



## **INJURIES AND FATAL INJURIES TO RACEHORSES**

### **Why can injuries be life-threatening in racehorses?**

The most serious type of injury sustained by racehorses are bone fractures. With advances in veterinary medicine a number of fractures sustained by horses can now be repaired, often allowing the horse to continue with either its racing career or another career, however, there are difficulties in repairing certain fractures that are not comparable to humans.

One of the biggest challenges for veterinary surgeons when treating all breeds of horses is not repairing the fracture per se, but the post-surgical complications and rehabilitation of a 500kg animal. Recuperation of a horse is a major welfare challenge, as horses do not adapt well to sustained periods of inactivity during convalescence. Additionally horses are not functionally adapted to or capable of spending large periods of time 'lying down' or having a limb put in a sling to prevent weight-bearing and consequently numerous life-threatening complications can result. Complicated, unstable fractures cannot withstand immediate weight-bearing and this means many fractures cannot be repaired. In such circumstances, the most humane measure is to put the horse down.

Additionally the risk of infection after injury, where the skin has been broken, is very high in horses partly due to their physiology and partly due to environmental contamination. Soft tissue injury that accompanies bone fractures in horses can further complicate repair after injury.

Racehorses enjoy a very high standard of care and quality of life when in training. Maintaining a comparable quality of life is a key consideration when considering future options for a horse that has had a serious injury or condition.

An article in [The Guardian](#) discussed in more detail the reasons horses have to be euthanised after sustaining certain injuries regardless of how much their owners and carers wish to save them.

### **What does the BHA do when fatalities occur?**

The BHA takes its responsibility for equine welfare very seriously and constantly reviews statistics and trends regarding racecourse facilities and racing surfaces, particularly if there is concern regarding horse safety.

All injuries and fatalities incurred on the racecourse are recorded and monitored to provide a benchmark from which the industry can continually strive to reduce injury rates. The data enables the BHA Veterinary Officers and officials to critically assess any situations where injury or fatality levels increase and to put in place measures to safeguard horse welfare.

The BHA conduct detailed investigations if we are concerned at increased incidence of fatalities or injuries. Where these investigations are course specific, the process involved includes:

- Thorough review of the career profiles of the injured horses, including any previously recorded on-course injury that they may have sustained.
- Video analysis of all incidents by the BHA's Course Inspectorate and Senior Veterinary Staff



- Mapping of serious injury incidents to establish whether there may be any localised track factors.
- On-site review of condition of track, fences/hurdles and racing programme as applicable involving racecourse Executive and Senior BHA Staff.
- Specific follow up action points for racecourses and/or trainers as necessary.