



The Aftercare Toolkit – Practical Strategies for Racing Authorities

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ABSTRACT

The International Forum for the Aftercare of Racehorses conducted its annual forum in Oslo, Norway in 2019, in conjunction with the General Assembly of the European and Mediterranean Horseracing Federation. Societal expectations of animal industries relating to the care, management and traceability of animals are evolving, driven by social change and technology. New expectations may challenge the traditional regulatory scope and reach of the racing industry, however racing must continually review its practices to ensure it can reasonably match those community expectations.

Six strategies that support aftercare outcomes have been identified, that could form the basis of a comprehensive aftercare framework. “Lifetime management” relates to the implementation of rules that provide regulatory oversight, drive awareness and accountability at a participant level and facilitate the collection of relevant data. “Transitioning strategies” look to stimulate demand and supply for off the track thoroughbreds in the equestrian market.

The “safety net” requires that jurisdictions implement initiatives that help and support horses at risk of neglect. Racing authorities are recommended to support the use of off the track thoroughbreds as “therapy horses” to build community engagement. “Thoroughbred advocacy” is identified as an important activity to ensure that the thoroughbred breed remains popular in the equestrian market. “Networking” is highlighted as an important tool to learn from international best practice and build engagement with the equestrian community.

Background

The International Forum for the Aftercare of Racehorses (IFAR) was established to advocate for the lifetime care of thoroughbred racehorses, to increase awareness within the international racing community, and educate the sport horse world and the general public on the welfare of thoroughbred racehorses.

IFAR advocates for the adoption of best practice administrative processes and global industry recognition of its birth to end-of-life responsibility. The Committee works to positively influence racing authorities, industry participants, equestrian groups and the wider community.

Racing across the globe is diverse and operates at different levels of competitiveness, sophistication and scope. The Committee is cognisant of this diversity but nevertheless believes that aftercare responsibilities are universal. Accordingly, IFAR has developed practical advice to that should be applicable to any jurisdiction in the racing world.

All animal industries are accountable for the ethical handling and management of the animals within their care. Those involved in the racing industry generally have a genuine and deep connection with their horses, which transcends the economics of this global industry. Ensuring the best standards of care are provided to their horses not only underpins participants' pursuit of athletic excellence but is usually intrinsic to their attraction to the racing industry.

The ethical basis on which we utilise animals for food, companionship and entertainment is premised on the provision of certain fundamental standards of care. Traditionally this was focussed on food, shelter and veterinary attention, but contemporary expectations demand a broader focus on the quality of an animal's life, from birth to end of life.

Racing jurisdictions must ensure their industry practices align with community expectations. Community values are evolving - driven by changing demographics and accelerated by social media. Racing's leaders are charged with the responsibility to ensure that the industry evolves and adapts to this dynamic environment.

Increasingly, society demands transparency and accountability from animal industries that those expectations are being met – with demonstrable evidence. Other animal industries are increasingly moving to establishing clear performance measures for animal welfare programs. Industry leaders work to ensure targets are met, that programs continue to reflect community aspirations and performance is communicated to stakeholders and the wider public.

Critics of the racing industry are likely to benchmark racing's investment, commitment and transparency against other animal industries. Enlightened administrators will anticipate this challenge and position their jurisdictions to withstand such scrutiny.

The Aftercare Toolkit

The Aftercare Toolkit has been developed by the IFAR Committee after several years of reviewing and discussing various strategies in place around the globe. The Committee has selected practical and proven initiatives that will constitute a roadmap for jurisdictions beginning their aftercare journey and that could serve as a foundational checklist for more established countries. Jurisdictions who implement these strategies will best position their racing industries for a robust and sustainable future.

The toolkit encapsulated six strategies that looks to address the full range of horses exiting the racing phase of their careers.

