

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals Safeguarding Thoroughbreds in Two-Year-Olds in Training Under Tack Shows

Background

On May 19, 2011, at the Fasig-Tipton Midlantic two-year-olds in training under tack show, a filly (Hip #396) suffered a gruesome breakdown on a muddy track, completely fracturing her right cannon bone. Witnesses described the sound of the breaking bone as a "rifle shot." High-resolution, slow-motion video footage showed fragments of bone flying from the shattered leg. Video of this breakdown and other fatal incidents can be viewed on the accompanying DVD and also at this [video link](#).

As you can see in the video, this fatality was not an anomaly. In the wake of a series of such catastrophic breakdowns, it is imperative that the four major thoroughbred auction companies institute immediate reforms at under tack shows. These reforms will not only reduce life-ending and career-ending injuries at under tack shows themselves but also eliminate the pressure to use damaging speed-training techniques on immature horses to prepare them to perform sprints at excessive speeds.

According to Dr. Sheila Lyons, an equine veterinarian who was featured on the cover of *The Blood-Horse* magazine:

Pushing these immature 2-year-old horses for speed before they have reached physical and mental maturity is recklessly dangerous and systematically damaging for the animal while also proving to be unreliable for the prospective buyers as a predictor of future racing ability.¹

Many of the horses at two-year-olds in training sales are still chronological yearlings. However, to impress potential buyers, owners push their horses to breeze in faster 1/8 mile fractions than they ever will run in their future racing careers. These bullet works—most less than 11 seconds for 1/8 mile and some even breaking the 10-second barrier—are faster fractions than even the elite, mature horses will run in the Breeders' Cup Sprint. These reckless breezes not only put these physically immature horses at great risk but also are pointless, as they are a poor measure to predict a 2-year-old's racing potential as a fully mature horse at distances of more than a mile.

Dr. Lyons writes:

One example of a speed and power related physical maturation factor I have recognized in my practice is the relative development of the biceps femoris muscle within the hamstring complex of muscles. ... If this most important muscle that gives power and thrust to the hind limbs is not in balance with the

¹Sheila Lyons, D.V.M., statement to PETA, June 28, 2011.

development of the semi-membranosus and semi-tendinosus muscles, the horse will neither be capable of fast speed nor optimum performance.

Yet I have seen hundreds of 2-year-old thoroughbred racing prospects offered at sales with this speed-inhibiting lack of development, and their performance is poor in speed drills. But they may very well be outstanding racing prospects passing through this normal development stage. My clinical practice records reveal that by August, only about 10% of 2-year-old thoroughbred horses examined have presented with a mature and balanced development in this important muscle group on physical examination.

Common sense and science both ask—why are we pushing these horses for speed when it is abundantly clear that by overwhelming majority, they are not sufficiently physically developed to respond?²

The under tack shows are only the tip of the iceberg. Young horses undergo accelerated speed-training regimens in preparation for the shows. This dangerous and ill-conceived preparation for what are artificial and arbitrary sales deadlines has damaged many of these young horses in training. More than 25% of the horses in the catalog are listed as "Withdrawn" or "Out" by auction day, often because of injuries. Furthermore, the damage done to horses who survive the excessive speed-training demands at such a young age has had a profound effect on the performance and durability of 3-year-olds. The pressure to have these horses eligible and peaking for the Triple Crown races so early in the 3-year-old campaign, regardless of the horses' development or need for additional recovery time, has contributed to the alarming injury rate before and during the Triple Crown series.

Trainer Randy Bradshaw, who has done the early training and foundation work for numerous Grade 1 winners, including the 2011 Kentucky Derby winner, Animal Kingdom, said, "I don't like them to have them go in 11 [seconds]. We don't go that fast, and that's a reason we don't get shins [painful inflammation of stressed cannon bones]. Going slow develops denser, harder bone."³

But breeders and owners, especially pinhookers, are concerned primarily about quick and profitable turnover—not a horse's long-term soundness or welfare. Dr. Lyons writes, "Motivated by the business incentive to sell for the highest price, many breeders or professional resellers will push their young sales stock for speed, but many of these same horsemen will hold back on speed work with horses they intend to keep for their own racing stables."⁴

Misuse of drugs to keep injured horses running is also common. Dennis Brida, former trainer, owner, and past president of the New York Thoroughbred Breeders, said in a statement to PETA

²Lyons.

³Ray Paulick, "The Breeders' Cup Forum: Breaking and Training With Randy Bradshaw," *Paulick Report*, Aug. 10, 2011 <<http://www.paulickreport.com/features/the-breeders-cup-forum/the-breeders-cup-forum-breaking-and-training-with-randy-bradshaw/>>.

⁴Lyons.

that there is "a ton of pressure on trainers to produce quickly" and that many trainers will "do anything to camouflage the pain to get them to the sales." He said that the sport is "butchering" these horses and that these under tack shows are "idiotic speed tests." He argued that people, instead, should be using good horsemanship to evaluate the 2-year-olds.⁵

Dr. Lyons echoes Brida's conclusions:

Biomechanical science, basic biology, and veterinary medical science clearly tells us that an immature horse cannot perform high-speed work in a way that is reliably predictive of its racing ability at maturity. Of far greater significance in the selection of racing prospects are factors that would include: age-appropriate conformation analysis; the quality of the horse's walk, trot, and slow gallop; cardiovascular analysis; laryngeal examination; pedigree analysis; full physical examination; and temperament.⁶

For all these reasons, four years ago, Adena Springs changed its under tack show format to model European under tack shows, which permit only gallop or gradual acceleration down the stretch in untimed works.

