

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Your Say: What is the fate of the sport of horse racing?



Fashion Plate with jockey Gary Stevens wins the Santa Anita Oaks.
(Benoit Photos)

We asked readers if horse racing should be banned or reformed

By [U-T Letters](#)
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Owners care deeply about their horses

On behalf of the 7,000-plus members of the Thoroughbred Owners of California, I wanted to respond to the U-T's request for points of view on the business of thoroughbred racing in California.

Our members own, train and care for the thoroughbreds that compete at California race tracks from the Bay Area to Del Mar. California is home to more than 535,000 horses, according to a study by the American Horse Council. Raising and caring for horses is integral to the state's economy.

To start, our horses receive extraordinary levels of care compared to other domesticated animals. They are tended to and monitored daily by trainers, exercise riders, personal grooms, private veterinarians and regulatory veterinarians. Their diets, exercise and daily regimen are carefully overseen by equine professionals.

They are subject to pre-race and post-race examinations and testing. We wouldn't have it any other way as we are committed to creating the safest environment possible for these athletes to race and train.

The anomalous incidence of serious injuries at Santa Anita this winter served as a reminder that we can always strive to improve and enhance our mission to create the safest conditions for racing and training.

That's why we've endorsed reform measures recently put into place in California that offer additional protections to horse and rider, including revamping training protocols to provide additional veterinary checks and safeguards, reduction and phased elimination of race-day medication and more stringent guidelines on the use of the riding crop.

We believe these reforms, like those put in place at Del Mar in the last few years, will reduce the incidence of serious injury and should be given a chance to succeed.

For the vast majority of our members, family farmers and small-business owners, owning, training and working with horses is a labor of love and a way of life. These people care deeply for their horses. Some fringe activists would have you believe that this is not the case, and we are facing up to the fact that a small minority will never be satisfied by our efforts.

While we may not be able to eliminate all of the risks inherent in equine sporting activity, we will continue to work to protect the safety and welfare of the horses in our care.

Greg Avioli, president & CEO of the Thoroughbred Owners of California