1. Lifecycle Management

Racing regulators have been traditionally focused on the regulation of the racing phase of a racehorse's life. The scope and reach of their regulatory power is often precisely defined in legislation. Regulatory systems have evolved from race day control and often now extend to out-of-competition testing, stable inspections and pre-race inspections, but have generally been naturally limited by the licensing reach of the racing authority.

Traceability obligations from other animal industries are establishing new expectations regarding regulatory reach. Increasingly, the community expects responsible authorities to have regulatory oversight throughout the supply chain. In livestock industries, consumers wish to know the origin of their food and demand guarantees as to the ethical rearing and handling of those animals throughout their lives. Accordingly, significant investment has been made in livestock supply chains to ensure traceability provisions match societal expectations. New benchmarks for animal traceability utilise and leverage modern technologies, including microchipping, GPS, solar power, cloud technologies and big data.

The concept of lifetime traceability has emerged as an understandable evolution of societal expectation for animal industries. While there are clear and unquestionable differences between livestock for human consumption and the racing and equestrian industries, such subtleties can be manipulated by social activists with radical agendas. There is a potential for a misalignment between community expectation and the traditional role and regulatory power of racing authorities. It is clear that the racing industry must engineer ways to satisfy, in an appropriate manner, those evolving requirements.

The fundamentals of traceability require that the regulator to know *who* the licensed animals are and *where* they are throughout their life. For racing regulators, this concept has important implications and challenges the traditional operational and regulatory framework.

Some countries like the UK, Australia and recently Ireland, have moved to extend their regulatory oversight back up the supply chain and have implemented traceability obligations on the breeding sector. Racing authorities must be notified of the birth, identification and location of a foal within 30 days of birth. Foal movements must be registered with the authorities and the foal may be subject to out-of-competition drug testing at any time.

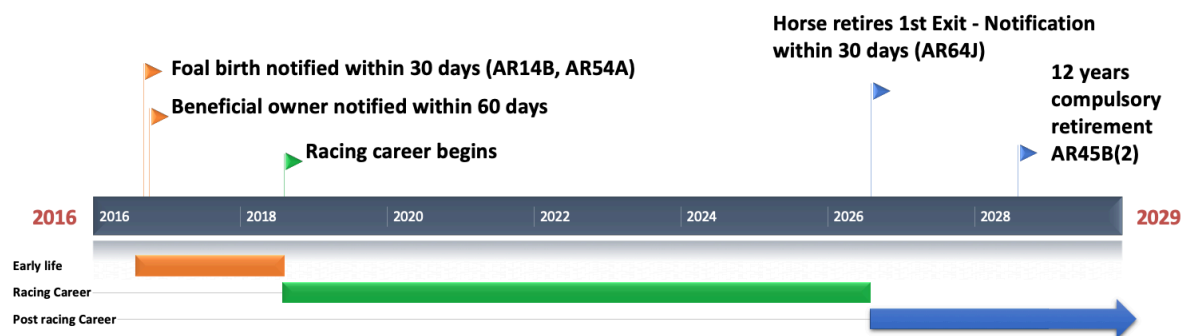
Racing authorities need to investigate methods to either secure regulatory oversight or partner with national breed registries to ensure basic traceability provisions are met. New partnerships, data sharing and joint reporting approaches may be required.

The second aspect of traceability relates to the horse’s post-racing life. From a regulatory perspective there are some straightforward approaches that any racing jurisdiction can put in place as a first step in implementing traceability provisions.

Notification of retirement rules were first implemented in Australia and have been adopted by several countries including New Zealand and South Africa. This rule of racing places an obligation on the owner of horse to notify the authorities of when a horse is retired. Additional information may also be requested, such as reason for retirement and destination post-racing. Figure 1 provides an overview of the various Australian rules of racing that allow for traceability from birth to the first exit from the racing industry.

Australia allows the owner’s agents – usually the trainer – to complete the online form on the owner’s behalf. Racing Australia receives approximately 7000 notifications of retirement each year. Various strategies have been put in place to drive compliance, including email notifications if a horse hasn’t raced for a period of two years. It is an offence not to notify Racing Australia within 60 days of retirement. Sanctions under the rules are possible, but to date, the focus has been on communication strategies to encourage compliance.

