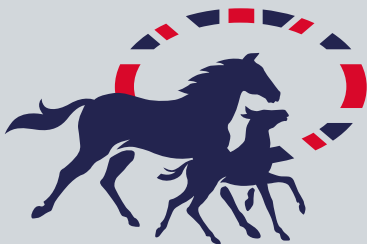


# TBA Equine Welfare Guidelines

## FOR THE THOROUGHBRED BREEDING SECTOR



THE  
THOROUGHBRED  
BREEDERS'  
ASSOCIATION

[thetba.co.uk](http://thetba.co.uk)

# TBA Equine Welfare Guidelines

## FOR THE THOROUGHBRED BREEDING SECTOR

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (TBA), recommends that this guidance is read in conjunction with the DEFRA *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids* (2017), presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 15 of the Animal Welfare Act (2006); the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses* (Wales), and the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equidae* (Scotland), (2009).

This document exists to provide additional advice in respect of the specialist management of Thoroughbreds, being bred and raised for the horse racing industry. This is not an exhaustive document, and owners and keepers are advised to keep themselves informed of best practice and advances in stud medicine and management techniques for the benefit of the horses in their care, which should include regular consultation with their veterinary surgeon.

These guidelines will be reviewed annually by the TBA, to ensure their continued accuracy, reflection of any legislative changes and close representation of the excellent standards of health and welfare broadly witnessed on Thoroughbred stud farms across Britain.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2006 (Scotland), make owners and keepers, both individuals and corporate bodies, responsible for ensuring that the welfare needs of horses in their care are met. To comply with the law, horses on stud farms must, as a minimum;

- have a suitable environment to live in
- have a healthy diet and fresh, clean water
- be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- have appropriate company
- be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease.

As good health and freedom from disease are integral components of the welfare of horses, Thoroughbred breeders should follow the recommendations described in the Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB or "the Levy Board"), *International Codes of Practice* (2022), to prevent and control the spread of disease.

## DUTY OF CARE

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Under the Animal Welfare Acts animal owners and keepers are under a legal duty of care for the animals for which they are responsible on a permanent or temporary basis. A person could therefore be responsible for an animal if they own it or are in charge of it. If an owner leaves an animal in the care of another person, it is the owner's duty to ensure the keeper is competent and has the necessary authority to act on their behalf in case of an emergency. Responsibility for an animal includes having an understanding of the specific health and welfare needs of the animal and having the appropriate knowledge and skills to take care of the animal.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLE

**At all stages during the breeding, raising and educating of Thoroughbreds, the welfare of horses should be the primary consideration. Proper treatment of horses, by appropriately trained and experienced personnel, will not only protect the wellbeing of the horses but will also safeguard individuals that come into contact with these animals. With correct handling and care, horses experience less stress and fear, thus reducing the risk of injury to all parties.**

It is the expectation of the TBA that all members will endeavour to uphold the welfare standards outlined within this document at all times and to the best of their ability, whilst it is hoped that the continued provision of educational opportunities and guidance materials by the TBA will support breeders in achieving and maintaining high standards of welfare on their stud farms.

## ENVIRONMENT

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For general guidance on keeping horses at grass and stable accommodation please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*. Supplementary advice relating specifically to the breeding and rearing of Thoroughbreds includes:

### PADDOCKS

Paddocks on stud farms should optimally range in size from small paddocks close to the foaling unit for mares with new-born foals i.e. 'nursery paddocks' (approximately 0.25 – 0.5 acres to accommodate a single mare and foal), to much larger paddocks suitable for groups of six mares and foals, or six to eight yearlings (approximately 5 – 10 acres).

### FENCING MATERIALS

In addition to the fencing materials (hedging, post and rail, electric fencing etc.), detailed in the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*, diamond weave wire fencing or rectangular patterned stock fencing is often installed around paddocks used by mares and foals, as there is less possibility of foals escaping through the gaps in rails; there is some flex in the wire between posts so that impact with the fencing may cause less harm to the horse; sheep can be easily contained if cross species grazing; and wild animals (e.g. deer and rabbits), have a less accessible entry to the paddock. The voids within the pattern of the wire fencing should be small enough so that a foal's hoof cannot become trapped. The perimeter of the paddock should be checked frequently for any holes emerging under the fencing created by burrowing animals and for any evidence of damage to the wire, or sharp protrusions.

### STABLE DIMENSIONS

Horses on the stud farm vary in size from the unweaned foal to the stallion or large broodmare. Minimum dimensions are suggested below (please see page 12 of the DEFRA *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*):

- Single horses: 12 x 12 ft
- Foaling boxes: 14 x 14 ft
- Mares and foals: 12 x 14 ft
- Stallions: 14 x 14 ft

The DEFRA *Code of Practice* does not include recommended minimum values for stallion boxes, but these should be sufficiently sized to allow the potentially large occupants to lie down in any direction unhampered, with some space for movement, stretching and expression of normal behaviours. Stallion handlers will also require adequate space to groom and change rugs/tack without putting themselves at any unnecessary risk. Stallions may spend more time in the stable than mares and young stock.

# BEHAVIOUR

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## EXERCISE

For general guidance on exercising horses please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*.

## HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

**Any restraint method used to assist normal management or treatment of the horse should be the most mild, effective method available and should only be applied by a competent person for the minimum period necessary. Sedatives must only be used if prescribed by a veterinary surgeon.**

### i. Stallions

Stallions require consistent and sympathetic handling both during their normal daily routine and in the covering yard. A stallion handler should be calm and confident, with the ability to create a partnership between themselves and the horse. Safety is paramount for the sake of the horse, stallion handler and those working in the covering shed, and the handler should have training and experience prior to working in the stallion unit.

Equipment used to handle and restrain a stallion includes a bridle, headcollar and shank with chain. Sedation may be required to perform certain tasks such as swabbing of the penis.

### ii. Pregnant mares

Pregnant mares generally become slower to move and less manoeuvrable as their pregnancy progresses to term and this should be borne in mind when handling them and particularly when undertaking veterinary or farriery tasks.

Mares are usually handled and restrained using a headcollar or bridle. Reproductive examinations normally take place within stocks to enable safe, speedy and accurate examination. These help to prevent the mare swinging from side to side or moving forward during examinations and treatment, preventing internal or external injury to the mare. They also act as a barrier between the mare and the veterinary surgeon and handlers should the mare become difficult to handle. Pregnant mares should be restrained calmly and sympathetically by experienced handlers.

Sedation may be used from time to time by a veterinary surgeon if considered essential to treat a mare, to ensure her safety and that of the handlers and with due consideration for the mare's condition.

### **iii. Foaling**

At foaling, mares should be handled calmly and sympathetically and with due regard for the welfare and safety of the mare, foal and handlers. Before, during, and after foaling the mare may exhibit abnormal behavioural characteristics. Unease, discomfort and pain at foaling may cause mares to lie down, stand up and attempt to roll quite violently, and to disregard normal handling techniques. Handlers should be aware of this and be prepared to respond appropriately. An experienced person should always be present at a foaling and should be ready to call for assistance, including a veterinary surgeon, if required. Restraint of the foaling mare should be undertaken with extreme care.

The foaling process should be accomplished as calmly as possible. In the case of maiden mares in particular, it is important to note that they may react unexpectedly at and after foaling. They may show intense protective attitude towards the foal, and in extreme circumstances may be aggressive towards handlers. These mares will often become less aggressive as they adjust to motherhood, but a watchful eye must be maintained to ensure that the mare learns to care for her foal appropriately. Conversely the mare may exhibit aggression and rejection of the foal, which must be addressed promptly by handlers to avoid harm coming to the foal. Veterinary intervention may be required in these cases. At all times it must be understood that the mare's behaviour is a natural process and not intentionally directed at handlers, and she must be treated with respect and good handling to achieve a successful outcome.

