

# ATBC Newsletter

April 2011



## ATBC

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This publication is the official Newsletter of the

### Australian Thoroughbred Breeders Club Limited

The Club, which currently has over 200 members, was formed to assist thoroughbred breeders through the presentation of talks, seminars, stud visits and social activities as well as providing incentive schemes and a Stallion Tender Scheme. New members are always welcome and the membership can be arranged by contacting the Club Secretary. Annual membership fees are \$ 50 for a single member or \$ 70 for a joint membership, which includes families, partnerships or corporate bodies

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### Stand Alone Saturday Meeting at Hawkesbury Race Club April 30th, 2011

Members are welcome to come to our Clubhouse (at the entrance to the Race Club) for a quiet Tea or Coffee.

Champagne will be offered to members with a winning horse!

It is also a good time to return or borrow library books, a number of which are currently on outstanding loans.

### 2011 Bus Trip

As a number of our regulars will be on overseas on horse related trips (lucky devils!), we have decided to organise a visit to the Hunter Valley stallion parades held on the weekend of 27th/28th August.

Arrowfield, Coolmore, Darley & Widden Studs will be pleased to include us. Numbers will be strictly limited to 20, so it will be first in best dressed by expression of interest. We will be staying at Noahs in the Valley Motel Muswellbrook who will supply us with dinner and breakfast. Depending on where members live we will either hire a mini-bus or car pool. Please ring Dianne Lanham on 45 796 451 as soon as possible so that we can get an idea of numbers and from whence they come.

**Production Deadline:** Please note that advertisements and articles must be received by the third Tuesday of Each month to guarantee their appearance in that month's Newsletter

## **New Members**

We welcome Rob Caruso of Wamboin NSW.

## **Horses for Sale or Lease**

We are improving the website further so that Members can advertise their horses for sale or lease. Interested parties should contact Peter Haynes either via the website or on (02) 4574 0968

## **BOBS for Broodmare Owners**

John Gatfield of Racing NSW is keen to see a bonus implemented for the breeders of winning horses, as documented in the Stud Book. This sector of the industry has not been eligible for the bonus. At the moment if you sell a horse there is no bonus for you as the actual breeder.

Unfortunately for the time being there is no funding available for this idea, although Mr. Gatfield has indicated that if the court case concerning wagering revenue is successful there could be some funds available.

If anyone has any bright ideas as to how such a bonus could be financed, Mr. Gatfield would be pleased to hear from you on 95517552

## **Flavivirus disease in horses**

Thoroughbred Breeders have drawn their members attention to a serious mosquito borne viral infection called Flavivirus which is prevalent in NSW, Victoria and South Australia following the particularly wet spring and summer. An infected horse will become uncoordinated and barely be able to stand. Most horses with clinical signs will recover over several weeks with proper care, but there is a worrying 10% mortality rate.

The current situation is summarized by the NSW Department of Primary Industries at the link

[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/nervous](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/nervous)

## **Equine Research News**

Just a reminder that this newsletter is available either by contacting the Club and indicating that you would like us to include a copy with your ATBC newsletter mail out or by email by contacting [rirdc@rirdc.gov.au](mailto:rirdc@rirdc.gov.au)

The March 2011 edition will become a collectors item as it contains a full page write up of our very own Club, including photograph of President John Holloman.

## **Books for your library**

There is a number of very interesting books and catalogues of which the Club already has copies available to members in the Clubhouse at no charge. Please contact one of the Committee if you would like to see these.

### **Why does it appear that Modern Racehorses are less Sturdy?**

It has often occurred to me that, in a general sense, all trainers carry out their work in a similar fashion. This I thought was because, over time, the practice had been so finely honed that best practice now approached perfection. The next century will, therefore, focus on the evolution of communication skills so that trainers occasionally actually tell owners what is happening with their horses.

Larry Greetham of Piplyn Lodge gave me a 1990 American publication containing an article entitled 'A Short Course In Exercise Physiology' by Tom Ivers. The Author claimed that: "After a decade of intensive research and application with innovative training techniques, race horses, at least, have repaid that investment of time, thought and hard work with some \$14 million in purse winnings from scientifically conditioned animals."

This being the case it could be expected that this improvement would be manifest. However, the winning times of U.S. triple crown winners has not improved at all in the last 70 odd years, which initially seems to contradict any belief that a more scientific approach has achieved very much at all. Indeed the reverse is true. The modern cohort of U.S. racehorses not only seem to be no faster, but also start less and get injured more often.

Why? In an excellent article, "Do We need a Sturdier Racehorse?", Bill Finley attempts to identify the cause.