Figure 1 – Traceability to first exit from racing



Example for a horse born 1 August 2016 and retires at 10 years of age.

Australia has had this rule in place since 1 June 2014 and has collected thousands of data points over the last five years, which provide powerful insights into racehorse retirement. The data reveals that 64% of horses that leave the track within the last twelve months,

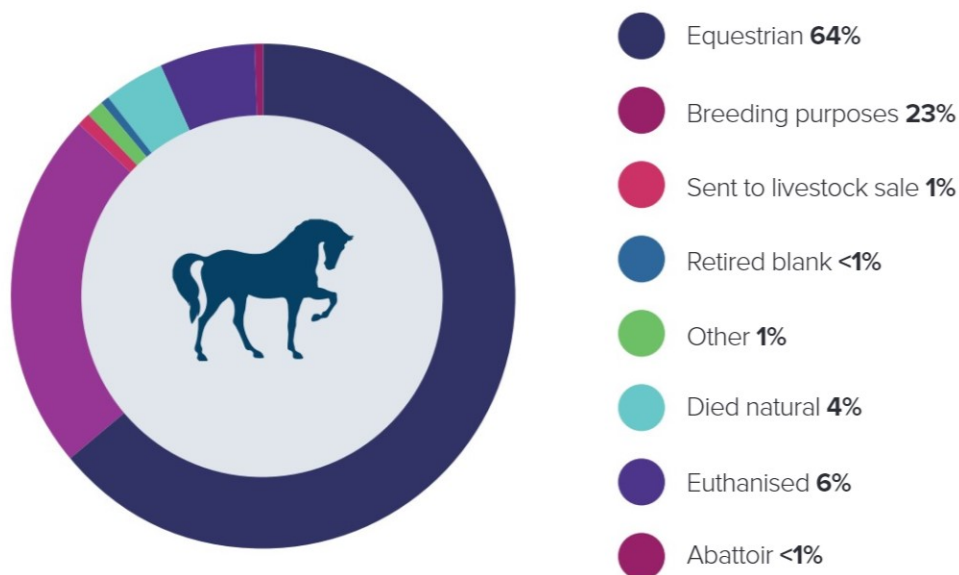
continue their careers in the equestrian world, while another 23% go into the breeding industry. The remaining 10% die of natural causes, are euthanised or go to livestock sales. Figure 2 provides an overview of destination of horses leaving the Australian industry.

Racing Australia can now speak to the issue definitively, based on quantitative data. Nine out of ten horses that leave the track enter the equestrian world or the breeding sector. All racing authorities should challenge themselves to answer the question, “what happens to our horses”?

Retirement notification requires owners or their agents to be transparent about their retirement outcomes. Compelling owners to actively consider their horses’ retirement options helps drive culture change. There remains an opportunity for regulators to apply further scrutiny if they are not satisfied with a participant’s retirement performance.

Data collection and transparency are important considerations. Racing Australia publishes annual racehorse retirement data every year in its annual report. An inability to provide an accurate, up-to-date and transparent answer to the question “what happens to the horses”, will likely fall short of society’s expectations of the contemporary regulator.

Figure 2 – Destination of retired horses – Australia 2018



Source: Racing Australia Annual Report 2018

The more vexing question relates to traceability beyond the horses’ exit from the racing industry. Racing authorities’ regulatory power is typically limited to licensed people within

the industry. Irrespective of good intentions, racing administrators have no ability to collect data or exert regulatory oversight when a racehorse moves beyond the care of licensed persons.

This is a natural delineation that jurisdictions can define and signal as the end of their regulatory responsibilities. However, the racing industry must be attuned to society's expectations and ensure it is across government or NGO initiatives that may impact the perception or obligations of racing beyond first exit. There may be over-arching legislative obligations in relation to horse traceability (irrespective of breed) that may emerge as governments look to regulate, either in response to community concerns, food safety or biosecurity reasons.

