

My name is Mattie Reynolds and walking horses have been a part of my life since I could walk. Participating in this breed circuit has allowed me to afford to go to college as well as travel the world. I acted as show secretary for the German Championship show last year and have been invited back this year and I highly respect the German and other European clubs for their success and complete lack of any kind of soring or action devices. No German walking horse owner would ever consider the use of pads, chains, or any training methods that included the use of caustic chemicals. I contribute the complete lack of soring and performance horses in part to German culture and in part to a dedication to humane treatment of animals that is pervasive in Europe. Because the environment does not support abusive behavior, it is nonexistent. There is no need for government supervision or federal laws to prevent horse abuse because it simply does not exist to the extent that is obvious in the United States.

I am here today to express my whole hearted support of the eradication of the performance division within the walking horse breed. I believe that a sound horse would not be able to perform like the currently successful padded horses do now. I also believe that if exhibitors, trainers, and breeders do not stand together to support such a change that we may see a total disbanding of our breed. I understand that change to such a massive extent takes time and resources but it must be done.

After studying the questions sent out by email by TWHBEA, I wanted to focus on a select few. Firstly, 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? Yes, we can. It has already taken root in the Northwest. TWHEAO show management and executive committee, in conjunction with show DQP's, ensure that sore horses are not welcome in any manner at club-sponsored shows. Speaking as a member of the executive committee, our TWH community has made it a priority to create an environment that encourages sound horses in the show ring and trainers that only use non-abusive training techniques in their barns. It is successful to the extent that only a handful of performance exhibitors remain active in this area. I applaud their dedication and passion to their horses but if they are in violation of federal law, they are not welcome.

The Northwest Pleasure Tennessee Walking Horse Association has also proved successful in self regulation. Because of the nature of their club, performance horses and heavy shod horses are strictly prohibited from showing and are not allowed on show grounds if believed to be in violation of club rules. It's a hard job to stand up to one's peers and tell them that they are unwelcome but that's what makes self regulation successful in the Northwest. If other clubs can implement this type of self-regulation and support it, I believe that the example would spread and gain momentum.

The second question I would like to address is should there be a prohibition of all action devices and pads? Absolutely. If self-regulation programs gain strength, they can contribute greatly to the success of outlawing pads and action devices which in my mind

means the eventual eradication of sore horses. The self-regulation programs are not the only contributing factor to the elimination of pads and action devices, though. The Horse Protection Act, due to lack of funds and lobbyist support, has proved practically ineffectual in stopping the abuse of walking horses. With the recent federal convictions and national attention, I hope that the HPA will start to warrant more resources to apply to enforcement. I hope that with the threat of federal prison, trainers will begin to see the folly of continuing with the current trend of abuse, if not for the threat of federal prison then for the threat of losing popularity.

The last question I would like to address is what can the USDA do now, and in the future, to ensure more compliance? For starters, keep putting those guilty of breaking federal law in prison. For too long, horse abusers breaking federal law have gone unprosecuted. Is it no longer important to our horse showing communities that criminals go to jail? Do we want our youth riders raised in an atmosphere that not only promotes blatant abuse but also encourages it? I am no longer willing to support an association that is prepared to protect criminals.

The future of the walking horse breed has two possible outcomes: we can either come together as a breed and eliminate the "ideal" image of walking horses as padded, chained, and fixed or we can cease to exist. The federal government, thankfully, is no longer willing to sit idly by as walking horse trainers, owners, and exhibitors are rewarded for a horse that can barely crawl around an arena let alone act as a representative for the breed. I will continue to speak against padded, chained, and sore horses and urge other walking horse owners, exhibitors, trainers, and breeders to do the same until the change that this breed so desperately needs is made real. Thank you for your time.