horsemanship and must not compromise their welfare. Any practices whether in stables, training or racing which are inconsistent with contemporary standards of husbandry should not be tolerated.

Training methods

Breaking and training methods which unreasonably influence the normal behaviour of racehorses should not be used. Horses should only be given training schedules which are suited to their physical capabilities and level of maturity.

Shoeing

Horse shoes and racing plates should be designed and fitted to minimise the risk of injury.

Transport

The risk of injury and disease should be minimised when racehorses are transported. Vehicles should be safe, clean, well ventilated, regularly maintained and disinfected.

Rest periods

Long journeys should be planned carefully and horses allowed regular rest periods and access to water. Respiratory problems can often be reduced if horses are able to lower their heads to ground level during rest periods.

2. Horses should be suitably conditioned and healthy before being allowed to compete.

Veterinary examinations

A veterinary examination should be undertaken of any horse showing signs of disease, lameness or other ailment to determine its suitability to race.

Immaturity

Horses mature at widely different rates. Training and racing schedules should be carefully planned to minimise the risk of musculo-skeletal injuries.

Surgical procedures

Any surgical procedure which threatens the welfare or safety of any horse or rider should not be allowed in racing.

Severe or recurrent clinical conditions

Horses with severe or recurrent clinical conditions should, on veterinary advice, be temporarily or permanently excluded from racing.

Pregnant mares

Mares should not be raced beyond 120 days of pregnancy.

3. Conditions of racing should not prejudice horse welfare.

Racecourse conditions

Racecourses and racing surfaces should be designed and maintained to reduce risk factors which may lead to injuries. Particular attention should be paid to crossings, uneven racing surfaces and extremes of surface quality.

Steeplechasing and hurdling

Participation in these races should be restricted to horses with demonstrated jumping ability. Weights to be carried, race distance, number, size and design of fences should all be carefully assessed when planning these races.

Extreme weather

Due care and attention should be paid to the welfare of horses racing in extreme weather. Provision should be made to cool horses quickly after racing in hot and/or humid conditions.

Misuse of the whip

Excessive, unnecessary or improper use of the whip cannot be condoned, for example, on a beaten horse, a horse unable to respond or a horse clearly winning. Any post-race whip welts clearly indicate injury.

Medication

One purpose of the rules controlling medication is to protect the welfare of the horse and the safety of riders. After any veterinary treatment, sufficient time should be allowed for recuperation before competition. Drugs should not be allowed to influence the racing performance of the horse or to conceal genetic or acquired conditions.

Racecourse accommodation

Racecourse accommodation for horses should be safe, hygienic, comfortable and well-ventilated. Fresh drinking water and washing-down water should always be available.

Starting gates/barriers

Horses should be educated so as to be familiar with loading procedures. Barriers should be properly designed and safe. Aids to loading should be humane.

4. Racehorses should receive proper attention after they have raced and be treated humanely when their racing careers are over.

Veterinary treatment

When a horse is injured during a race the jockey should dismount. Veterinary expertise should be available on the racecourse. Injured horses should be given full supportive treatment. If required the horse should be transported to the nearest referral centre for further assessment and therapy.

Racing injuries

The incidence of injuries sustained in racing and training should be monitored wherever possible. Track conditions, frequency of racing, age and any other risk factors, should be carefully examined to indicate ways to minimise severe injuries.

Euthanasia

If injuries are sufficiently severe the horse may need to be euthanased. Euthanasia should be undertaken as soon as possible with the sole aim of minimising suffering.

Retirement

Owners should attempt to ensure that their horses are sympathetically and humanely treated when they leave racing. Racehorses should be permanently identified and registered, so that instances of mistreatment during retirement can be pursued.

These Guidelines were adapted from the International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians Welfare Guidelines for Horseracing