



Mr Riggs

Welfare of THE RETIRED THOROUGHBRED:

FACTS vs FICTION

The issue of where our racehorses end up after racing is gaining public momentum, writes editor at large René Geelen.

Re-homing thoroughbreds is not a new concept - horses have always found new homes and new careers after racing - but the public interest in what happens after racing is something new.

In November, the ABC's 7.30 Program broadcast a program that "exposed the reality of horse racing's throw-away culture: wastage". If you can get past the extreme headline, the claims behind it are even more absurd. Most of the information came from the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (CPR) who claimed that: "Every year 18,000 Thoroughbreds are slaughtered for dog meat or for human consumption". The CPR runs an alarmist website called www.horseracingkills.com and many of their members are also members of PETA,

whose key philosophy is that all life is suffering, therefore it is better off dead. Ultimately, both PETA and the CPR want to see all racing banned and, by extension, all use of horses and other animals for 'pleasure and leisure' banned.

For those inside the thoroughbred industry, the sheer lunacy of their key statement is obvious. How can an industry that only breeds 16,000 foals a year mathematically send 18,000 a year to slaughter? So the question does need to be asked: where did they get that figure? The answer is simply that they could only have made it up.

The RSPCA have funded two recent studies on wastage. Ariella Hayek in 2004 interviewed 20 knackeries around Australia, and found they killed 13,536 horses (of all breeds) annually and most of those were "old, sick or injured". In addition, there are two export human-

grade horsemeat "abattoirs", that humanely slaughtered younger horses whose "upkeep was no longer economically feasible" or were feral brumbies, but no numbers were available to Hayek. In a separate report, AQIS estimated this to be 11,415 animals in 2007 (including all horse breeds, donkeys and mules). The Hayek study also interviewed 378 Thoroughbred and Standardbred trainers to determine what happened after racing and found that for the 2,474 horses that left their stables during the 2002/03 season, the table below reveals where they all went.

Using these numbers as a base, the Hayek study estimated that in 2002/03 an estimated 1,700 ex-racing Thoroughbreds were sent to knackeries - a very long way from the CPR's estimate of 18,000.

In 2008, a RSPCA-funded study by Amanda Doughty into the condition of teeth and feet of slaughtered horses investigated 340 horses over a 3 month period and found that 40% had a Thoroughbred brand and 13% had a Standardbred brand. This study also quotes two animal welfare websites who estimate the 18,000 figure. Therefore in a neat form of circular logic, the number appears to have been invented by Animal Liberation in 1998, re-used by Animals Australia in 2007, quoted by Doughty in 2008 and is now used by various animal welfare organisations as coming from a scientific paper. Doughty states that their figure is a vast over-estimation, but this is ignored by those who want more sensational numbers.

The slaughter of horses was made illegal in the USA in 2007, and many animal rights campaigners, including PETA, rejoiced as they felt the decision removed horse cruelty. But a US government study completed in 2011 found →

Race horses / Where they end up.

Where the Horses Went		Thoroughbred	Standardbred
Stud		243	184
Spelling		150	132
Knackery		84	189
Different trainer		229	326
Auction / new owner		221	127
Other	Subcategories:	406	183
	Died	27	11
	Returned to owner	22	13
	Performance riding	151	32
	Pleasure riding	41	53
	Recreation cart horse	0	1
	Pony Club	27	7
	Racing - other types/locations	9	8
	Racing industry related work	2	0
	Retired to paddock	48	32
	Stock work	24	5
	Unspecified	55	21



Retired racehorse Tippitaka



Retired racehorse Moehuane

that the decision had resulted in more cruelty, not less. The same number of horses were killed, but rather than being killed close to home, they were trucked to Mexico or Canada and killed there. And it's not just the arduous journey that adds to the cruelty, but the US also saw a rise in the number of malnourished and abandoned horses after that decision which the study said was probably a side effect of the additional cost involved in trucking them away.

As a result, in November 2011 the ban was overturned with all sides of politics saying that it had been a failure. Nebraska Republican Rep. Adrian Smith told www.washingtontimes.com, "While we have a long way to go, responsible processing represents a vital first step in reversing the unintended consequences to blame for the dismal state of neglected horses and their frustrated caregivers across our country. Reinstating a humane, accountable and legal management tool is good for horses, good for owners and is good policy."

