

## **Changes to Start Rules and procedures**

The BHA Board has approved several changes to the start Rules, following a review of stalls and starting procedures over a 12-month period.

The changes, which have been agreed following an extensive period of engagement and consultation, are described in full below and come into effect on the dates specified.

They have been developed following recommendations by the Starts Review Working Group, which has been tasked with reviewing all elements of the start, including stalls design, loading, and Jump start procedures. More information on the Starts Review Working Group is available below.

If you have any queries, please contact: [Disciplinary@britishhorseracing.com](mailto:Disciplinary@britishhorseracing.com).

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## **ADJUSTMENTS TO LATE LOAD REQUESTS**

From **1 January 2024**, the Rules around Late Load Requests – defined as raceday privilege requests made by a trainer for their horse to be loaded out of sequence – will be modified so that:

- Late Load Requests are **restricted** to horses that have demonstrated behavioural issues inside the starting stalls in a previous race in Great Britain
- Horses having their debut run will be **ineligible** for a Late Load Request unless they have taken a pre-race assessment that has specifically identified a behavioural concern inside the starting stalls.

In addition, the Rules around warnings for Late Load Requests and Stalls Tests will be adjusted, so that where a trainer has received three warnings for the same horse with respect to behaviour inside the stalls within a 12-month period:

- The horse will be required to complete **one Stalls Test** rather than the two needed under the current Rules
- Any further Late Load Request for that horse will not result in additional warnings for a 12-month **period**, rather than the current lifetime late load.

These Rule changes aim to reduce the number of Late Load Requests to help improve the safety and fairness of the Start and ensure that horses without behavioural issues are not disadvantaged.

The number of Late Load Requests has grown from 0.36% of runners in 2008 to 1.4% in 2022. These are requests made due to behaviour issues, but also increasingly for tactical reasons.

The changes, in particular those relating to the lifetime late loads, therefore seek to encourage increased schooling of less well-behaved horses and to discourage the tactical use of requests to achieve lifetime late load status. With the reduction of this timescale to 12 months, it has been agreed that only one Stalls Test due to warnings should trigger the Rule.

To help support trainers in adjusting to these Rule changes, stalls opportunities are available, including pre-assessments, with the potential for stalls training days or barrier trials if enough interest is received. Moreover, the changes also have the potential to reduce the Defined Percentage for Trainers.

For more information, please see the **frequently asked questions** below.

[\*Rule F – the Race\*](#), Paragraphs 18 and 20 will be updated accordingly.

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## **STARTS TRAINING FOR TRAINER REPRESENTATIVES**

From **1 January 2024**, all persons assisting at the start must have completed [the BHA Trainer Representative - Starts Training Module](#). This is to help ensure that safety protocols are fully understood by everyone in and around the starts area.

Trainers and their representatives are required to have taken the online module prior to accompanying their horse to the Start. The module is available to complete now on [Racing2Learn](#).

[Rule 14. Starting Procedures Code](#), Paragraph 26 has been updated accordingly.

## **LOADING PROCESS – EAR AND TAIL TWITCHING / GRABBING**

Effective from **1 January 2024**, grabbing or twitching a horse's ear or tail during the loading process will only be permitted for safety purposes.

This is not a new Rule, but provides additional clarity around what may constitute an offence under the existing [Rule D.2 – duty to promote welfare of horses](#). It also introduces a clearer and more specific penalty structure for managing any potential breaches.

It should be noted that BHA Stewards will take a pragmatic approach to enforcement and will always take into consideration that these techniques, when used proportionately, can be acceptable tools of good horsemanship and essential for safety purposes.

This might include gently holding an ear to help relax and placate a nervous or fractious horse during the loading process, or to ensure the welfare of the horse, jockey, and stalls handler by helping to settle a horse should they become unruly in the stalls.

However, in the rare instances where the Stewards consider these actions to go well beyond what is deemed necessary for the purposes of safety and horse welfare, they will have discretion to issue a caution for a first offence, followed by a Band A fine for any subsequent offences.

Separate guidance has been developed for both Jockeys and Stewards to provide clarity on what is considered acceptable practice.