### **iv. The foal – first hours and days of life**

The new-born foal is generally initially wary of any intervention from humans and requires calm, consistent, sympathetic handling to ensure its welfare and to lay the foundations of the future relationship between horse and handler. Foals should be handled by, or under the supervision of, experienced and trained personnel. New foals will be particularly nervous of being handled around the head, and should be gently but firmly cradled front and back when being examined. It is also important to keep the foal close to and in sight of (i.e. in front of), the mare, to avoid distressing both mare and foal and to ease the handling process.

Most Thoroughbred foals will start to wear a headcollar and have their hooves picked out from day one after birth. The headcollar should not be pulled in anyway in the early days as foals will resist and may flip over and damage themselves. Instead, the cradling technique should be adopted, which will progress to leading from the headcollar with one handler on the left ('near'), side of the foal, with an additional follow up from behind until the foal is fully confident. Initial turn out should be in a small paddock, mare and foal alone, for two to three days to allow full bonding between mare and foal, before introduction to a small group of mares and foals of a similar age. In the case of a maiden mare, particularly one who is not overly maternal, additional care must be taken to prevent abandonment or rejection occurring.

Restraint of young foals is normally confined to them being cradled front and back whilst standing on the left side of the foal, or held gently but firmly in a corner where they cannot reverse backwards and turn over. Sometimes, light sedation may be deemed necessary for a veterinary procedure.

On the occasion where a mare dies or is unable to feed her foal at, or soon after foaling, the foal may have to be bottle fed until suitable fostering arrangements can be made. It is advisable that the foal is not treated as a pet, as they can very quickly become attached to their human 'mother' resulting in severe behavioural problems at that time and in later life. The sooner a foster mare or suitable equine companion can be found for the foal, to allow normal socialisation, the better.

#### **v. The older foal, weanling and yearling**

If foals are well handled from birth, this will facilitate their handling and reduce the need for restraint later in life. At all times young horses should be handled calmly, consistently and sympathetically by competent staff. Training and supervision of new and inexperienced staff are essential to ensure welfare and safety of horses and handlers.

#### **vi. Handling sick horses**

Horses that are in pain, or having veterinary treatment, may become stressed, anxious and difficult to handle. Where temperament changes are noted, it should initially be assumed that the animal is uncomfortable and efforts should be made to ascertain the source of this discomfort with support from the stud manager, veterinary surgeon, farrier, dentist and/or physio, as required. It may be necessary to use additional restraint to achieve a successful outcome but this should be kept to the minimum required and applied only by experienced handlers.



## COMPANY

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For general guidance on the socialisation and grouping of horses please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*. Supplementary advice relating specifically to the breeding and rearing of Thoroughbreds includes:

- i. Thoroughbred breeding stock should be grouped by category as follows:
  - Barren/Slipped/Rested (i.e.non-pregnant), mares
  - Maiden mares
  - Pregnant mares – small groups (ideally no more than six mares), formed according to similar due foaling dates
  - Mares with foals at foot – subdivided into age of foal
  - Weanlings – sub divided into colts and fillies at the appropriate time (but before nine months of age)
  - Yearlings (may range from six – 12 months old as of 1 January) – sub divided into colts and fillies at the appropriate time (but before nine months of age).

NB. Young stock, horses out of training and non-pregnant mares should not be grazed or housed in close proximity to pregnant mares due to their potential to carry and transmit the Equine Herpesvirus, which can cause abortion in pregnant mares and neurologic disease in all types of horse. Keeping pregnant mares in small, stable groups will assist with disease prevention.

- ii. Stallions and teasers are not suited to living in a group situation. They should be turned out in individual paddocks. They should not be kept in complete isolation, but should be stabled and turned out within sight and sound of other horses where possible.

## HEALTH AND WELFARE

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### ILLNESS AND INJURY

For general guidance on recognising the signs of ill health please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses* and the HBLB *International Codes of Practice*. Supplementary advice relating specifically to the breeding and rearing of Thoroughbreds includes:

- i. Everyone responsible for the supervision of breeding stock should be able to check the basic vital signs (demeanour, temperature, respiratory rate, colour of mucous membranes etc.), and be familiar with normal equine parameters for the age and pregnancy status of the animals under their care, which can be done with the advice, help and supervision of the stud's veterinary surgeon. Further examination of the vital signs of health and wellbeing can be performed by a veterinary surgeon and include heart rate, capillary refill times, gut sounds etc.
- ii. Where an infectious disease is suspected or identified, the stud's veterinary surgeon should be contacted and immediate action should be taken to contain the disease and prevent further spread. Protocols should be established in advance, so that staff are able to implement them at short notice.

All Thoroughbred breeders should comply with the Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB or "the Levy Board") *International Codes of Practice* (HBLB, 2022), a set of voluntary recommendations to help breeders, in conjunction with their veterinary surgeons, prevent and control specific diseases that occur in all breeds of horse and pony, including information on correct notification procedures.

The Codes are distributed in hard copy to TBA members on request, but are otherwise available online at <http://codes.hblb.org.uk/>

- iii. All new arrivals on the stud farm may pose a risk of introducing equine infectious disease to the resident herd and a risk assessment should be performed, veterinary history checked and biosecurity protocols followed, to safeguard the health of other horses on the premises.

## ROUTINE HEALTH CARE

For general guidance on parasite control, dentistry, biosecurity and isolation procedures please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*. Supplementary advice relating specifically to the breeding and rearing of Thoroughbreds includes:

### i. Vaccination

A vaccination programme for breeding stock should be devised in consultation with the stud's veterinary surgeon. Vaccinations to protect against Tetanus, Equine Influenza and Equine Herpesvirus (the latter being important in helping to protect individual mares against pregnancy loss, as well as reducing the risk of abortion storms within herds of pregnant mares in case of disease outbreak), are recommended, as is immunisation of pregnant mares to help protect the unborn foal against Rotavirus (contagious diarrhoea).

In addition to Tetanus, Equine Influenza and Equine Herpesvirus vaccinations, breeders who have previously been affected by *Lawsonia Intracellularis* in foals or young yearlings may also choose to vaccinate their foals against this bacterium, in which case the stud's veterinary surgeon should be consulted on the optimum timing for the administration of two Enterisol enemas.

### ii. Parasites

A worming and faecal worm egg count (FWEC) testing programme specific to the age and pregnancy status of each type of horse on the stud farm, should be devised in consultation with the stud's veterinary surgeon. Care should be taken to assess the suitability of wormers according to the age and pregnancy status of the horse requiring treatment.

Pregnant mares should be given a dewormer treatment for *Strongyloides Westeri* one month prior to their due date, in order to protect the [as yet unborn] foal from this parasite, which can pass from an untreated mare to her foal via her milk.

Foals may experience high worm egg counts as they will not yet have developed any natural immunity from previous exposure. As such, they are not suitable candidates for FWEC testing alone, as burdens can develop rapidly and may not be detected at the migratory stage. A sequential programme of worming (according to life cycle of each parasite), will be required to keep parasitic burdens low, which is especially important with Ascarids, which can cause colic and in extreme cases, rupture of the intestinal walls.

It should be remembered that FWEC testing is not a reliable method for detecting Tapeworm, which is shed intermittently, or parasites in the larval stage, such as Encysted Cyathostomin. Blood and salivary tests exist which can indicate the likelihood of recent exposure to these parasites.