One potential answer is modern breeding practices. Despite our attempts to breed the best to the best, many believe we are ending up with a less sturdy animal. However, this is questioned by genetic experts, because the time frame is simply too short to result in such an abrupt change in a whole population. Genetic trends move at a much slower, almost glacial, pace. However, there are examples when rapid changes do occur in species brought about by sudden and dramatic changes in their environment. This is a relatively recently recognised and poorly understood phenomenon, known as epigenetics. Examples are the famine in Holland in World War II and China in 1958-59, which lead to children being born smaller, shorter-lived and more prone to disease.

It is difficult to identify what changes in the recent lives of thoroughbreds could have been so dramatic as to have accelerated such a genetic change, however, John Holloman has pointed out that the selection process in Australia has become significantly more concentrated. The market dictates a need for early maturing, sprinting types. Speed is essential; soundness only desirable. We have reduced the stallion population considerably with new found access to the most sought after international stallions, who cover vastly larger books of mares. The result is a significant shrinking of the gene pool of a species already inbred by design. Six years ago we visited Robbie Horne's stables at Maraylya and he was already warning of the dangers he saw in this market obsession with speed that results in the out-breeding of bone density. It is probably the case that only a change in the market, producing a higher demand for soundness, will dictate breeders to create sturdier horses. An owner is unlikely to make money from

a horse, however brilliant, that breaks down and only runs a couple of times so there may well be such a point. The owner of Three Chimney Farm, Robert Clay, has said that he has already seen some movement in the direction of durability and away from speed and brilliance.

There is also the financial lure of the breeding barn. Owners are concerned with the residual value of their charges. Thus the best horses go on to breeding careers after only brief racing lives. There is a marked preference for brilliance over durability in the market place and breeders respond to these market dictates. Among the top 25 leading sires by 2010 progeny earnings there were 12 who never won a race at 9 furlongs or longer and five of those who never won beyond 7 furlongs.

Another issue to be considered is the use of drugs, because the author is looking at outcomes in the USA, where drug use has been far less regulated than in Australia. Again there are contrary views. One trainer suggests that the use of drugs, rather than making horses run faster, have longer careers and get hurt less, has had the exact opposite effect. Another argues that this doesn't explain horses breaking down after only one or two starts when long term use of drugs could not possibly be the issue.

In the U.S. there is widespread use of the short-acting diuretic Lasix, which has a significant impact on the recovery period and thus reduces the number of potential starts. Initially used to prevent bleeding in horses, it was found that some horses improved dramatically when treated with it. It is now used on almost all American racehorses, regardless of susceptibility to bleeding. Bill Finley is nothing if not thorough in his search for the truth. He conducted an experiment on himself, using Lasix in his own exercise regime. I doubt that the effects on a middle aged (he's 49) seven-minute mile man proves much, but he was slower under Lasix and didn't notice any improved bounce back. He just spent more time in the toilet and lost a heap of weight.

The use of Lasix is so entrenched in the U.S. that it appears unlikely that there will ever be a return to drug-free racing, but as this is illegal in Australia it can not be the reason for any similar reduction in the sturdiness in our stock.

There is a view that economics is the culprit. High end trainers need to keep their win rates up and so only run their horses when they have a good chance of winning. Anyone who has ever watched American ball sports on the television will have soon realised that Americans are obsessed with sporting statistics. Some times I think that they enjoy watching the statistics more than the play that they represent.

Are racing surfaces the culprit? It is too early to tell whether synthetic tracks replacing the traditional dirt tracks in America will result in lower breakdown rates. Lower frequencies occur in countries where they race on turf. They may be having an effect on times; deeper tracks requiring more effort to run at the same speed. However, the track superintendent at Churchill Downs, who has been employed there for 38 years, says the track is no different than when he started.

Notwithstanding all the unsatisfactorily answered issues mentioned above, it seems that the most favoured opinion on the apparent inferiority of the modern thoroughbred is that modern

horse management has changed dramatically. Therefore, let us return to this, which is at the very heart of the Tom Ivers writings.

Ivers argues that the goal of exercise is to develop a strong unbreakable structure of bones, tendons, ligaments, cartilage etc, that will prevent injury when event specific exercise is taken on, together with the development of an above normal cardiovascular system.

He advocates a slow, gradual exercise build up so that the horse's body learns to tolerate and master the increased levels of stress. He acknowledges that the animal needs time to recover from particularly tough workouts, perhaps three to five days, but warns against total rest, suggesting instead continuing, but lighter work, during this recovery period, which allows the debris from damaged tissue to be flushed away and any soreness and stiffness to be avoided. After the recovery period further and even tougher workouts can be undertaken, progressively increasing fitness. He warns against going too fast too early and the perils of being too kind after tough workouts. Slow progressive conditioning with hard and easy days is the way to avoid injury.