Using the Hayek table, of the 2,474 horses that left stables, 66% stayed in the racing industry (either to stud, spelling, other trainer, or racing related location) and a further 15% were rehomed into a new career.

Both NSW and Victoria have implemented rehabilitation programs for retired racehorses.

Racing Victoria have a program called "Off the Track" that lists Horse Re-trainers that are approved by them to take retired racehorses and educate them as pleasure horses. One of the companies they sponsor through this program is the Cyberhorse Racehorse Outplacement Program run by Bill Saunders and he talked to Breeding&Racing about his journey in this area.

In 2009, Cyberhorse website owner Bill Saunders was fed up with the negative commentary on ex-racehorses that flowed on the equestrian forums of his website. These, apparently informed, riders felt that ex-racehorses were too head-strong and difficult to be useful show horses, but on further investigation,

Saunders found that the reputation of ex-racehorses came from a lack of proper re-training rather than a fundamental issue with the breed.

"I wanted to get talented riders starting to think of ex-racehorses as used Mercedes, not clapped out Datsuns from backyard car dealers," he says. So Saunders approached Racing Victoria to put together a proper process for retired racehorses, saying to them that "a lack of professionalism in the after-market was costing the racing industry's reputation."

This, in conjunction with Racing Victoria doing market research into the general public's opinion of racing and horse welfare, led to the "Off the Track" program that accredits horse re-trainers and provides a pathway for horses moving into a new career.

Saunders' Cyberhorse Racehorse Outplacement Program is one of those that gained accreditation, and while he can only deal with ten horses at a time, he is working

on Thoroughbreds, which in turn would create a larger and more valuable market for what they were producing. It is the lack of high quality re-trained horses combined with poor recognition of their competition achievements which is holding back the equestrian market value of Thoroughbreds."

Saunders also says that the other benefit is that it makes recently retired horses too expensive for the knackeries, and it also means that trainers will endeavour to retire their horses while they are still sound as a sound horse will be worth more than an unsound one.

"If a retired racehorse is worth more, it benefits the racing owners and it benefits the horse as it will end up in a better home and have better outcome."

Saunders reveals he also realised that there is "no champion for the Thoroughbred outside of racing". He says that whenever a racehorse achieves something, even a winner in

"How can an industry that only breeds 16,000 foals a year mathematically send 18,000 a year to slaughter?"

towards his key goal of shifting the value of the ex-racehorse.

He says, "I can't save all the horses, but I can get people thinking about the issues and how their own behaviour affects the whole breed. And if I can shift the price for a retired racehorse from its current \$0-500 mark and make them worth a few thousand, the more talented riders will see the economic value in buying them and working with them."

"Currently, there are a limited number of good riders available to train all horses, but much of the current talent spends its time on other breeds. If the ex-racehorse was worth more they might be inclined to spend more of their time

the bush, there is someone in racing who has a vested interest in talking about the achievement. Be it the stallion owner, the broodmare owner, the trainer or the syndicator - someone is championing the horse and those who surround it. But once a horse moves into the pleasure horse arena, there is usually no mention of its origins when the horse wins. Therefore it is via his website that Saunders sees the greatest victories for the horses. There is a place where the horses can get talked about, and ultimately their reputation moved from being 'difficult' to being horses that everyone wants because they are successful.

He wants to create a place for people to brag

“Planning and preparation
wins the race.”



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about their ex-racehorse.

Racing Victoria are also doing their part, with the recent implementation of sponsorship of over 100 'Thoroughbred only' classes at various horse shows with all winners going forwards into a big final. Saunders says this is a great chance for Thoroughbreds to strut their stuff and show the potential of Thoroughbreds outside of racing.

As well as Racing Victoria, Saunders is pleased to hear that the Australian Racing Board has appointed a National Taskforce to look into re-homing, which he says is an excellent step. As part of this taskforce, Saunders would like to see that owners are required to have a formalised retirement plan for their horses through the different state authorities. And it's not about money, says Saunders, but about ensuring that people think about their horse. It could be that the retirement plan is that the horse stays in the industry, as breeding stock, or it could be that owners plan to put the horse into a re-training program.

