

Welfare Issues and the Racehorse



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“Money makes the mare run” is a well known adage in racing circles....but what happens when the money “runs out” is often times that horses involved are treated less than optimally and their welfare undermined. Fortunately, most horses are afforded proper care and cases of abuse and neglect are in the minority.

Career-ending injuries (e.g. broken legs requiring euthanasia), excessive whipping and emaciated horses wandering in residential communities are some of the more obvious manifestations of the welfare issues surrounding this minority in Jamaica. Other less obvious, but equally important, issues include, illegal practice on horses by non-veterinarians, inadequate veterinary resources (e.g. veterinary pharmaceuticals and surgical facilities for colic), contracting avenues for re-homing/adopting retired racehorses and perhaps most importantly the oft times unfortunate perception of the equine athlete’s value being important only while it remains a performing asset.

Best practices for optimizing equine athlete welfare require the collaborative efforts of owners, breeders, veterinarians and racing practitioners, promoters and regulators. These best practices include, but are not limited to, provision of proper: health care services by licensed veterinarians, nutrition, housing/stabling, training facilities, safety standards and re-homing opportunities when competition is no longer a viable option. Also important is strengthened legislation to deter and penalize.

Important interventions have yielded success: 'abused/neglected' horses have been rehabilitated and returned to racing, offending owners/trainers have been penalized, unfit horses have been prevented from daily competition or culled from racing entirely, and racing practitioners have been educated about their responsibilities in adhering to industry standards through formal training programmes (e.g. Jockey School, Trainers Training Programme)

Successful interventions aside, real threats to equine welfare remain, especially when the utility value of the horse decreases. Linked to this of course, is the significant cost associated with ownership of a racehorse prior to, during and after its racing career, coupled with less than optimal earnings in many cases. Reducing the impact of these threats requires responsible ownership premised on planned use of disposable income to fund racing endeavors and making appropriate decisions regarding equine performance, recovery, quality of life and retirement. Supplementing this effort should be vigilance by industry stakeholders in adhering to established minimum standards and the public in reporting/preventing abuse/neglect.

Money **does** make the mare run...but planning and humane treatment make the "running" and transition from "running" smoother and with less potential for abuse/neglect.



May 3, 2011: Reported case of neglect at Caymanas Park



June 16, 2011: Rehabilitation at a farm



Dec 14 2011: Return to racing at Caymanas Park 7 months after neglect first reported.