

TOC Industry Summit



Jerry Moss, Duncan Taylor and Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs.



Burnie Lenau and Harry Wilson.



Craig Fravel, Tom Varela, Guy Lamothe, George Haines, Robert Hartman and Chris Korby.



Tom Robbins, John Harris, John Sadler and Marsha Naify.

TOC members asked for more forums to discuss the issues near and dear to their hearts and wallets – such as track surfaces, the future of California’s racing calendar, and satellite wagering – and they turned out in impressive numbers for just such a forum on Feb. 13. Santa Anita’s Baldwin Terrace room was filled to capacity for TOC’s first Owner-Trainer Industry Summit.

First up was a panel on California’s satellite wagering system, which included Tom Varela of SCOTWINC, George Haines of Santa Anita, Craig Fravel of Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, Robert Hartman of Golden Gate Fields and Chris Korby of CARF. Discussion focused on possible long-term solutions for the aging satellite network. Established nearly 25 years ago, the system includes 32 wagering sites throughout California, predominantly at fairs. It has been losing money in recent years due to a combination of factors including migration of handle from brick and mortar locations to Internet wagering, high fixed costs, and outdated facilities. Proposed solutions include opening up-to-date “mini-satellites” in locations such as sports bars, card clubs and Indian casinos, as well as reducing the 20-mile radius restriction for placement of new mini-satellites in relation to existing California wagering facilities.

The second panel included John Harris of the CHRB, Tom Robbins of Del Mar and Trainer John Sadler, who discussed California’s year-round racing calendar and what it might look like in future years. Possible scenarios discussed included reductions in race days and longer breaks between race meets. In response to a question from the audience, Harris explained the process of race date allocation and the importance of consensus among all industry partners – including the owners, trainers, racetracks and labor.

The closing panel on track surfaces included Drs. Lucy Anthenill and Francisco Uzol of the UC Davis Laboratory, Dr. Rick Arthur of UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and CHRB, trainers John Shirreffs and John Sadler, Fravel, and professional handicapper Toby Turrell. Drs. Anthenill and Uzol presented statistics on findings from their necropsy program on racehorse fatalities from 2005 through 2009 on dirt, synthetic and turf tracks. Additional data was presented by Dr. Arthur on catastrophic injuries both in racing and in training. Fravel presented statistics reflecting Del Mar’s experience in relation to horse injuries, field sizes, and various runner statistics before and after the installation of Polytrack. Shirreffs and Sadler detailed some of their experiences on synthetic surfaces, explaining the reasons they favor a return to traditional dirt tracks, while Turrell spoke about some of the misperceptions about handicapping synthetic versus dirt track races. Audience members participated in a lengthy question and answer session, a very civil and useful dialogue in which panelists and audience members alike expressed the desire to work together to find a solution to California’s track surface issue.