Resistance by worms to the current treatments available has increased in all animals and with the development of no new drugs on the horizon, it is likely to become an increasing problem for horses. All worming and FWEC testing programmes should aim to identify and target the 20% of adult horses that carry 80% of the worm burden, keeping wormer doses to a minimum in the rest of the herd (other than when seasonal administration of treatments is required). Similarly, the effective management of paddocks (i.e. regular removal of faeces and cross-species grazing), to minimise worm egg burdens is vital.

### iii. Donor Colostrum

A refractometer is used to measure the quality of the colostrum in the dam's milk post foaling and when this is scored below 20%, a decision may be made to provide donor colostrum to the foal by bottle, or if the foal is lacking a suck reflex, the stud's veterinary surgeon may administer it via stomach tube. Donor colostrum should be given before the foal is around 12 hours old. The donor colostrum is usually collected from another mare with a high count who has ideally foaled at the same location, as antibodies produced will be specific to the local environment. If colostrum has been frozen, it will require gradual defrosting and should not be dethawed in a microwave or over-heated.

Donor colostrum may also be given where a foal cannot nurse from its own dam for the first 48 hours of life, due to her having a history of producing haemolytic foals.

### iv. Plasma Transfusions

Foals who have a poor transfer of colostrum immunity from their dam, or who were unable to nurse from their dam within the first 24 hours of life, may receive a transfusion of Hypermune plasma performed by the stud's veterinary surgeon, to boost their immune system.

Foals travelling to Ireland and France may also receive a transfusion of Rhodococcus Equi Hyperimmune RE Plasma to raise immunity against Rhodococcus Equi pneumonia, which can cause abscessation.

### v. Foot care

Owners and keepers should have an understanding of the care of a horse's feet and the need to treat lameness promptly and effectively. Feet should be trimmed regularly by an experienced farrier and attention paid to the growth, balance and symmetry of the feet. Horses on stud farms range from foals and yearlings to older mares and stallions, with some shod and others remaining unshod, so regular visits from a suitably experienced farrier should be standard practice. Horses' feet were not designed for shoes and the ideal scenario for non-athletic horses, is for them to be managed unshod if at all possible, with regular trimming and inspection.

Trimming of the feet of adult horses should be done in six week intervals as a minimum, with any adult horses presenting with cracks to the horn possibly requiring trimming every four to five weeks. Horses wearing shoes should have these replaced every five weeks, or sooner where indicated. Young foals may have their feet balanced more frequently than mature horses and should be examined every four weeks, when action and conformation will be assessed on hardstanding and any minor adjustments made. Any horses receiving specific remedial footcare may need to be monitored more frequently and the advice of the farrier should be sought.

**Standards of health and welfare can be optimised with well thought out stud procedures; close attention to detail; and in the routine daily observations of knowledgeable and experienced staff. In this respect, small changes can be noted and assessed, before larger and longer-term problems are able to establish.**

## TACK AND EQUIPMENT

On most stud farms equipment used will include headcollars and bridles, clip-on bits, lead ropes of various lengths and lunge lines. All tack should be regularly cleaned and checked to ensure comfort, safety and effectiveness. Where headcollars are left on mature breeding stock and young stock, they should be made of leather and regularly checked to ensure they continue to fit correctly, with particular attention paid to the latter who will need to have new headcollars fitted from time to time as they grow and until they reach maturity.

Other specialist and occasional use equipment may be used in certain situations and these include:

- i. **Chifney** – a ring bit attached to a leather headpiece, which may be used in place of a bridle. Used by experienced staff only, as depending on the angle and pressure exerted it can have a more severe effect than a conventional bit, e.g. a snaffle.
- ii. **Brushing boots or over-reach boots** – applied to the limbs to prevent injuries where horses strike into/tread on themselves in the faster paces, i.e. when exercising or during turn out.
- iii. **Grazing muzzle** – where diet is being controlled as part of a weight loss programme, a horse may wear a muzzle for no more than 12 hours per day to reduce intake of grass, whilst allowing free exercise and companionship. When the grazing muzzle is removed, the horse should be located in an area without access to grass and provided with an alternative type of forage, such as soaked hay (preferably with a low protein content). The muzzle should be cleaned regularly and the horse should be checked daily for any pressure sores or abrasions to the lips or nostrils.
- iv. **Fly mask** – various styles of fly masks, hoods and fringes are available, but all have the common purpose of protecting the horse's face, eyes and sometimes the ears from flies which cause Fly Strike and eye inflammation or infections. Fly masks should be removed daily to check for abrasions to the face and to examine the health of the eyes.
- v. **Wind-sucking collar or anti-crib biting muzzle** – not all horses who wind-suck or crib-bite will require these behaviours to be managed, but where they are detrimental to the health of the horse (sucking air into the stomach can cause recurrent gas colic in some individuals and the habitual chewing of surfaces such as fencing and the top of stable doors can cause uneven wear of the teeth), then a decision may be made to attempt to reduce the frequency of these stable vices. A wind-sucking collar may be fitted around the horse's head and neck, which discourages them from wind-sucking or crib-biting. Collars should be made from leather which will snap and free the horse if it becomes caught. Collars should be removed regularly for cleaning to eliminate scurf and debris, which may rub the skin and whilst the collar is removed the hair should be checked for any pressure sores or abrasions. Anti-crib biting muzzles can be an effective alternative to a collar, but should also be removed frequently to check for any pressure sores or abrasions to the mouth and nostrils.
- vi. **Lunge whip** – a long whip that is used to direct the size and shape of the circle the horse is to exercise on and to encourage upward transitions. The whip is used in a pointing or flicking gesture to support the voice aids of the handler.

## TRANSPORTING HORSES

For general guidance on transporting horses please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*. Supplementary advice relating specifically to the breeding and rearing of Thoroughbreds includes:

- i. Horses should have constant access to fresh water and forage prior to travel. Temperatures should be taken using a rectal thermometer, to check the wellbeing of the horses immediately prior to departure. In addition, blood samples and chest sounds/ultrasound may also be analysed to assess the health status of horses, in particular foals, in the 24 –48 hours prior to departure. Horses should be given immediate access to water, forage and a suitable rest area following transportation.
- ii. Horses should receive food and water at regular intervals while travelling, but at intervals of no more than 4.5 hours (to coincide with tachograph breaks for horseboxes/operators where this is applicable). Horses should be assessed for their general wellbeing whilst being offered water and a contingency plan may be required if horses are no longer fit for the intended journey.
- iii. The horse area should be of a moderate temperature, be well ventilated and on longer journeys horses should be able to lower their heads to clear the sinuses and debris from the lower respiratory tract, in order to help prevent Pleuropneumonia (shipping fever).
- iv. Mares in their final trimester of pregnancy and those with a foal at foot are often transported untied in a double stall, to give adequate space for any foal to lie down and for the mare to balance (often using her hind quarters to lean on). When transporting foals, bedding materials should cover the floor of the stall to allow them to lie down comfortably. Pregnant mares within a month of their due date or with mammary development should not be transported, except in emergency situations to access urgent veterinary assistance.
- v. Weanlings are often paired or grouped in double/larger stalls according to their size, so that they take confidence in having a companion.
- vi. Horseboxes and trailers should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between each journey.

