



WHIP USE IN HORSERACING

RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS POSITION STATEMENT



Position Statement on the use of the whip in horseracing

THE RSPCA BELIEVES THAT WHIP USE MUST BE REDUCED TO THE MINIMUM NEEDED TO ENSURE HORSE AND JOCKEY SAFETY AND THAT WHIP RULES NEED TO BE ENFORCED

INTRODUCTION

The use of the whip in horseracing became a high profile issue in 2011 when excessive use of the whip was seen in the Grand National. In fact, the number of breaches of use of the whip had also been increasing since 2002 across all racing.



Inappropriate or excessive use of the whip can cause pain and is a welfare issue. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 sets out clear obligations for all those responsible, including on a temporary basis, for protected animals¹ to ensure the welfare needs of their animal are met. This includes ensuring that it is protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. There is no 'opt out' for horseracing.

The whip is used primarily for safety, correction and encouragement purposes. The RSPCA does not believe that a ban would be safe or practical as there will be instances where its use is required for genuine safety purposes but the present situation is untenable, particularly its excessive use in racing under the guise of encouragement.



WELFARE CONCERNS

Any use of the whip has the potential to cause suffering, and we are especially concerned about the use of a whip with excessive force or frequency. The way whips are used and the frequency with which they are used needed to be addressed. Simply reducing the number of hits does not solve the problem if the whip is used with excessive force which clearly has the potential to cause suffering.

Breaching of the BHA rules in the past has been common in both flat racing and national hunt especially in relation to frequency of use of the whip. In national hunt racing, a report showed that the risk of falling may well be associated with whip use and race progress. Horses which were being whipped and progressing through the race appeared to be at greater risk of falling compared to horses which were not whipped². In particular the study indicated that the use of the whip should be curtailed between obstacles as this could affect the horses balance and stride by lengthening and subsequently impede the horses natural ability to safely negotiate the oncoming fence.



¹ Article 2 Animal Welfare Act 2006

² G.L.Pinchbeck, C.J.Proudman, K.L.Morgan and N.P.French 2004. A prospective cohort study to investigate risk factors for horse falls in UK hurdle and steeplechase racing Department of Veterinary Clinical Science, University of Liverpool. The BHA do not consider that the study was not robust enough to reach the study's conclusions however further science related work needs to be done in this area.





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RECOMMENDATIONS

The RSPCA believe that both the method and frequency of using the whip needs to be strictly controlled. The present rules have yet to be fully evaluated to see whether there has been a culture change by jockeys whereas the whip aid is only resorted to having regard to the following ;-

- Limiting the frequency of use: The RSPCA would prefer the number of times it can be used to be limited to as low a number as possible to maintain genuine safety.
- Limiting the use of the whip: The RSPCA would like to see the use of the whip limited to a backhand only position. This would still provide the jockey with adequate means of communicating with the horse.
- The RSPCA would also like to see minimal use of the whip in the final stretch.
- Legal consequences: Jockeys need to remember that provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 place on them a duty to ensure the welfare needs of the horses they are responsible for and that there could be legal consequences if these are breached.
- Remedial training for jockeys: Offending jockeys with particular emphasis on amateur riders should be given further more specific training on the manner in which the whip is allowed to be used within the rules of racing.
- Better definitions for reasons to use a whip: The term use for safety purposes needs to be better defined in that although the use of the whip for safety may have an inherent factor of encouragement it should not be the primary reason for the application of the whip aid. The word encouragement should not be used in isolation as it implies that the whip is the primary means of winning a race. The term safety and guidance are better terms.

OTHER POSSIBLE LINKS:

- [Animal Welfare Act : www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/changingthelaw/whatwechanged/animalwelfareact](http://www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/changingthelaw/whatwechanged/animalwelfareact)
- [Our Horses : www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/horses](http://www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/horses)

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