

I am a lifetime member of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association. I have been raising Tennessee Walking Horses for nearly forty years. My purpose for raising these horses has been and continues to be for trail riding and other recreational use. I do not show. I believe that the people that have Tennessee Walkers and exhibit them in the show ring are a small minority of Tennessee Walking Horse owners. This minority is in control of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry, as an outsider to this group I, like the rest of the majority have minimal influence. I believe that I am typical of the average walking horse owner and am able to speak with the confidence the majority of walking horse owners share my opinions.

I have had occasion to visit facilities that do cater to the buying, selling, raising and training of Tennessee Walkers for the show ring. I was there either to look at a horse for purchase or a stallion for breeding. On those visits, as a prospective customer I was often given a tour of the entire facility, at which time I would be shown many of the horses in residence. During those tours I observed instances of horses that have obviously been sore on more than one occasion. When I say sore, I do not mean the use of pads, weights, action devices, or even the harnesses that force the horse into some abnormal positions for long periods of time with no relief. When I say sore, I do mean the use of some pain causing element, either mechanical or chemical. Pain was causing these horses to try and support its weight on its hind legs, lean against a wall, or in some cases to stand on its hind legs and resting on its knees on the front. Whatever the horse could do alleviate the pain. The owners or trainers made no effort to hide these horses from my view, which leads me to think either they see no wrong in what they are doing, or they fear no sanction.

Forty years have passed since the inception of the Horse Protection Act, yet soring continues all too frequently. The 2006 Celebration showed us that soring is rampant at the highest levels of the show industry. Anecdotal evidence tells us that the situation is worse at the less prestigious shows, where competitor routinely pull their horses from competition, or don't enter in the first place if inspectors other than those representing the HIOs are in attendance.

The Tennessee Walking Horse industry has consistently shown that it is unable and/or unwilling to police itself. As long as barefoot and liteshod horses are barred from exhibiting in the championship stakes this attitude will continue. As long as the use of pads, weights and action devices are encouraged, unscrupulous individuals will take advantage of the capacity of these devices to mask their soring techniques.

It is paramount that the USDA continue to monitor HIOs. USDA certified HIOs should shoulder the bulk of the responsibility for enforcing the HPA. The HIO inspectors need to be held accountable for their decisions. Willful failure to enforce standards should be fined.

I urge you to listen to the majority of Tennessee Walking Horse owners who ask you to make regulations more restrictive and increase sanctions against those who do such a disservice to the Walking Horse breed.

Gary Pegg