## STUD PRACTICES

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### TEASING AND COVERING

- i. It should be noted that Article 12 of the *International Agreement on Breeding, Racing and Wagering (AIBRW)*, states that there can be no artificial breeding involved in conception or gestation in the Thoroughbred. To qualify for entry in the British General Stud Book (GSB), a Thoroughbred must, therefore, “be the result of a stallion’s mating with a mare which is the physical mounting of a mare by a stallion with intromission of the penis and ejaculation of semen into the reproductive tract” (Weatherbys, 2016). For this reason and to avoid injury to the stallion or mare, the act of covering is normally carried out ‘in hand’ on Thoroughbred stud farms.
- ii. On most Thoroughbred stud farms, reproductive management of the mare is a carefully controlled process using modern veterinary management techniques as an adjunct to the natural reproductive performance of the mare. Veterinary examination of the mare will provide an accurate assessment of when best to cover her to achieve conception, but the final decision on whether she is truly ready for covering will frequently be informed by use of a male horse (the “teaser”), to confirm oestrus in a process known as “teasing”. Teasing is normally carried out in hand, when a male horse is introduced to a filly or mare across a barrier covered in protective cladding. Bridles and headcollars are used to control the mare and teaser. The barrier will be of sufficient construction, height and length to protect the mare, teaser and handler while allowing the male horse to stimulate the mare so that handlers can pinpoint where she is in the oestrous cycle. Successful teasing requires a high level of practical skill and knowledge and should always be supervised by an experienced person. Evidence has shown that teasing releases spurts of the hormone Oxytocin in the mare, which encourages oestrous behaviour, therefore facilitating mating and fertility.

When a maiden is in season and readily accepts interaction with the teaser she may be prepared for mating with the stallion by a process known as “bouncing”, whereby the teaser will lift his front legs up and lean across her back i.e. imitating the position of the stallion during covering, but without direct contact of the reproductive organs.

Where a mare with a foal at foot is to be teased, the foal will be held at a safe distance from the teasing process. It is important to ensure that the foal is not injured during the process, and that both mare and foal experience minimum distress if they are temporarily held apart.

- iii. Covering will normally be conducted in hand, in order to protect the mare, stallion and handlers. Covering takes place in a designated covering yard, of a size and roof height suitable to accommodate the activity. Covering yards should have a non-slip, dust free floor, and may also have padded walls. Prior to covering, mares will undergo swabbing and blood sampling to check for freedom from venereal and other important infectious diseases, whilst the stallion will also have had negative blood tests and swabs at the beginning of each mating season. These procedures are essential to identify ‘carrier’ mares and stallions before mating commences. On arrival at the covering yard, the mare should be teased once more to check that she is well in oestrus; this particularly applies to maiden mares. She is then prepared for covering. The perineal area is washed thoroughly, by handlers wearing gloves, for biosecurity reasons. Felt boots are fitted to her hind feet to protect the stallion and handlers should she kick. Hind shoes will have

been removed prior to arrival in the covering yard. A tail bandage will be applied and a cape may also be fitted to her neck if the stallion is known to bite when covering. A nose twitch may also be applied to help the handlers to prevent the mare from moving forward rapidly or kicking out. Any twitch used must be made of appropriate materials (a soft, broad rope, but not string, twine or chain), and should only be applied to the nose for a maximum of five minutes. The mare is held by one or two handlers, the stallion is worked by an experienced stallion handler, and an additional person may be present to assist where necessary. These precautions and controls are all designed for the optimum welfare and safety of the horses and handlers involved. The covering process will vary from stud to stud, as will stallions in the manner in which they approach and cover mares. Stallion handlers will know the behaviour of the stallion they are working with, and their objective will be to achieve covering safely and successfully, allowing the stallion to behave as naturally as possible while not prolonging the process. Mare handlers should be experienced in working in the covering yard. Once the covering is successfully completed, any restraint to the mare should be relaxed immediately, the tail bandage, felt boots and cape will be removed and she will be returned to her yard or to the horsebox on which she has arrived.

- iv. Where a mare with a foal at foot is to be covered, the foal should be held securely by an experienced handler in a corner of the covering yard, within sight of the mare. Alternatively, the foal may be placed in a purpose-built, small, enclosed pen, where it will be unable to damage itself or a handler, whilst still being able to see and hear the mare.

## **FOALING**

- i. As pregnant mares approach full term they will remain grouped together in paddocks by due date, and be closely monitored by experienced personnel for signs that foaling is imminent. Mares should foal in individual foaling boxes, which may be larger than traditional stabling and are often equipped with CCTV cameras. Each foaling box should be meticulously cleaned and disinfected prior to a new mare entering it, and new bedding provided. It is most important not to cause stress to a heavily pregnant mare, and changes to her surroundings and routine at this stage should be made as calmly and smoothly as possible. A record of foaling history is an extremely useful tool as many mares adopt a similar pattern of behaviour year after year. Attention should be paid to unknown or maiden mares, the latter in particular, being difficult to 'read' at this stage. Thoroughbred studs have experienced personnel on duty day and night, and the foaling boxes and daily turn out paddocks should be monitored continuously once mares enter the final stages of pregnancy.
- ii. While the majority of foalings may pass without incident, all foalings on Thoroughbred studs should be attended by stud personnel. Whilst additional monitoring devices such as cameras and foaling alarms may be useful, physical monitoring of mares is most likely to ensure a presence at a foaling and a successful outcome. Foaling should be attended by experienced personnel who are able to check the position of the foetus in the birthing canal and rapidly identify an abnormal presentation and possible foaling complications, and react appropriately and promptly, including contacting the stud's veterinary surgeon if required, or admitting the mare to a veterinary hospital in case of emergency. The stud farm's location in relation to equine veterinary hospitals may dictate whether emergency procedures may have to be carried out on site, in which case suitable contingency plans, facilities and equipment should be prepared.



- iii. Many mares take a natural pause between stage two and three of labour, but as long as the foal's front limbs and nose are presented and the mare is not pushing, this is quite normal. Stage three of labour in Thoroughbred mares is often rapid in comparison to other species and most mares will not require assistance in the form of pulling the foal's forelimbs with the mare's contractions. It is more likely that minor corrections to the positioning of the front legs will be made by experienced foaling attendants, to facilitate the smooth delivery of the shoulders. Excessive pulling, or conversely a lack of appropriate assistance when required (dystocia), may result in foals being born with cracked ribs; compromised of oxygen supply (neonatal maladjustment syndrome, known as a 'dummy' foal); or internal damage or haemorrhage of the mare.

## **THE NEWBORN FOAL**

- i. It should be normal practice on a stud farm to ensure that a newborn foal is in good health and is behaving normally in the hours after birth. This includes having passed urine and meconium, receiving correct management of the navel, reaching developmental markers such as standing and feeding properly from the mare, ingesting colostrum and having a bright and alert demeanour, with good coloured membranes. The signs of a sick foal are often very subtle, and can progress speedily towards serious illness; at this stage the welfare of the foal is dependent on good horse husbandry and handling skills. It is therefore vitally important that stud personnel working in the foaling unit are highly experienced or closely supervised by experienced staff.