As a producer of horses, society will expect racing plays its role in relation to horses exiting the racing industry. With careful thought and positioning, these do not need to be onerous or unreasonable expectations but could align with the existing regulatory power and resources of racing authorities.

Lifetime traceability is a reasonable expectation of animal industries and the racing industry is well-positioned to implement regulatory mechanisms to trace horses from birth until their first exit from racing. Building mechanisms to trace horses beyond the first exit for racing is possible but requires wider legislative support or cooperative arrangements with equestrian and breed societies.

2. Transitioning Strategies

Beyond the regulatory strategies, societies increasingly consider that racing must invest in racehorses' lives beyond the track. There is an expectation that an industry which creates a demand for the supply of thoroughbred horses, should not absolve itself of the responsibility for those horses at the end of their economic life.

Horses race at between 2-3 years of age and retire from the track somewhere between 6 - 10 years of age; yet many will live until 20 years of age or more. Racing's traditional approach has been to allow the market dynamics of the equestrian world or livestock market dictate post-racing outcomes.

Increasingly, the community expects that racing should be doing all it can to promote a quality life for racehorses beyond the track. This is clearly beyond the legislative, regulatory reach of racing, but sophisticated and cost-effective strategies have been implemented by many jurisdictions to enhance racing's support beyond the track.

As identified, Australia's data indicates that nearly 70% of horses leaving the track enter the equestrian industry in some capacity. It has been suggested that "retirement is a racing problem with an equestrian solution". Finding ways to smooth the transition of racehorses to the equestrian industry is a key activity.

Some authorities have chosen to participate directly in the equestrian supply chain by sponsoring the re-training of racehorses either directly or through third parties. Authorities may provide subsidies to retainers or even purchase facilities and staff those properties

directly. There are two inherent risks if this approach is adopted in isolation of concurrent strategies.

Firstly, industry-owned facilities cannot let themselves be exploited by irresponsible owners. Policy and operating provisions must be implemented to promote responsible retirement decisions. Secondly, where racing pays for the re-training of racehorses for the equestrian market, there may be an associated increase in supply; but there is risk there may not be a concurrent increase in demand. Subsidisation risks market disruption.

There is a risk that prices decline, thereby putting pressure on other re-trainers in the market. Caution is needed to preserve the buoyancy of the existing equestrian market.

Another “supply-side” approach relates to implementing a quality assurance scheme for re-trainers and their facilities. Racing authorities have no legitimate regulatory authority extending beyond racing industry participants, however voluntary participation in quality assurance schemes, incentivised by financial support can help to enhance welfare and aftercare outcomes.

An excellent example of this approach is the US’s Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance (TAA) who administer a comprehensive national program of quality-assurance linked to grant funding. The same supply-side risks outlined earlier must be managed, however the US model demonstrates that this is possible, especially when implemented at scale.

An alternative approach is to seek to stimulate demand in the equestrian market for re-trained racehorses. Some authorities stimulate the demand for horses by sponsoring equestrian events specifically for off-the-track thoroughbreds. They provide direct financial incentives to boost prize money for thoroughbred class events, usually with conditions requiring that the thoroughbred is an “off-the-track” (OTT) racehorse.

This approach stimulates the market for horses, supports the business model of existing re-trainers and is a scalable approach. Many jurisdictions increasingly look to the “demand” model as their preferred off-the-track strategy. The annual US Retired Racehorse Project (RRP) is an excellent example where a marquee event can stimulate demand and raise the profile of the breed. The RRP encourages the uptake of off the track thoroughbreds, stimulating demand, supports the business model of re-trainers and helps facilitate a post-event market for the sale of those event participants.

