

The France Galop perspective on euthanasia



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I am going to speak in my capacity of vet and I will limit the scope of my presentation to the euthanasia on the racecourse.
Euthanasia is always a very difficult moment for the vet.

The vet practitioner must:

- assume the responsibility of the medical part of the situation: the diagnosis, the prognosis,
- advice the trainer and the owner,
- take care of the horse suffering and the distress of the entourage,
- take care of the public,
- act quickly,
- be professional, sensitive, but without emotion.

In order to be Superman, the vet must follow strictly the different stages of procedure.

This situation must be prepared

- There should be clarity in command and control to ensure effective coordination around the incident and on the course overall.
- Who is responsible to make decisions and to ensure coordination should be clearly identified ahead of an incident.
- The arrangements for personnel and vehicle access to the incident, and for following the race, should allow a rapid response by vet and related personnel.

Assessment of case: the diagnosis and prognosis

- This medical part is difficult because the symptomatology is often unclear and the possibility to make a careful examination is reduced.
- If the horse may be evacuated, the vet will have it transported to the medical box of the racecourse stables.
- If it isn't possible to carry out complementary examination, then the vet has to rely on his experience and expertise.
- It is strongly recommended that a second veterinarian is consulted.
- Having given a diagnosis to the trainer/owner, the vet has to explain the prognosis and the consequences of such damages.

Assessment of case: the decision criteria

- When the case is clear and the horse must be euthanized, the consent of the trainer/owner is generally easy to obtain.
- When the horse can be treated with a good hope of recovery for racing or breeding, it is accepted by the entourage to give conservatory treatments in order to evacuate the horse to their vet clinic.

Assessment of case: the decision criteria

- When the horse may be treated, we can sometimes face the will of the trainer/owner who prefers to have it put down rather than to have to spend money for a horse who is a poor performer and has no future in breeding.
- It is the case of the gelding which have had no result in racing and for which the cost of the treatments and surgery exceeds its value.
- There was an important evolution of the mentalities during the 20 past years, but even now all the trainers/owners aren't ready to spend money for their horses.

Ethical aspects of the situation

- How to manage: in France we ask the vet to take his/her decision in accordance with the best interest of the horse.
- The vet may refuse the euthanasia of a horse which can be treated without excessive pain or expenses.
- It is clearly indicated in the rules of racing: *“Tous les traitements vétérinaires doivent être dispensés dans l’intérêt de la santé et du bien-être du cheval. Chaque traitement doit être totalement justifié par l’état de santé du cheval qui le reçoit.”*
- When the euthanasia is refused by the vet, he/she must apply the necessary conservatory treatments in order to allow it to be transported by its trainer/owner.

Financial aspects of the situation

- Until 2015, France Galop was giving a compensation in case of fatality on a racecourse.
- In several cases, it was noted that this compensation could modify the decision of the trainer/owner and put the vet in a difficult situation.
- So we have cancelled the compensation and just maintained the payment of the corpse removal.

Precautions to be taken at the time of euthanasia

- The consent of the trainer and the owner must be sought. It is always complicated to obtain a written consent and it is important to have a witness to avoid any late contestation.
- In case of impossibility to contact the trainer/owner, the rules of racing give to the stewards the power to decide the euthanasia.
- Diagnostic proofs must be taken (pictures, radiographies, blood balance sheet ...) and kept in order to establish clearly the situation, particularly if insurance cover.

Technical realization

- The euthanasia must be technically irreproachable and take into account the perception the persons in charge of the horse and the public.
- It must be:
 - similar to the surgical anaesthesia, but using toxic doses,
 - made outside the field of vision of the presents: either the horse is evacuated up to the medical box, or screens have to be arranged to avoid that the public can see what is made.
- It is compulsory to anticipate the presence of a medical van for evacuating the horse and a system of covers to move easily the body of the horse.





Technical realization

- The perception the persons in charge of the horse and public perception is prominent.
- The use of a gun or a gun for slaughtering should not be used.

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Course vets not to use guns on safety grounds

By Graham Green

THE BHA is planning to amend its general instructions to racecourse vets with the aim of ensuring that where possible horses are euthanised by lethal injection, rather than using a firearm.

The catalyst for the move was the furore that followed a national newspaper printing a graphic front-page picture of the Michael Bell-trained Wigmore Hall being shot in the head after sustaining an irreparable leg fracture at Doncaster in September.

The damaging publicity prompted racing's governing body to review procedures when injured horses are required to be destroyed on the track. But while the decision to prioritise injections will undoubtedly benefit the sport from a public relations perspective, the BHA insists the decision has been taken on health and safety

grounds to avoid any accidents involving racegoers or racecourse personnel.

The majority of on-course vets already favour chemical injections, but while the use of a gun is not being banned, it can only be fired as a last resort and to do so will necessitate furnishing the BHA with a full report of the case.

BHA chief veterinary officer Jenny Hall said yesterday: "The picture of Wigmore Hall raised just how busy racecourses are. I'm confident a gentleman was not in the line of fire, but to anybody just glancing at the picture they might have thought he was, which raised the health and safety issue. So we have changed the general instructions to make it clear the preferred method is chemical euthanasia. Firearms can only be used in really unusual circumstances when that's the most effective option."

Asked whether there were welfare concerns as an injection does not produce the instant result of a bullet, Hall said:

"Technically that might be correct, but it depends how you define the point of death so for the horse to be unconscious, not necessarily.

"This shouldn't be about how quickly a horse is killed, it should be about the horse being properly assessed, the extent of its injuries being correctly evaluated and appropriate consideration being given to the options for the horse.

"The horse must be given immediate pain relief whatever is going to happen, that is the key point. But then it's important to take a couple of minutes to thoroughly assess the situation and make sure everybody is correctly positioned, as would have been the case with Wigmore Hall. When it's been decided there is no alternative to euthanasia then frankly whether the horse is killed with a firearm or an injection there is no real difference in the timing of that."

The change to BHA general instructions comes into force from February.

Support and communication

- It is essential:
 - to offer a support to the entourage of the horse if needed. The sensibilities of owners and trainers, and their staff, dealing with the loss of a horse should be respected.
 - To inform the public not about the euthanasia but about the fact that a vet is taking care of the horse, that the situation is critical, but everything is done for the horse.
- When and who is responsible for communicating to the public and press should be clearly established.



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