## **WEANING**

- i. Correct management of the foal is crucial to its long-term health, welfare and development. By the time they are between four – six months of age, Thoroughbred foals will be deriving more nutrition from grass, hay and hard feed and less from the mare's milk. Nutritional requirements of the foal and the mare are very different at this stage, and it is important to be able to manage them as individuals. This is the right time to separate the mare and foal from each other.
- ii. Methods of weaning vary, but it should be conducted with the aim of minimising stress to the mare and the foal. Paddock weaning, whereby single mares are removed sequentially (one or two mares per day) from a stable group of mares and foals until one 'nanny' mare remains, is preferable in that it appears least stressful to the foals, who remain in a group of known companions where a hierarchy and relationships are well developed. Abrupt weaning, where foals are confined to a stable while the mare is removed, may be utilised in some circumstances, e.g. where an injury has occurred which prevents free turn out. Care should be taken to ensure that the stable is a safe environment for the foal to spend its first few days after weaning. Whatever weaning method is used, it is important to ensure that the foal has been introduced to hard feed prior to weaning and is able to resume its normal feeding and exercise routine as soon as possible. It is particularly important to monitor foals for weight loss, growth and general health during this period.
- iii. Correct treatment of the mare at weaning is also crucial. While the bond between mare and foal will be less intense, separation from the foal will inevitably cause the mare some distress. Mares should be removed to a safe paddock well away from the foal and out of earshot. Temporarily limiting the quantity of nutrition and encouraging exercise will help to reduce milk yield and pressure on the udder, which should be closely monitored for signs of mastitis (inflammation/infection). Should this occur, veterinary attention will be required.

- iv. Early weaning may take place for reasons such as ill health or injury to the mare or foal, or poor milk yield. Occasionally a foal may gain more condition than is ideal for its frame/limb conformation and earlier weaning may take place to enable optimum management of the diet. The stud's veterinary surgeon will support with the decision-making process. The same care and attention should be applied to weaning in these circumstances, with particular attention paid to foal nutrition.

## **FOSTERING**

- i. If a mare with a newborn foal at foot dies or is no longer able to nurse the foal, then attempts will be made to foster the Thoroughbred foal onto a foster mare. Foster mares can be other Thoroughbred mares who have lost their own biological foal, or who will tolerate nursing two foals; or they may be another breed entirely, again they may have lost their own foal or they may be kept specifically for this role.
- ii. The management of the foster mare's biological foal (if applicable), will depend on age – it may be old enough to rear in a group with other weaned foster mare foals and could potentially take most of its nutrition from grass, hay and hard concentrate feed. If younger, it may be raised on formula milk administered by bottle or bucket.
- iii. The fostering process requires a careful and patient introduction of the Thoroughbred foal to the foster mare, by trained and experienced staff. The foster mare may initially wear a hood and hind limb hobbles until a satisfactory bond between mare and foal has been achieved. Sedation of the mare may be performed by a veterinary surgeon.
- iv. Occasionally, new foster mares may be admitted onto the stud farm with a level of urgency and potentially originating from premises operating with lower biosecurity standards. As such, it is highly recommended that they are isolated from the rest of the herd (with the exception of the foal they are fostering) and normal biosecurity protocols followed in terms of health testing and monitoring of new arrivals to ensure freedom from infectious disease, prior to being introduced to any other mares and foals.

## **VETERINARY EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT**

- i. The most common form of veterinary examination on a stud farm is palpation and ultrasound examination of the ovaries and uterus of the mare via the rectum, which takes place at certain points in the reproductive cycle to facilitate covering, and to identify pregnancy. This examination helps to reduce the number of times a mare is covered, supports the maintenance of healthy genital organs and aids with the diagnosis and treatment of reproductive disease. For the welfare and safety of the mare, handlers and veterinary surgeons, it is essential that mares are static and relaxed during the examination. Handlers should be knowledgeable, experienced and calm. Once mares become accustomed to the process they are generally accepting of it. To facilitate ease of examination, many stud farms have a set of stocks in place within which the mare stands. These generally have a front and rear door, the height of the latter being below the mare's vulva. Mares will also receive treatment, such as uterine lavage while standing in the stocks.

- ii. Some stud farms may choose to have mares examined in the stable around the door post. This has the advantage of being less disruptive to the mare, but may carry more risk of injury to the veterinary surgeon. The method of choice for individual stud farms will be agreed between the attending veterinary surgeon and the senior person responsible for the mares.
- iii. Occasionally it may be deemed necessary to sedate the mare for her welfare while a procedure is carried out, but this should always be done under veterinary supervision.
- iv. Veterinary examinations and treatments to breeding stock should always take place in a safe, enclosed area, and in the presence of at least one experienced handler who knows the horse in question.
- v. Regular (every other or daily when the mare is in season (oestrus)), veterinary examinations, by rectal palpation and ultrasound scanning, greatly improves the accuracy of prediction of the optimal day for covering mares and therefore the likelihood of a successful mating. Cervical swabs and smear tests (to identify mares with signs of uterine infection and/or inflammation), taken early during each oestrus period, will identify mares who are not suitable for covering until they have been appropriately treated and have recovered (confirmed by repeated swab and smear tests). These examinations are in addition to the *Codes of Practice* pre-breeding season swabbing to rule out venereal disease (CEM, Klebsiella and Pseudomonas), carrier status. Not performing routine early oestrus swab and smear tests and failing to ensure that the mare's vulva is properly stitched (a Caslick operation, if she requires one), risks sending mares for covering that have reduced chances for conception and increased chances of pregnancy failure, not only wasting the stallion's resources but also risking damaging the mare's uterine health and therefore her chances for a successful pregnancy that breeding season. Close liaison with the stud standing the stallion regarding what tests have been done and their results, helps everyone to maximise the chances of a successful outcome for the benefit of both the mare and the stallion.

**Skillful and knowledgeable handling of horses during treatment and examination are key to avoiding stress and injury to the horse. Young horses may be wary and unsettled in the presence of someone trying to carry out a procedure, but it is crucial to provide them with a non-eventful introduction to the veterinary surgeon's presence as this will pay dividends in future.**

## **PREGNANCY SCANNING**

- i. The veterinary surgeon will typically use ultrasound scanning (per rectum in the earlier stages of gestation/transabdominally in the later stages), to detect pregnancy; measure the size of the conceptual sac or foetus; identify a foetal heartbeat to confirm a live pregnancy; and to look for signs of normal growth and development. Early diagnosis of early pregnancy abnormality or loss will enable any necessary treatments to be performed and the mare to be prepared for mating again (if the loss occurs before endometrial cups are formed between around 30 – 60 days of gestation).
- ii. A first pregnancy scan is usually performed 14 – 16 days following covering, to ascertain whether the mare has conceived and if it is a single pregnancy. Horses are not usually able to successfully carry multiple concurrent pregnancies to full term and this can often end in the death of the smaller pregnancy, as the stronger foetus and its placenta occupy the largest space in the uterus and take most of the nutritional support. This usually results in the spontaneous miscarriage of both/all pregnancies and can greatly compromise the health and welfare of the mare. Where there is a second (or more), conceptus the veterinary surgeon will prompt the smaller pregnancy to resorb by applying a small amount of pressure to the sac through the rectal wall, which is sometimes referred to as “squeezing” a twin. This technique is highly successful when performed by experienced veterinary surgeons and has resulted in the marked reduction of twin pregnancy abortion in the modern Thoroughbred, as compared to the pre-scanning era.
- iii. A follow-up scan is usually performed between 26 – 30 days following mating, to ensure the pregnancy has a heartbeat. Additional scans may be performed at around 40 and 60 days gestation, to ensure that an early foetal death has not taken place and/or there are no signs to suggest infection or developmental abnormality. Many nomination invoices (covering fees), for stallions become payable on 1 October in the year the mating has taken place (depending on the terms of the contract, monies can be returned if there is a later pregnancy failure, still birth, or the foal dies shortly following birth). Therefore, pregnancy diagnosis will often be carried out in September to check that the pregnancy remains healthy at that time.