Finally, there may be administrative processes that could be implemented to help smooth the transition between racing and equestrian. The US Jockey Club has the Thoroughbred Incentive Program (TIP) which provides off the track thoroughbreds with a unique identifier, that allows the horse to compete in the wide range of equestrian disciplines. Racing can demonstrate leadership by investing in data systems that help cross disciplines and even consider administrative subsidies for breed societies or equestrian registration fees.

3. Safety Net

There is a diversity of athletic ability and temperaments in thoroughbred racehorses. Accordingly, aftercare strategies must reflect this diversity. There is likely a bell curve distribution in the population.

At the top level, the elite horses will naturally find their way into a suitable post-racing career. They have likely been ear-marked during their racing career as being suitable for an equestrian pursuit, due to their temperament or inherent athleticism. Existing market dynamics are effective for these horses and we can celebrate their success and use them to promote the breed.

The middle majority of horses will benefit from the supply or demand strategies previously outlined.

The bottom tier represents those horses who, for one reason or another, will not “make it” to the breeding shed or an equestrian home. They may carry injuries, have an unpredictable or dangerous temperament or are simply not athletic. These horses need different retirement strategies as they have the potential to become “horses at risk” of neglect.

A comprehensive Aftercare Toolkit includes strategies that provide a safety net for horses at risk. Fortunately, there are low-cost administrative solutions that can form the foundation of a safety net.

The US Trotting Association led the way in this space with a program called “Full Circle”. The program entails building database fields in the horse registry that permit an interested person nominating themselves to be contacted in the event that a particular horse ever falls into an “at risk” situation.

There is no cost to participate and no enduring obligation for the nominee to provide support – they simply have the option to provide support, in some fashion, for a horse in need. More than one name can be attached to the horse’s file and names can be withdrawn at any stage. The horse registry or racing administration office accepts the responsibility to coordinate and share details of the respective parties if required.

This approach also has the benefit of extending the administrative support of the racing industry beyond first exit from the industry. The practical administrative costs of the program are modest, but the benefits can be significant – especially when integrated as part of a suite of retirement strategies.

Other safety net approaches are more interventionist and require more resources. These include providing funding or sponsorship to various horse rescue organisations or charities.

Racing authorities may also choose to be more “hands on” and consider having dedicated crisis response funding or even purchase or lease rescue facilities. For example, Racing Victoria, send staff to livestock sales and scan the microchips of horses in the sale, talk to the last registered owner and offer the owner the opportunity to purchase the horse before it enters the sale.

Different models will suit different operating environments. This segment cannot be ignored, as neglected animals quickly attract media interest leading to reputational damage.

The most important aspect is that racing authorities firstly recognise that “horses at risk” are a discrete segment of the retirement spectrum and secondly, that a comprehensive aftercare toolkit includes specific strategies to address this vulnerable segment.

4. Therapy horses and community engagement strategies

There are many charities around the world that utilise horses, including off the track thoroughbreds, for therapeutic and rehabilitation programs. There are many successful programs that support war veterans, people with disabilities or disadvantaged children. Some programs are integrated into correctional facilities and assist with inmate rehabilitation.

The IFAR website features two presentations from the 2018 forum outlining programs that support returned soldiers. The 2019 forum featured a presentation from a Greek charity, *Hippolysis NPC*, which utilises horses for psychotherapies for human patients. These presentations highlight the importance of this work and the unique and powerful role the horse can play. In addition, they represent excellent opportunities for racing to link with meaningful social causes.

Racing also needs to promote and if necessary support the use of off the track thoroughbreds as part of such programs. Racing authorities are encouraged to develop a sound understanding of the various charities or programs in their respective countries.

5. Thoroughbred Advocacy

Racing has an important role to promote the thoroughbred to the equestrian market. At the IFAR forum in 2017, a strong message from high profile equestrian participants was that the equestrian market in the US had trended towards the use of warmbloods and other sport horse breeds over a number of years.

This wasn't due to any inferiority of the thoroughbred, but merely a function of customer preferences in that market. Accordingly, the demand for off the track thoroughbreds declined in the US, which put pressure on the business model of re-trainers working with thoroughbreds.

