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Walking Horse owner 47 years, trainer 42 years

· Congress passed the Horse Protection Act in 1970 to eliminate the cruel and inhumane practice of soring horses. How close are we to achieving the goal?

I have been impressed with USDA efforts in the past few years, demanding the HIO's move forward in the elimination of the sore horse. Bringing the sniffer and thermography on board, if only on occasion, proves that chemical and mechanical soring is still rampant in the breed both performance and flat shod. The clinical proof, from the Mass Spec, that 100% of the horses checked at the 2011 Celebration for the use of foreign substances showed a positive result proves that sore horses have been presented and have passed palpation and locomotion tests through the use of anesthetic agents on the horses pasterns for years. HIO's for the most part can only discover the scarred or grossly non-compliant horse. Strong show management, such as NPWHA and PWHA, have made it plain that bi-lateral hair loss of any kind is not allowed on the grounds, taking the scarred or calloused horse out of play. Of all the HIO's, only three are HPA reliable, while most HIO's are controlled by people deeply ingrained in the sore horse mentality or by veterinarians that have owned and shown suspect horses themselves using family members as registered owners. How close is the USDA to achieving the goals of the HPA? Closer, but not there yet. The human element involved in the sore horse contingent will have to admit what they do to horses to their customers including those that know it already and those customers will have to demand that the soring stops. When Trainer of the Year goes to someone with multiple HPA violations – sore horse training appears acceptable. Soring of any kind must become socially unacceptable in reality rather than in pretense, until then, I don't believe soring can be regulated in a completely successful way. I lay much of this at the foot of the USDA for not putting a stop to this practice in forty-two (42) years.

· Can the industry achieve a consensus on how to carry out a self-regulatory program to enforce the Horse Protection Act in a consistent way?

As long as those with a stake in the promulgation of the sored horse regulate the big-lick part of the walking horse industry, I don't see how any consistency in self-regulation is possible. Show management that tolerates, even applauds, the sored horse is to blame. Trainers and owners know without a doubt those institutions that will not allow a sore horse on their grounds and those that will.

· What responsibilities should USDA-certified Horse Industry Organizations (HIOs) have within the industry?

Any USDA-certified HIO should have one responsibility within the industry and only one— to eradicate the sore horse through implementation of the Horse Protections Act and its regulations including mandatory penalties. An HIO should not be involved in rule making beyond pursuing and penalizing those responsible for attempting to haul or show a sore horse.

· How can the industry reconcile its inherent competition aspect with ensuring compliance with the Horse Protection Act?

When I think of the competition aspect vs. compliance, my first thought is that the look of the acceptable TWH show horse will have to change. Trainers will have to fess up to owners that their “special” horses require more chemical or mechanical enhancement than nature gave them. I feel that the grooms (working at the behest of the big lick trainer) should also be held responsible for the soring agents illegally applied to a horse’s pasterns or the bolts and blocks screwed into their feet. I also believe that those hauling horses deemed non-compliant at a competition venue should be held accountable unless they have a written statement from the trainer that all horses being hauled are compliant within the limits of the HPA and its regulations. However - I do believe the criminal prosecutions of whole barn staff will have a most desirous effect on owners and trainers.

· What can USDA do now (and in the future) to ensure compliance?

Continue to assimilate information leading to any prosecution of those involved in soring whether civil or criminal. Continue with the use of the mass spec and thermography as well as visual inspections.

· What responsibilities should USDA have within the industry with respect to enforcement and what hinders oversight of the HIOs and/or industry?

HIO’s should be de-certified after obvious anomalies regarding the HPA , its regulations and mandatory penalties, thus taking their insurance status away and making the show management responsible for the horses on their grounds.

· Should there be a prohibition of all action devices?

Action devices belong in the training barn, not on the show grounds. However, if the regulations were to include a bilateral hair loss rule, it would decrease the use of action devices all together, if as we are led to believe, action devices cause callouses and/or scarring. The scar rule leaves room for interpretation, bilateral hair loss does not.

· Should there be a prohibition of pads?

Personally, I don't see pads as the problem other than the package can hide lead, golf balls, screws, extraneous nails, etc. Rather than just pads – I find the use of bands on the padded or flat shod horse abhorrent- just one more way to present a horse as compliant that has been mechanically or chemically altered to the point that the hooves are no longer sound.

· Currently the Horse Protection regulations have a shoe weight limit on yearlings. Should there now be a shoe weight limit for all aged horses?

Along with action devices, weight restrictions create another type of unfair competition, will this increase a problem? A sixteen hand raw boned horse handles sixteen ounce shoe easier than a fifteen hand horse wearing the same and giving that sought after, semi-labored look – and the result? More fix on the big horse or hidden nails, wire under the shoe, fishing line around the coronary band, and so forth. I'm not going to address the weight involved in the padded horse, other than the lead and lead pads, extraneous nails, etc. for extra weight...once again to give that labored way of going So my thought is that size does matter – in horse shoes anyway.