## **CASLICK**

- i. A caslick vulvoplasty procedure involves the veterinary surgeon placing a few stitches at the top of the mare’s vulval lips following covering and ovulation, to prevent air or bacteria entering the reproductive tract and potentially inhibiting conception, by allowing cervical and uterine infection to develop. A caslick operation is more commonly performed on a mare with poor (sloping), vulval conformation or those with a history of placentitis or pregnancy failure. The seal formed is opened prior to foaling by the veterinary surgeon in a procedure known as an episiotomy. Local anaesthetic and, if necessary, sedation may be used by the veterinary surgeon.

## MANAGEMENT OF THE NATURAL CYCLE

- i. Occasionally drugs such as oral progestogen (Regumate), and prostaglandins will be used to encourage a mare to cycle, such as when a mare has gone into lactational anoestrus (is not cycling naturally), following foaling, or when a barren mare fails to respond to natural lengthening of daylight stimulation and cycle, as spring approaches.
- ii. Short-cycling of the natural oestrus period may occasionally be used, potentially following a natural oestrus cycle where the cervical swab and smear were not 'clean' (i.e. cervical swab and smear tests reveal signs of uterine infection and/or inflammation), and the mare required antibiotic treatment, or when the end of the permitted covering season is approaching.
- iii. Luteinising hormones are commonly used to help the mare successfully ovulate following covering and to decrease the chances of her requiring a second ('cross'), cover, which may increase her susceptibility to developing uterine infection, which will reduce her chances of a successful conception and pregnancy.

## ABORTION

- i. If a mare is found to be aborting she should be given the same level of care and observation as per a regular foaling, with the understanding that she may require more assistance with the delivery if the foal died in utero or at some point during the delivery process and is no longer able to manipulate itself into an optimum position. It should be assumed that the abortion may have been caused by Equine Herpesvirus (EHV-1), until this has been ruled out by PCR testing of the foetus and placenta. Other common causes of abortion are placentitis and compromise of the blood flow to the foetus caused by an excessively long or twisted umbilical cord.
- ii. It is crucial that studs have biosecurity protocols in place; have a readily available stock of disinfectants and disposable PPE; and that staff are trained in correct procedure in the event of an abortion, as early actions can have consequences for any subsequent spread or control of a virus such as EHV-1. The stud's veterinary surgeon should be consulted and the HBLB International Codes of Practice should be followed.
- iii. EHV-1 is highly infectious and can be spread via direct contact, especially from touching or mares sniffing the aborted foetus/membranes/fluid, or by inhalation of airborne particles. As such, paddock companions, or any mares housed in stabling with shared air space (American barns or stables with ventilation grills/windows between boxes), should also be treated as a high-risk group and isolated from the rest of the herd until testing of the aborted foetus has been carried out. When virus abortion occurs, there is a higher risk of transmission to other mares where ventilation is restricted such as in barns, than when outdoors in a paddock environment.
- iv. A £200 subsidy towards the cost of a post mortem at an approved laboratory is available to TBA members following abortion or neonatal foal death (occurring within 14 days of birth), to assist with screening for EHV-1. Visit the post mortem subsidy page within the equine health and welfare area of the TBA website.

## PREPARATION AND SALE OF THOROUGHBRED BREEDING AND YOUNG STOCK AT PUBLIC AUCTION

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### SALE ENTRY AND DEMONSTRATION OF HIGH HEALTH STATUS

- i. The pre-sale requirements detailed in the Conditions of Sale or sales documentation information respective to the health certification, blood testing, swabbing and vaccination status of horses, should be checked and arranged within the time parameters outlined in the rules for each sale. The appropriate certificates and evidence should then be submitted to the sales house prior to the arrival of horses on the premises. This may include the uploading of vaccination records to the horse's e-passport via the Vaccination App.
- ii. The sales houses have their own individual rules pertaining to the maximum age of a mare on the date of the sale; the maximum stage of gestation permitted; and the minimum age of any foal being sold. These restrictions, introduced solely to safeguard the welfare of horses going through the ring, should be checked before horses are entered to be sold at public auction.
- iii. Consignors and prospective purchasers are advised to read the Conditions of Sale and to familiarise themselves with the definitions, allocation of responsibilities and any restrictions relating to the administration of medications; health certification; declaration of stable vices; and any circumstances, health conditions or positive post-sale health testing, which may mean that the horse is returnable to the vendor. Purchasers may wish to engage the services of a bloodstock agent.
- iv. Repeated endoscopic examination at the sale can be distressing and suboptimal in terms of infection. Vendors may wish to arrange for their horses, especially foals, to be video endoscoped shortly before the sale, recording the identification of the individual; the nostril used; and ensuring good quality imaging of the larynx and pharynx. This video should then be left at the repository for examination by the vets representing prospective purchasers. Full video endoscopy guidelines and repository rules are available from the individual sales houses.
- v. When selling entire male horses, especially foal colts and rigs, the advance examination and palpation of the testicles by a veterinary surgeon may avoid repeat manual examinations during the sale, which the horse may start to resent. The veterinary certificate can be presented to prospective purchasers or displayed on the stable door.

### PREPARATION FOR THE SALE

- i. The appropriate preparation in terms of nutrition, exercise, farrier work and veterinary care is required, to ensure the healthy presentation of horses, especially young stock and pregnant mares, at public auction. Additionally, the horse should be taught to stand correctly for physical inspection; become accustomed to being taken in and out of the stable to be shown; and become familiar with loading on and unloading from the horsebox.

- ii. A busy sales complex can be a stressful environment for all horses, especially pregnant mares and this does place some risk on the unborn foetus. Pregnant mares should therefore be prepared adequately for sale, so that they are able to be presented to prospective purchasers for inspection, without impacting their wellbeing. Sales preparation for pregnant mares will usually involve some in-hand walking exercise, so that they are fit enough to walk and have their action and conformation assessed by potential purchasers.
- iii. Any foals being sold will be prepared according to their age and developmental stage, with some in-hand walking likely. Care should be taken to ensure foals do not become footsore. Preventative steps should be taken well in advance of the sale to prepare the hooves and soles for presentation at public auction, with regular trimming, balanced nutrition and topical ointments commonly used to achieve strong feet and prevent bruised soles.
- iv. Yearlings are generally prepared with a combination of in-hand walking, long reining, or automated horse walker exercise. Some trot and canter work on the lunge is also recommended, with equal amounts of work performed on each rein. Post-sale wind (respiratory) testing does require the yearling to be exercised on the lunge in both directions for veterinary panel assessment.
- v. Care must be taken not to let sales horses carry too much condition – they want to look well rather than heavy; juveniles are future athletes and excess weight is detrimental to their development, putting excess strain on their joints and organs.
- vi. The trimming of sensory hair for cosmetic purposes, around the eyes, nostrils and muzzle, is strongly discouraged with Thoroughbreds. Sensory hairs are required by horses for spatial orientation when in darkness, to familiarise themselves with surroundings, mangers and water troughs. The removal or trimming of these hairs reduces the horse's ability to adapt to new environments.

## **AT THE SALE**

- i. Any equine welfare concerns whilst on site at Thoroughbred public auction houses should be reported in a timely fashion to the welfare officer, who can be contacted via the Control Office at Tattersalls; or the ID veterinary surgeons at Goffs. All participants are reminded that sales complexes are public spaces and the presentation and sale of Thoroughbreds serves as the racing and breeding industry's 'shop window'.
- ii. If a veterinary surgeon recommends that a horse requires medicinal treatment, which would require declaration at the rostrum immediately prior to sale, then this should not be withheld from the horse.