"We have changed the format this year," said Mark Roberts, the general manager of Florida's Adena Springs division. "The 2-year-olds with late foaling dates, May or June, will not breeze. They will gallop. **We feel that it does not serve the 2-year-olds or the buyers to have an immature horse race a furlong in 10 and change**" [*emphasis added*]. It should be noted that Adena Springs sales, unlike most other 2-year-old sales, do not record individual under-tack times. Horses either breeze—that is, accelerate through the stretch—or gallop.⁷

PETA strongly recommends the adoption of the following reforms, effective 2012, for Fasig-Tipton Company Inc., Ocala Breeders' Sales Company (OBS), Keeneland Association, and Barretts Equine Limited.

Recommendations for Under Tack Show Reforms

Speed Restrictions

- Only gallops, or gradual accelerations down the stretch, should be permitted at all under tack shows.
- Gallops and gradual accelerations must be untimed.

Calendar Restrictions

⁵Dennis Brida, past president, New York Thoroughbred Breeders, telephone interview, Jul. 1, 2011.

⁶Lyons.

⁷Dave Goldman, "Adena Springs changes up sale routine," *Daily Racing Form*, Mar. 16, 2007 <<http://www.drf.com/news/adena-springs-changes-sale-routine>>.

- These should be gallop shows only—no breezes—until June 1.
- After June 1, any horses with late foal dates who have not turned 2 years old chronologically must be prohibited from breezes.

Cancellations or Postponements Because of Extreme Weather or Unsafe Track Conditions

- Breezes must be postponed if there is a muddy, sloppy, or sealed track. The breakdown at Fasig-Tipton on May 19, 2011, occurred on a muddy track. In April 2004, Keeneland immediately canceled the remainder of its under tack show after a catastrophic breakdown on a sloppy track.

After the 2004 Keeneland incident, consigner Kip Elser noted that rain is particularly dangerous for under tack shows, as opposed to races: "It's not like when you run a race and 12 horses go over it and you harrow it right away, smooth it out, and it's closed for the next half hour. Here, where there's a steady rain, the rain gets down into the (horses') footprints between breezes, and it gets uneven."⁸

Consigner Niall Brennan also praised the company for its actions: "It's unsafe to ask these babies to breeze so fast over a bad track. ... When you're sitting there praying every time one of your horses goes, there's something wrong."⁹

- Institute mandatory cancellations or postponements for extreme heat—more than 90 degrees Fahrenheit or a heat index of more than 95 degrees Fahrenheit. On June 19, 2011, at OBS, PETA filmed a colt who suffered a ruptured aorta while running in 100-degree Fahrenheit heat. Under tack shows should extend the event over additional days, if necessary, to avoid afternoon heat. Many tracks including Belmont, Monmouth, and Woodbine recently canceled race days because of extreme heat. Races at Prairie Meadows Racetrack were canceled "after jockeys voted not to ride, saying the 97-degree temperature with a 111-degree heat index made conditions hazardous for the horses."¹⁰

Said jockey Ken Tohill, "Even very well-conditioned racehorses, with the heat index this high, how can you feel comfortable asking them for everything they have to stay on their feet?"¹¹

- Because of the confirmed higher rate of fatalities on dirt tracks, it is essential that breezes be conducted on a synthetic surface or that a turf option be available for breezes at under tack shows in addition to the dirt main track.

⁸Deirdre Biles, "Keeneland Calls Off Under Tack Show Following Filly's Breakdown," BloodHorse.com, Apr. 12, 2004 <<http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/articles/21827/keeneland-calls-off-under-tack-show-following-fillys-breakdown>>.

⁹BloodHorse.com, Apr. 12, 2011.

¹⁰"Heat Wave Cancels Horse Races," KCCI.com, Jul. 19, 2011 <<http://www.kcci.com/r/28600402/detail.html>>.

¹¹KCCI.com, Jul. 19, 2011.

- Protocols must be in place for immediate track inspections if an injury occurs during the gallops or breezes. At Fasig-Tipton on June 19, 2011, the muddy track was not inspected after the catastrophic breakdown even though witnesses noted that while the track was being worked, the tractor visibly bounced at the spot of the accident.

Restrictions on Whipping, Excessive Urging, Toe Grabs

- Eliminate all whipping, except when altering course for safety reasons. The 2008 rule changes still allow for whipping before the 1/8 pole—an exception that has been exploited.
- Eliminate all excessive yelling and whistling and other stressful techniques to urge the horses to unsafe speeds.
- Eliminate rear toe grabs (in addition to the front toe grab restriction introduced in 2008). There should be no need for grabs for gallops or breezes at reduced speeds.

Additional Recommendations: Drug Restrictions, Testing, and Mandatory Necropsies

- Institute a complete medication ban for the 72-hour period prior to the horse's breeze or gallop.
- Complete veterinary records for each horse should be made available to the public at the auctions. Full disclosure of these records must include the following: up-to-date histories of all medications ever administered, surgeries, cosmetic surgeries, therapeutic treatments, and injuries.
- Full cautionary veterinary examinations should be conducted before breezes.
- Random drug tests must be performed after breezes.
- If random drugs tests and physical examinations reveal either drug infractions or observations that conflict with or were omitted from the horse's veterinary records, the horse must be withdrawn from the auction and all connections would face disciplinary action applicable to, and enforced by, all four auction companies.
- Mandatory drug testing should be conducted on any horse injured at an under tack show.
- Mandatory necropsies should be performed on all horses who die at an under tack show.