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## **JUMP STARTS WITHOUT HUNTING CROP**

Effective immediately, BHA starters will no longer carry the hunting crop during jump starts. The hunting crop was previously used very sparingly, and the Starts Review Working Group felt there was no longer a need to continue to carry it during the starting process. There is no Rule or Code modification necessary for this procedural change.

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## **MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE STARTS REVIEW WORKING GROUP**

British Racing's Horse Welfare Strategy – [A life Well Lived](#) – identified the need for the sport to conduct a short review of stalls and starting, including:

1. *Assessment of risk of injury to horses from stalls starts and jumps (tape and flip) starts to ensure risks are as low as possible. If risks are identified causes to be ascertained and addressed.*
2. *Review to include consideration of stalls loading procedures and assessment of any real or perceived welfare issues with appropriate action to be taken as necessary.*

As such, the Starts Review Working Group was established in September 2021 to consider all elements of the start, including stall design, stalls loading procedures and jumps starts procedures.

The group brought together Jockey, Trainer, racecourse, BHA and HWB representatives, who worked to develop a series of recommendations that aim to help reduce the risk and address any perception issues around starts and stalls.

In addition to the Rule changes set out above, areas of work that have been completed include workshops for starters, stewards and veterinary officers to review rules and procedures; a review of loading sequences and times; and a review of the penalty for being late to post.

Other items are still subject to engagement and consultation with industry stakeholders, with areas such as blindfold use and stalls design set to be considered in the coming months.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOADING PROCEDURE

1. *I have a debutante that is displaying poor stalls behaviour at home, or I have concerns about a horse standing for a long period of time on their first start. What options does the horse have?*

Under the [Starting Procedures Code](#), the trainer is responsible for ensuring their horse can walk into the stalls with the aid of only two pushers, stand for a minimum of 2 minutes and be comfortable with horses standing on either side while in the stalls. (Note: 5-year average load time for all flat races is 1 minute 47 seconds) It is recommended that trainers bring any horse for a pre-assessment to allow the horse to gain valuable experience away from home in preparation for their first race. At the pre-assessment, the starter can offer advice on loading and recommend if the horse needs more preparation before raceday.

2. *What does it mean if my horse receives a trainer Warning, is Reported or is Withdrawn?*

A trainer **Warning** is given if a horse displays behaviour during the loading process that is contrary to what is expected in the Starting Procedures Code. This could include reluctance to load, becoming restless in the stalls, kicking, etc. This is the least severe penalty given to a horse. Three trainer warnings in a 12-month period will result in the horse being required to pass a stalls test prior to their next start.

Being **Reported** is when a horse displays a behaviour during the loading process that has not been significant enough to necessitate a withdrawal but has affected the loading process or the safety of horse a rider, thus requiring the horse to pass a stalls test prior to their next start.

**Withdrawal** is when a horse's behaviour during the loading process affects the safety of horse or rider to such an extent that it contravenes the loading process. A stalls test is required prior to their next start.

3. *My horse receives a trainer warning for a behaviour reason inside the stalls. Can I take a Late Load Request (LLR) on their next start?*

Yes, however, the warning will count against the horse. If the horse receives three warnings in a 12-month period, the horse will be required to successfully complete a stalls test prior to its next start.

4. *My horse was withdrawn or reported for a behaviour issue inside the stalls. Can I take a Late Load Request (LLR) on their next start?*

Yes, if you believe that loading the horse out of sequence will benefit the horse on its next start, you can request this. The LLR will not count against the horse for a period of 12 months from the Starters' Report.

5. *A horse receives a trainer warning for reluctance to load or requiring a good push to load. Can I take a Late Load Request on their next start?*

No, LLRs are only for horses that exhibit poor behaviour inside the stalls.

6. *My horse does not have a history of behavioural issues, but I'm concerned about its behaviour if loaded first and having to wait in the stalls. Can I request a Late Load Request (LLR) for this start?*

No, the Starting Code is clear that a horse should be able to stand for a minimum of two minutes in the stalls. If you have concerns about your horse's behaviour, we recommend bringing the horse for a pre-assessment.