- iii. Vendors, consignors and breeders should monitor all horses in their draft for signs of fatigue or being footsore, especially foals. They should be managed to preserve energy levels, where possible. A minimum of at least one uninterrupted rest period of 30 minutes daily, taken during normal working hours, for every full day the horse is resident at the sales complex is recommended, so that horses are able to rest and potentially lie down; have free access to hay and water; and be able to urinate on straw. If foals are becoming tired and/or footsore, then additional/a longer rest period(s) should be given. The bit should be removed from the horse's mouth during this rest period and at frequent intervals during the day. This should optimise the welfare, demeanour and sale expectations of every horse.
- iv. If horses begin to resent the frequency at which they are being shown, taken in and out of their stable, or are reluctant to load or unload horseboxes, only reasonable and sympathetic measures should be used to encourage them. Where space constraints, layout of facilities and staffing levels permit, a dedicated member of staff may hold horses who are reluctant to enter stables outside, or allow them to graze in-hand for a short period.
- v. Staff should be suitably experienced at handling young and fit horses, particularly where colts may be stabled and shown in close proximity to fillies in oestrus. Particular care is required in congested areas for people and other horses, such as the chute to the sales ring and in the queue for the lunging rings.

## **FOLLOWING THE SALE**

- i. Horses should be left with adequate water and hay, and with a headcollar left on.
- ii. Purchasers must complete the Transfer of Ownership process with Weatherbys within 30 days of the sale taking place.



## EUTHANASIA AND CARE OF OLDER OR ILL HORSES

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For general guidance on the care of older horses or those living with health conditions please refer to the *Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Horses*.

End of life decision-making is never an easy subject for discussion, especially when there will inevitably be emotional attachments to the horse in question. Multiple owners may need to be consulted to reach a consensus, whilst the staff responsible for the day-to-day care of the animal may also have formed strong bonds. Further difficulties may arise around veterinary knowledge and understanding, cultural differences, religious standpoints, variances in ethical positions and changing financial circumstances.

All stud managers should have authorisations in place, ideally within their contracts of employment or boarding stud agreements, to permit a veterinary surgeon to put a horse to sleep on humane grounds immediately, when an emergency situation occurs for which there is no, or an extremely limited, chance of saving the animal and where it is in extreme distress or pain, such as a catastrophic trauma injury. The veterinary surgeon is also naturally obliged to act in the best interests of the health and wellbeing of any horse at all times, which is key to securing registration with the Royal College of veterinary surgeons (RCVS), which allows them to practice veterinary medicine in the United Kingdom. Accepting that Thoroughbreds are flight animals and that such accidents do occasionally happen, is often an important watershed moment in the journey of horse ownership, although the disappointment and sense of loss doesn't tend to get any easier to process.

Where horses have injuries, health conditions, congenital deformities, disease or advanced age-related degeneration, for which there is no known cure, medication or form of management that can control pain or discomfort without exacerbating other issues, then the opinion of a veterinary surgeon should be sought to make an assessment as to the horse's overall quality of life. It is here that the old adage of 'better a week early than a day too late' often applies. Taking ownership of an informed decision, can often end the discomfort or suffering of those individuals with a very poor prognosis. In this context, euthanasia is an important option for stud managers in ensuring the welfare of horses under their care. Planned euthanasia should ideally be carried out at the horse's usual place of residence and in familiar surroundings, to minimise stress.

It may be that a horse is still enjoying a reasonable quality of life with careful management and balancing of known health conditions and old injuries. In these situations, it is advisable to maintain regular dialogue with your veterinary surgeon and to occasionally reappraise what adjustments to medications and treatments need to be made in order to ensure continued freedom from discomfort. When increased inputs are required to ensure the comfort of horses with known health issues, this may apply increased pressures on finances, time and provision of resources. Potentially the owner may no longer have the facilities or expertise to manage the changing and more demanding needs of the animal. Occasionally and sadly, these circumstances can precipitate horses being found in a poor state of health or wellbeing. Whilst there are examples of aged Thoroughbreds finding new homes as companions, with the finances, facilities and a keen desire to manage their health conditions, these can be extremely difficult to identify in practice. Due diligence on prospective new owners is always recommended, but never more so than where commercial value of the animal is low and the inflated costs of keep, medication and nutrition may be high.

Occasionally, euthanasia may be selected on economic grounds, where a horse potentially requires a life-saving surgical procedure, or elective treatment that will give it the best prognosis for a good quality of life. It may be that the owner does not have the financial resources to pay for the procedure, or potentially they cannot justify the expenditure on other grounds, for example if the cost of treatment and rehabilitation exceeds the value of the animal. It is not easy, nor always advisable, to find new owners for horses in this situation and the expected quality of life of the horse must be carefully assessed. In any case, the welfare of the animal should be paramount and vital treatment should not be postponed indefinitely whilst options are investigated and negotiations take place.

## **LOANING, SELLING OR REHOMING THOROUGHBREDS**

Where Thoroughbreds are to be loaned to new homes it is recommended that a legally binding agreement is signed by both parties. The British Horse Society (BHS) has a template loan agreement that can be edited to reflect the particular circumstances for each horse (<https://www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/horse-ownership/loaning-a-horse>).

Sales houses, particularly those catering specifically to the Thoroughbred industry such as Tattersalls and Goffs, offer an ideal marketplace with a targeted audience for racing and breeding stock, but owners should consider whether this is the right thing to do with aged individuals, or those with known health conditions. Rules on maximum age and gestation of mares, in order to be eligible to be sold at public auction are in place to protect the welfare of horses, but beyond this vendors should be aware that there is little control over their horse's destiny (owner and country of destination) once in the hands of the auctioneer, other than being able to set a reserve minimum sales price. If the commercial value of the Thoroughbred is likely to be minimal, then demand for those individuals will be low.

Breeders should consider whether it is their own responsibility to manage the final days of a horse in declining health or of advanced age – potentially a broodmare who has produced several foals for them – rather than passing on this role to somebody else. A new keeper, without the longstanding loyalty, bond and knowledge of the animal, should not be expected to make decisions that others are afraid or unwilling to confront.

Young broodmares who are no longer required for breeding, may be suitable candidates to enter the leisure riding sector. The temperament of the horse should be assessed, as well as the health record of the animal. If there is a history of a severe tendon injury, pelvic fracture, arthritis etc, then they may not be consistently sound enough for ridden exercise. The opinion of your veterinary surgeon should be sought. Prospective owners should also be assessed for their understanding of how the management needs of Thoroughbreds may differ from other breeds and the resources available to them. For example, will the horse cope with individual turn out in a livery yard situation where they may be last to be brought in each evening? How might the rider's ability to cope with the horse in different scenarios be assessed, if the Thoroughbred is not fit enough to be ridden or to go on trial pre-sale? It is in the best interests of the horse and the individuals involved, if all parties go into any transactions or agreements fully informed of the expectations and responsibilities.

## RETIRING THOROUGHBREDS

Retired broodmares who are healthy and paddock sound often live in herds, turned out at grass through the summer months and they can be barn housed during extreme weather conditions. Aged Thoroughbreds may have increased nutritional requirements to maintain body condition and will still require regular handling for routine worming, vaccinations, farrier and dental visits. Some studs with expertise of managing Thoroughbreds offer discounted rates for breeders who would like to board their retired mares, such as Galloway Stud in Bedfordshire ([stuart@gallowaystud.com](mailto:stuart@gallowaystud.com)).

## EUTHANASIA GUIDANCE

**Research and prepare an end of life plan** – since it is not always possible to meticulously plan the optimum timing and method of euthanasia for each individual at the moment it is required, as emergency situations will occasionally present that require immediate action, it is recommended that breeders go through the thought process and are prepared for when the time comes to have to make end of life decisions on humane grounds. This will at least remove one element that has the potential to cause distress at these difficult times.