This conditioning process allows structural and cardiovascular development to precede race specific muscle fitness development. Ivers suggests 90 days long, slow mileage build up for structural development, followed by 90 days work at two-thirds speed for cardiovascular development, leading to 90 day tough, race specific workouts, now made possible by the structural and cardiovascular achievements in the first 180 days. Of course economics becomes an issue when city training cost exceed \$100 a day plus extras. Few owners will be willing to make such a huge investment. If a shorter time frame is required Ivers suggests the available time still be split in similar proportions.

Of course, appropriate nutrition should support the workload. He suggests that the horse should not lose weight during training, merely redistribute itself.

There is a particular quote which I think sums up the theory perfectly: " All exercise performed by the horse at moderate speed is, as far as bone, tendons, ligaments, cartilage and fascia are concerned money in the bank. All peak performances withdraw from the bank. If there is a lot of reserve stacked up in the bank, then these withdrawals do no harm and, in fact, encourage additional reserves after brief recovery periods."

All this seems to be totally logical. It is the way that all athletes train. Why then does it seem not to be achieving the desired result in America thoroughbreds? It should be pointed out that there is an 'old school' of thought that maintains that not racing a horse too frequently is a fallacy and they point to a number of notable examples of horses that apparently thrive on regular racing. Secretariat had his colours lowered on two occasions in 8 weeks by different horses, each backing up in less than a week. The 1941 triple Crown campaign of Whirlaway included 20 starts with a Derby Trial win on the Tuesday before the Kentucky Derby and an allowance win between the Preakness and the Belmont. Today, top level horses run less frequently. Ghostzapper won the 2004 U.S. Horse of the Year on just 4 starts. This year's Belmont field contained neither the Kentucky Derby, nor Preakness winner.

Many disagree and cite figures that identify what is known as the 'bounce theory', which states that horses coming off a top effort need time to recover, or they run poorly at their next

run. One trainer said “ When I see what trainers did years ago it makes me scratch my head; if I tried to do that with my horses they would all be on the farm”.

If there is a difference in management practice that has resulted in a weaker animal, it has been suggested that it may be because of the way 2 year olds are currently raced. In 1964, 52% of the U.S. foal crop raced and averaged 6.9 starts. From 2004-2009 only 30% started and averaged only 3 starts. It is claimed by a prominent vet that horses that make their first career start as a 2 year old earn twice as much as those who begin as 3 year olds and show less predisposition to injury and have longer careers. He hypothesizes that “...it is easier for a horse to adapt to training when begun at the end of skeletal growth which takes advantage of the established blood supply and cell populations. If you wait longer, until age 3, the musculoskeletal system is allowed to atrophy at the end of growth because of lack of training stimulus.”

The problem is far worse in the US where small fields are having an effect on gambling revenue. Hollywood Park has had to cancel racing on a number of occasions and Saratoga has had to lower its standards to include conditioned \$10,000 races to pad out their meetings. Fears have been expressed that Europeans will stop buying American bred horses because of their perceived fragility. The public will not flock to the races when uncompetitive fields result in a dominant favourite with four or five challengers.

When I had a brief discussion with John Holloman on this subject, he suggested that while things at the top may have flattened off, it certainly wasn't true towards the bottom. He points out that the time run to win a maiden at Hawkesbury today would have been good enough to win a Class Three when he started training. He also suggested a further issue might be that modern trainers were not what one might call horsemen like those of old. They may have many other attributes, but that unidentifiable horseman's insight, almost sixth sense, learned from generations working and living with horses is missing.

Whatever the answer, I hope the foregoing promotes some thought and I look forward to receiving feedback to include in later editions of the Newsletter.

## **Vale Hot Danish**

Seven year old Hot Danish, bred by Club member David Parker, lost her battle with a body infection on Sunday, 17 April. As the winner of 13 stakes races, including two Group 1 races this feat places her amongst the top 10 Australian mares of all time. Hot Danish won the hearts of Sydneysiders as she strove to win her first Group 1 in 2010 after several years of trying.

## **Hawkesbury Race Club**

Hawkesbury Race Club has abolished trackwork fees. It'll cost them \$ 130,000, which will be offset by earnings from its motel and restaurant.

Four years ago the club took out a \$ 6.5 million loan over 25 years to build the motel. The loan will be paid up on 31 st March this year.

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or talk to **Virginia Harvey** at The Land (02) 4570 4444 or 0416 202 300 or

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