



Equine Welfare in British Horseracing

Horseracing in Britain is among the world's best regulated animal activities with welfare and safety sitting at the very heart of the sport.

HORSES IN RACING

Racehorses are equine athletes and lead an exceptionally high quality of life. They are bred for the sport and benefit from being involved in racing. They receive unparalleled care and attention, the best possible feed, bedding, facilities and a healthy lifestyle involving regular exercise. **The 20,000+ horses who race over the course of a year receive almost constant attention from the 6,000+ stable staff who are dedicated to their care.** The quality of life and care they receive is almost unparalleled, and clearly visible through the condition and health they clearly carry on to the racecourse.

Moreover, a career in racing benefits horses in their later life too. Their high health status, and the versatility that comes from being athletic and having had experience in training, makes them ideal animals to go on to further careers.

Over the last 20 years British Racing has invested over **£40 million in veterinary research and education** with funding invested by the Horserace Betting Levy Board and, more recently, the Racing Foundation. The sport's substantial investment in veterinary research and education brings benefits for all breeds of horse in Britain.

British racing's annual **National Racehorse Week** opens studs, training yards and aftercare centres nationwide for people to come behind the scenes of racing to experience for themselves the love and care racehorses receive. **There is no other sport that offers this kind of access.** It takes place every September over nine days and this year will offer over 13,000 places to the general public free of charge.

BRITISH RACING'S WELFARE STRATEGY

British Racing has an **independently-Chaired Horse Welfare Board** which published its five-year strategic plan in February 2020. **26 projects have been identified to help British Racing continuously improve all aspects of racehorse welfare in the sport** across safety, traceability, and aftercare. 20 projects are live with £3million of funding secured.

MAKING HORSERACING SAFER

As with all elite sports and all activities involving horses, there is an element of risk. It is the responsibility of the BHA and everyone involved in the sport to ensure that **we do everything possible to minimise that risk and to ensure that no injury or fatality occurs which could reasonably have been prevented.**

As a consequence of British racing's investment in safety, welfare and health, **the number of horses that have suffered fatal injuries on racecourses has decreased to just 0.21% of runners. 99.5% of horses complete their races without any serious injury.** There are around 90,000 runners in a full uninterrupted year of racing.

Faller rates during jump races have decreased to just 2.25%, their lowest figure on record as a result of initiatives to make racecourses and jump racing safer. The fatal injury rate in jump racing is 0.43%.

Despite British racing's excellent safety record, it always strives to improve, constantly investing in welfare research and education.

In 2022, **all 40 jump courses in Britain changed the markers on every hurdle and fence from orange to white.** This change was grounded in research completed by Exeter University which showed that the clarity of obstacles in racing for horses could be improved by the use of white. Changing the colour on obstacles is one part of a bigger body of work by the Horse Welfare Board and British Racing to use cutting-edge research to continuously find ways to reduce risk in the sport.

THE WHIP

In British racing the use of a foam padded, air cushioned whip is permitted, with strict controls on its use. The current foam padded design of the whip was developed with input from the RSPCA.



The use of the whip in British racing is strictly restricted to safety, correction, and encouragement and its use is strictly monitored in every race. Use of the whip to coerce is not permitted.

Whip use during a race has been reduced to a **maximum of six times in a flat race or seven times in a jump race. Penalties and suspensions have been increased** for any jockey going over these limits. Use of the whip four times or more above the permitted level now leads to disqualification.

Whips are carried first and foremost as an essential aid to horsemanship and safety. This is consistent across all equine activities which involve exertion on the part of the horse. Horses are checked by vets after every race. **In 2022, from 92,000 runners, just one horse was found to have been marked or 'wealed' from a ride in which a rider breached the whip rules.**

WHOLE-LIFE CARE

The sport takes steps to look after horses at all stages of their lives, from the mandatory microchipping and registration of a foal within 30 days of its birth, through to the sport's own charity – Retraining of Racehorses (RoR). Partly **through the work of RoR, and due to the adaptability and versatility of the thoroughbred as a breed**, an active market for the rehoming and retraining of racehorses has developed. **Tens of thousands of former racehorses go on to fulfilling second careers** ranging from polo, eventing, dressage, horseball, team chasing right through to happy hacking and supporting equine therapy programmes for humans.

WELFARE AT AINTREE AND THE RANDOX GRAND NATIONAL

In the last decade Aintree Racecourse has **invested more than £2 million on horse welfare measures.** As a result, the evidence suggests that the Randox Grand National is increasingly safer, with just four equine fatalities in the race in the last ten years including six consecutive years of zero fatal accidents.

- Every fence on the Grand National course was modified after 2012, with the inner frames changed from timber frames to more forgiving flexible plastic (all standard fences) or natural birch (open ditches)
- Each fence has a 'run-off area' for safety to allow horses without riders to safely bypass fences, plus strategically placed catching areas for loose horses and mounted horse-catcher teams
- Groundwork was completed to provide more level areas on the landing side of fences, including at the Canal Turn and Becher's Brook
- Significant investment has been made to improve the racing surface with £400,000 spent on enhancing the watering system to ensure the safest possible ground for horses to run on
- The start of the race was moved 90 yards forward to create a calmer and more controlled environment (from 2013 onwards) away from the grandstand
- A state-of-the-art, fully equipped cooling and washdown area is provided for the horses post-race
- 15 vets work onsite with one dedicated to every two fences to provide immediate support if needed
- Three state-of-the-art veterinary boxes are available to assess and treat horses

From 2023 all fences in the Grand National now have white markings rather than orange. This follows a study by Exeter University into equine vision which found that the use of white would aid clarity of fences for horses and should, as part of a bigger body of safety work, support efforts to reduce risk even further.

SUITABILITY TO RACE IN THE RANDOX GRAND NATIONAL

The horses competing in the Grand National are the world's best steeplechasers who have been developed over years of training. To compete, **horses and jockeys are required to meet stringent standards of fitness, capability and experience.** Every horse will have pre-race veterinary checks on limbs and joints and heart rate, as well as a trot-up to ensure they are fit and healthy. Horses must be seven years old or above and have competed in three or more steeplechases including one in the current season.

Each jockey is required to be passed fit and have ridden 15 winners, 10 in steeplechases, to ride in the Randox Grand National and there are mandatory jockey course walks with experienced professional coaches for those who have had two or fewer rides in the Grand National.

BHA must be satisfied with every entrant's previous performances to approve it to run in the race. In addition, from 2023 onwards, **newly-introduced and enhanced veterinary protocols** require trainers to submit videos of their horses trotting weeks before the Grand National **to help identify any potential concerns around a horse's suitability to run.**