**Be in possession of all the facts** – your veterinary surgeon will answer your questions and explain processes in the level of detail that you require. There is no such thing as a stupid question!

**Think about who you would like to take care of the process and the carcass disposal** – your veterinary surgeon can administer a lethal injection or if they hold a firearms license and are in possession of a gun at the moment it is required, that method can also be considered. Both methods have different characteristics but are equally as humane.

A calm and experienced horse handler is crucial.

If horses have been put to sleep by gun rather than lethal injection, local hunt kennels can be a cost-effective means of disposal. Alternatively, the equine division of the National Fallen Stock Scheme, called the Equine End of Life Service ([www.equine-endoflife.co.uk](http://www.equine-endoflife.co.uk)) offer a range of euthanasia and collection services across Britain. If your horses are based at the Head Quarters of British Horse Racing, the Jockey Club Estates have a dedicated Newmarket Equine Collection Scheme ([www.jockeyclubestates.co.uk/newmarket/equine-disposal-scheme](http://www.jockeyclubestates.co.uk/newmarket/equine-disposal-scheme)), as does John Dixon ([jbdixonequine@gmail.com](mailto:jbdixonequine@gmail.com)).

**Access further information and seek support if you need it** – the Thoroughbred industry approved Euthanasia Guidelines and Euthanasia Decision Tree are a useful point of reference:

[http://media.britishhorseracing.com/bha/Welfare/HWB/EUTHANASIA\\_GUIDELINES.pdf](http://media.britishhorseracing.com/bha/Welfare/HWB/EUTHANASIA_GUIDELINES.pdf)

[http://media.britishhorseracing.com/bha/Welfare/HWB/DECISION\\_TREE.pdf](http://media.britishhorseracing.com/bha/Welfare/HWB/DECISION_TREE.pdf)

The British Horse Society initiative, 'Friends at the End' <https://www.bhs.org.uk/our-work/welfare/our-campaigns/friends-at-the-end> offers emotional and practical support for anyone wishing to talk through their options. World Horse Welfare has compiled 'Just in Case' resources to aid with euthanasia decision-making <https://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/advice/management/end-of-life>. Whilst the experienced team at Retraining of Racehorses <https://www.ror.org.uk/welfare/welfare-1/care-of-vulnerable-racehorses> are also happy to guide breeders on options for their Thoroughbreds.

**Don't forget your administrative responsibilities** – the passport issuing organisation (Weatherbys in the case of Thoroughbreds) should be notified of the death and the passport returned for the General Stud Book (GSB) database and document to be updated. If you wish to have the passport returned on sentimental grounds, Weatherbys will be happy to post it back to you once the update has been processed.

**Decide whether or not you would like your horse(s) to be permanently signed out of the human food chain** – if you would like to ensure that your horse cannot be processed by an abattoir producing meat for the human food chain, then sign the appropriate page in the passport (assuming this has not already been completed by the breeder/a previous owner), which will be titled 'Administration of Veterinary Medicinal Products (Medicinal Treatment)' and will then permit the administration of many common veterinary medications such as Equipalazone (Bute).

***Remember – a horse cannot while away the hours dreaming of better days to come, nor reminiscing on good times from the past; without the cerebral cortex of a human brain, they are very much rooted in the present, so we owe it to them to ensure that the here and now is a **life worth living** and that it is **free from permanent discomfort**.***

## ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

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The following administrative processes are required to ensure the inclusion of Thoroughbreds in the General Stud Book and/or for eligibility to race under BHA rules; or for meeting any legislative obligations. The Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) for Thoroughbreds is the General Stud Book (GSB), administered by Weatherbys.

- **30 day foal notification** – official notification is required within 30 days of the foal's date of birth and is free of charge if completed within this deadline. Notifications can be completed [online here](#).
- **Foal registration** – in order to register a foal, the dam must be registered as a broodmare and the covering certificate must be lodged online with Weatherbys, as confirmation that the mating took place. If registration is completed online by 31 July in the year of the foal's birth, the registration process can be completed at the lowest available fee. The stud's veterinary surgeon will also be required to record the foal's markings, implant a microchip and to take a blood DNA sample as part of the foal registration process.
- **Broodmare registration** – ideally this should be completed prior to mating, but is compulsory before being able to register her progeny.
- **Stallion registration** – an initial stallion registration is completed, followed by annual registrations carried out in advance of the covering season. All northern hemisphere matings should be submitted to Weatherbys annually by 1 September.
- **Notification of deceased Thoroughbreds** – the General Stud Book should be notified within 30 days that the horse has deceased, along with the date of death. The paper passport must be returned to Weatherbys for update.
- **Transfer of ownership** - it is a legal responsibility of the new owner of every horse to update Transfer of Ownership records with the Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO), within 30 days of any transaction taking place.

## EDUCATION AND VETERINARY RESEARCH

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The TBA recommends that all owners and keepers of breeding stock should attain the highest possible levels of skill and education relevant to the care and management of breeding stock.

The TBA's charitable objectives include:

### **i. A commitment to the provision of education:**

- Build and production of educational materials for the TBA's e-learning platform TB-Ed
- Annual Stud Farming Course (over three days)
- Annual Bloodstock Industry Conference
- Input and support of the Entry to Stud Employment (E2SE), training programme delivered by the National Stud
- Collaboration on the development of an education and training pathway for stud employees
- Guidance materials and protocols
- E-newsletters, webinars and website articles.

### **ii. Continued support of veterinary research:**

- Funding allocated to equine infectious disease surveillance services
- Donation to Equine Herpesvirus vaccine research and development
- Financial support of research projects, including examining early pregnancy loss and parasitology.

## CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

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The TBA recommends that breeders have boarding stud agreements (a template agreement is available free of charge to TBA members from the members' area of the website), in place with all stud managers taking responsibility for the care of their bloodstock, so that site visits can be carried out and responsibilities, specific requirements and the expectations of all parties can be discussed and agreed upon in advance of horses arriving on the premises.

TBA members are entitled to access an initial legal consultation free of charge, if required, where situations have arisen that give possible grounds for consideration of legal action. Please call the TBA on 01638 661321.

Where the lack of availability of finances is a contributing factor to the management of horses at a sub-optimal level and may be preventing free access to veterinary assistance or the ability to put a horse to sleep on humane grounds, please contact Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) on 01488 648998 urgently, for further guidance and to be directed to the appropriate services and support.

If you have an immediate and high level of concern regarding the welfare of any horse outside of your ownership/management it should be reported to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

## USEFUL LINKS

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[DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids](#)

[Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses \(Wales\)](#)

[Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equidae \(Scotland\)](#)

[HBLB International Codes of Practice](#)

[TBA Educational Resources \(TB-Ed\)](#)

[TBA Website for current news and guidance](#)

[TBA's Broodmare Ownership Guide](#)

[Newmarket Stud Farmers' Association \(NSFA\)](#)

[Weatherbys, General Stud Book \(GSB\)](#)

[Horse Welfare Board's Report - A Life Well Lived, February 2020](#)

[Retraining of Racehorses \(RoR\), Source A Horse](#)

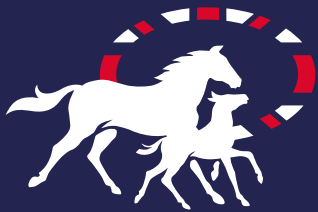
[Retraining of Racehorses \(RoR\), Vulnerable Horse Scheme](#)

[Industry Euthanasia Guidelines and Decision Tree](#)

[Retraining of Racehorses \(RoR\), Euthanasia Policy](#)

[Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#)





THE  
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BREEDERS'  
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