BHA Briefing: New figures show whip offences continued to fall in 2015

What's the issue?

There has been renewed discussion within British Racing on the use of the whip after Stewards penalised winning jockeys for exceeding the permitted number of uses in two recent, high-profile races – The 32 Red Veterans' Handicap Chase Final and The William Hill King George VI Chase.

This briefing gives an update on what has happened since the BHA introduced the current rules and penalty structure in 2012, including the latest figures for whip offences.

Background

In 2011, to address an increasing number of whip offences, which had risen by more than 40% between 2008 and 2010, the BHA undertook a comprehensive review of the whip rules, including an industry-wide consultation and research among the wider public

The objectives of the review were to: reduce the number of whip offences; instigate a cultural change in riding style among British riders; promote good horsemanship; safeguard the welfare of horses and public perception of the sport.

The review concluded that there was a legitimate role for the whip in Racing. Most importantly of all, the review concluded that with appropriate design (such as the energy-absorbing, air-cushioned whip currently used in British Racing) and effective controls on use, the whip does not compromise the welfare of horses during a race. This was backed up by the available scientific evidence.

What's changed?

In 2012, in order to achieve the objectives of the review, the BHA introduced the following changes to the whip rules:

- A reduction in the permitted number of times a whip can be used in a race from 16 (subject to Stewards discretion) to seven uses in Flat racing and eight uses in Jump racing. This is the threshold figure which, if exceeded, triggers a review of the race by the Stewards
- Stewards would assess the ride and the use of the whip as a whole, and not simply the number of times the whip was used. They would consider factors such as the force with which the whip was used, whether the horse was allowed time to respond, and the position of the strokes. (NB Suspensions can be incurred for offences against any of these tenets, even if the frequency of use falls below the permitted threshold).
- The Stewards were given the discretion to disregard – if appropriate – any number of uses of the whip based on the above factors and to use the resultant number to determine the appropriate level of penalty, if any
- A new penalty structure was introduced to the effect that one use of the whip over the threshold (after discretion) would incur a two-day suspension for the rider, while two uses over the threshold would incur a four-day suspension, and three uses over would incur a seven-day suspension. After that, each use of the whip would incur an extra two days suspension
- For offences of seven or more days, a fine could be incurred – the fine is triggered for offences committed in races of 20K and above in National Hunt Racing and 27.5K in Flat races - with the

actual amount dependent on the value of the race, gravity of the offence and the finishing position of the horse.

To what extent have the objectives of the 2011 review been achieved?

Analysis of the latest figures for whip offences in 2015, compared with those in 2010 (the last full year before the introduction of the current rules) shows that:

- Despite effectively halving the threshold that triggers the Stewards to review a ride for use of the whip, total whip offences have reduced by almost half (48%) since 2010, from 1,029 (out of a total of 92,025 rides) to 538 in 2015 (out of a total of 88,075 rides), continuing a long-term, downward trend
- In 2015, the number of whip offences, expressed as a percentage of total rides, was 0.61%, compared with 1.12% in 2010
- Cases of interference have fallen by 40% since the introduction of the new rules
- In 2015, the number of instances where the use of the whip resulted in jockey suspensions of more than seven days fell by a third to 41, compared to 2014
- Three horses (or 0.003% of the total number of runners) were wealed as a result of whip use in 2015, compared to an average of 20 a year before the BHA amended the Rules. Veterinary Officers examine horses after each race and report to the Stewards any horse they believe has been wealed as a result of the use of the whip.
- As a percentage of total rides, whip offences are proportionately higher for Flat racing (0.41% of all rides) than for Jump racing (0.2% of all rides)
- Statistics for the top five Jump jockeys in 2015 show that between them they incurred just five offences out of a total of 3,896 rides (0.12%), with two out of the top five Jump jockeys not incurring any whip offences at all
- In 72 Group or Grade 1 races in 2015, 10 winning rides incurred a whip suspension (2014: 5). Between 2014 and 2015, the total number of whip suspensions in these types of races rose from 13 to 22.

What next?

The BHA's current view is that, overall, the new Rules and penalty structure have had a significant, positive effect on jockey behaviour, reducing the number of whip offences by almost half – within a threshold that itself has effectively been halved – and safeguarding the welfare of racehorses. The fact that some of British Racing's most prolific and successful Jump jockeys operate well within the permitted thresholds sends a positive signal to all riders that excessive use of the whip is not required in order to be successful.

The BHA will continue to monitor the use of the whip with horse welfare and public perception in mind, with a particular focus on high-value races. The BHA is currently carrying out a more detailed analysis of data relating to the penalties for all riding offences, including use of the whip, to ensure that the penalty structure remains fair and proportionate and that it provides a sufficient deterrent to breaches.

As part of the usual annual process undertaken with stakeholders, the BHA will consider whether the processes it has in place remain the most effective and that they operate in the best interests of the sport. This will be done in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders, including the Professional Jockey's Association.