If racing owners consider the cost of putting a horse in an industry mixed sale, the amount they spend on the sale entry and transport to the sale would cover a month in a re-training program. So for Saunders, it's just about making people think responsibly, and differently about their horse and alternative options.

On February 19 this year, a Facebook page was started in Australia called "This is my ex-Racehorse". In 24 hours the page had over 1,200 'likes' and plenty of photos and stories of ex-racehorses and their new owners.

One of the page's administrators, Adrienne Bicknell, owns an ex-racehorse Mr Riggs (Carnegie-Pivoine, by Nureyev). He was trained by Robbie Griffiths, and Bicknell got him straight from the stable. She had wanted an off the track horse and had friends in the stable who kept an eye out for horses for her, so when

he bowed a tendon and was retired, Mr Riggs ended up with Bicknell.

The now rising 10YO gelding spent 6 months spelling, and mostly just hangs out in the paddock and does a small amount of pleasure riding. Bicknell says he is full of personality, and it would be too hard for her to on-sell him now. Regarding the Facebook page, Bicknell was talking to a few friends who also have ex-racehorses and they wanted a place where people could talk about their horses. The page was built so people could brag, try to find solutions to problems they were having and to recommend re-trainers of horses. Bicknell says they are also seeing people use the page to find out what has happened to horses they have strapped in the past.

MR RIGGS (AUS) 2003 Bay gelding by Carnegie - Pivoine, by Nureyev

Age	Runs	1st	2nd	3rd	Earnings (In Australia)
4	8	2	-	-	A\$12,150
5	9	1	-	2	A\$12,167
6	18	5	1	2	A\$111,276
7	13	-	1	-	A\$16,675
8	13	1	-	-	A\$61,125
Totals:	61	9	2	4	A\$213,393

At 4: Benalla RC Maiden P. (2300m), Bendigo JC 0.-. 62 H. (2400m)

At 5: Seymour RC Tingay's Excavations H. (2200m)

At 6: MVRC Emtomgusnenny Sungold Milk H. (3000m), MRC The Trump H. (3100m), Lavendo H. (3100m), Stony Creek RC DCP Group H. (2100m), Campbell Page, Leongatha H. (2100m)

At 8: VRC Rain Lover H. (2500m)

In New South Wales, the Thoroughbred Horse Rehabilitation Trust (NSW TRT) is a not-for-profit charity that has been set up to assist the rehabilitation and re-education of ex NSW Thoroughbred racehorses. All wages and administration costs for the Trust are donated by Racing NSW, and the horse-related costs rely on donations and sales of horses that have completed the program. Caitlin Lei Sam is the Media Contact for the NSW TRT, and she spoke to B&R about the program.

She reveals that Racing NSW and Corrective Services NSW put together the pilot Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Program in 2011. Donated horses are sent to Muswellbrook (St Heliers Correctional Facility) where they are spelled before being re-trained in conjunction with prisoners. The re-training contributes to

"The different programs for ex-racehorses that are in place by different racing authorities show leadership on the issue of animal welfare..."

the people's rehabilitation as well and gives them skills that led to job prospects outside prison.

Since November 2011, 65 horses have been re-trained for security work and show horses, and – now that the program is established – the number of horses is increasing with facilities for up to 30 horses to be stabled at Canterbury Racecourse. Racing owners get peace-of-mind by donating their retired horses to the program, as they know their horse will go on towards something purposeful outside racing.

"Our public demonstration at Canterbury during February was very successful," said Lei Sam, "with over 100 people coming to watch. We sold one horse on the day, and had interest in several others. The greatest success is that the day showed the Trust is starting to reach people across different markets, both inside and outside of racing."

The different programs for ex-racehorses that are in place by different racing authorities show leadership on the issue of animal welfare, and the great number of enthusiastic people who are starting to talk about our Thoroughbreds is something for the industry to get excited about.

It is one thing for industry participants to do the best they can for their horses, but without programs and people who are willing to share their stories with the wider world, the industry opens itself to organisations like CPR to spread their exaggerated tales.

While the vast majority of owners and other participants love their horses and want the best for them, in a world where misdirected political correctness often gets a hearing, it's up to the all sectors of the industry to make sure that our own 'message' is received far and wide. •

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