Racing must implement effective communication strategies to ensure the popularity of the thoroughbred, as an equestrian athlete, is not allowed to wane. Authorities are encouraged to implement communication strategies that celebrate the success of off the track horses in the equestrian world.

Sponsorship at every level for thoroughbred classes at equestrian events is also important. Racing has the strongest interest in working to ensure the breed remains popular for all equestrian pursuits from showjumping to polo to barrel racing.

The second important aspect of advocacy relates to ensuring racing tells the story of its activities in the welfare and retirement space to the community. As community values evolve, social debate can be easily manipulated by special interest groups. Accordingly, it is

important to dedicate resources to building a narrative around the aftercare strategies each jurisdiction has in place.

The UK's Retirement of Racehorses (RoR) organises race-day parades showcasing the many disciplines where off the track thoroughbreds succeed in their new careers. This approach leverages racing's existing events and helps to educate the public regarding the versatility of the breed and racing's enduring commitment to the horse.

Racing must be the strongest advocate for the thoroughbred.

6. Networking

The final strategy in the toolkit is described as "networking". IFAR is appreciative that there is tremendous diversity in the level of social debate across racing nations. Accordingly, racing authorities may not yet have aftercare as a priority on their agenda. However, authorities must be aware of the challenges some nations face and begin to recognise activism as an emerging threat.

The world is interconnected at an unprecedented level and a negative story in one country has repercussions throughout the global racing industry. Racing nations have a shared responsibility to encourage best practice and work to enhance welfare outcomes throughout the supply chain where their horses travel.

Proactive engagement with national equestrian federations in each country is strongly encouraged. There are usually opportunities for the administrative arrangements to be streamlined to ensure a seamless ownership transition from racing to equestrian. Authorities are also encouraged to build relationships with equine charities operating in their jurisdiction.

Engaging with the IFAR network is also an important tactic, to learn from best practice and engage with like-minded industry professionals.

Conclusion

It is critical to recognise the importance for all racing nations to examine their approach and thinking regarding aftercare. All animal industries are under pressure to demonstrate and deliver appropriate quality and traceability oversight from birth to end-of-life. Community expectations are evolving and while racing's traditional regulatory remit may not extend to those new societal demands, racing must examine its practices and seek to match those expectations in an appropriate manner.

The Aftercare Toolkit has been developed by the IFAR Committee following several years of reviewing the best global strategies. The six strategies represent practical and cost-effective approaches that can form a comprehensive and defensible foundation for thoroughbred aftercare.

The increasingly interconnected world means that reputational risk is shared across national boundaries and it is in the interest of all racing nations to encourage all authorities to implement best practice strategies.

Aftercare is non-negotiable and beyond the commercial and reputational drivers, it is the simply the right thing to do.

To learn more on IFAR, visit internationalracehorseaftercare.com or contact registration@internationalracehorseaftercare.com

IFAR is an independent forum that recognises geographical and industry differences among racing countries and is designed to enhance Thoroughbred aftercare worldwide. Working with the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities, IFAR's goal is to raise awareness of the importance of welfare for Thoroughbreds, improve education on lifetime care, and help increase demand for former racehorses in other equestrian sports.

About the Author

Dr Eliot Forbes is a founding member of the IFAR Steering Committee and continues to serve on the committee. He is currently the CEO of AniMark Ltd, a standards company specialising in the formulation and monitoring of animal welfare standards and livestock traceability.

He has previously served as the CEO of Racing Queensland, the CEO of Tasracing and was the Veterinary Steward for the Emirates Racing Authority. He has also worked as an equine veterinary surgeon in the United Kingdom, Macau, Qatar and Australia. As a director of Racing Australia (RA), he served as the inaugural Chairman of RA's Retirement of Racehorses Committee.

Dr Forbes holds a Masters of Business Administration from La Trobe University, an honours degree in Veterinary Science from the University of Queensland, is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, is a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and has studied with the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts.
