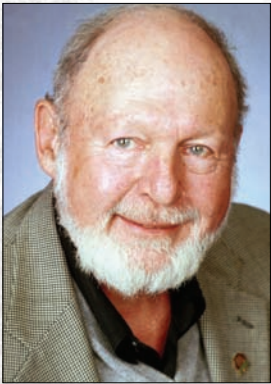


## TOC: Ready for the Challenges that Lie Ahead



Alan Landsburg

If I told you that polypropylene, recycled rubber and silica sand could save you and your stable a great deal of money, you would be free to wonder if I had finally lost it. Of course if I used the word Polytrack you'd have an inkling of what I was talking about. The three items noted above are part of a complex mixture that creates a surface apparently friendly to Thoroughbreds. Polytrack installation as a racetrack surfacing mix has won rave reviews at Turfway Park, Keeneland's training track, and as of mid February appears to be on its way to becoming a required change to all Thoroughbred tracks in California running for more than four consecutive weeks.

Polytrack first appeared in England in 1987, but it wasn't until 2001 that it debuted on a racecourse... Lingfield Park, in northern England, turned itself into an "all-weather arena," giving British Thoroughbreds a year round opportunity to race during the rainy winter months. After 14 years of using Polytrack on their training tracks, both private and public, the resulting drop in training injuries convinced trainers that it was good for racing as well as training; and as a result Britain now has three all weather tracks.

In 2004, Keeneland thought that it might be worth a shot. It's been there, on the 5/8 training track, for more than a year and a half. Nearby Turfway, basically a winter night running track, has a Polytrack surface. The result, according to Del Mar executive, Craig Fravel, is "only three catastrophic breakdowns occurred among 4,479 starters" during a four-month season. Fravel has suggested that Del Mar might be the first California track to install Polytrack. The more emphatic statement came from CHRB Chair, Richard Shapiro, who set in motion a regulation requiring Polytrack on all California tracks by 2007, noting that there were over 320 on-track fatalities in 2004 as partial motivation.

There are some interesting quotes on the Polytrack website from horsemen and women.

**Trainer Richard Mandella in *The Blood-Horse*:**

"I'd say it is the most promising thing I've seen in the future of racetrack surfaces. Horses get over it easily and I think that would decrease the percentage of injuries. From a first viewing, it is amazing. It could be the biggest answer to short fields."

**Jockey Patty Cooksey in *The Blood-Horse*:**

"It's absolutely awesome. It seems like the horses have springs on their feet. The surface doesn't cup away from them."

On the other hand, Jack Liebau, President of Bay Meadows and Hollywood Park, contends that the Board should "go slower," apparently unhappy at not knowing the cost, which has been estimated at 6-8 million dollars. Perhaps Mr. Liebau feels that it might be the equivalent of carpeting your house just before tearing it down.

Polytrack's kindness to our horses may keep them free from debilitating injuries, and add to our profitability. That's the plus. The question of where the money to lay the track will come from, can become a minus.

Your Board is in favor of the CHRB proposed ruling. We would like to see it gain support from our Owners. On page 18 of this magazine you will find the email address of the CHRB. Please express your feeling about the Polytrack Rule.

Alan Landsburg