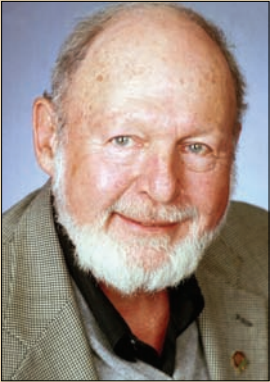


A Matter of Disclosure



Alan Landsburg

The TOC Southern California Annual Meeting held on August 12 at Del Mar had the largest attendance to date. More than 250 members participated, while approximately 35 owners attended TOC's first Northern California Annual Meeting held on September 30 at Golden Gate Fields.

One of the highlights of the Q and A – following the legally required elements of disclosing business affairs – at the Southern California annual meeting dealt with equine medication. The subject narrowed to an area troubling to many of those present: “Vet Bills.” Unlike transportation or farrier charges, the vet bill leads most of us into a puzzle-filled language barrier akin to talking to the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland. Perhaps one exception is the cost of Lasix.

I'm very familiar with the charges for Lasix, the ever-present “L” on the program. Introduced as a means of combating the problem of bleeding during a race, Lasix was found to also enhance performance. In order to create a more level playing field, veterinarians and trainers were allowed to inject it even if a horse had never shown a tendency to bleed. Lasix use is virtually universal in U.S. racing. I wonder if we should simply take it for granted that every horse has it unless it is noted as NOT having Lasix.

Beside the “L” is the “B” for Phenylbutazone or “Bute” as it's commonly called, which helps relieve the soreness that may accompany the daily training routine. Those of us who have suffered the pangs of tennis elbow, shin splints, or cranky backs, know the benefit of a steroid compound. “Bute” does much the same for horses, and is almost as common in use as Lasix.

The cornucopia of medication held in the drawers of veterinarians' trucks includes drugs as unfamiliar to most of us as the prescriptions scrawled by our own trusted physicians. We learn about therapeutics that have been given to our treasured thoroughbreds days or even weeks after administration. Annotations on our bills generally tell us the name of the drug that has been administered. Why they were ordered is the general province of conversations and directions determined by trainers and vets. The bill tells us what was used, but it doesn't say why it was used.

A number of suggestions were made by owners who had found comfort in their discussions with their trainers, and in some cases with the vets themselves. For the most part we take on trust the information, however long after the fact, that the drugs administered by the vet were requested by the trainer in an effort to make the horse feel better.

We spent some time discussing the fact that a private and confidential file exists of all medications that have been given to each and every horse. Some of the questions relating to these files included suggestions that, at some point in the horse's history, they should be made public. Would it be proper for an owner who claimed a horse to see those records? In the interest of transparency, should these records be made public in any form?

We want to know what you think.

Please email your answer to TOC@toconline.com.