

HORSES THAT STAY THE COURSE

NEW CAREERS FOR RETRIED RACEHORSES

STORY BY LISA TREEN
PHOTOS BY ANIMAX

HORSERACING HAS BEEN AN ESTABLISHED SPORT IN AUSTRALIA COMMENCING SOON AFTER EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT. IT'S THE THIRD MOST ATTENDED SPORT AND ITS ESTIMATED THAT OVER \$14 BILLION DOLLARS WERE WAGERED IN THE LAST YEAR.

A successful racehorse can have an illustrious career and can earn millions. Melbourne's favourite mare, Black Caviar, has reportedly earned 3.5 million for her 13 consecutive wins.

But what happens to 'retired' racehorses once their winning streak is over or they're deemed unsuitable to race? Many of us would like to believe that retired racehorses spend their days lolling around



in paddocks with their stable mates. Others, we hope, continue their legacy as stud horses so that their progeny can carry on strong bloodlines. For many, their future involves a trip to a slaughterhouse.

There's an extremely interesting article written on this subject matter by Geraldine Chapman which was originally published in Equis Magazine in 2008. Chapman takes a well-informed and well-researched approach to what happens to around 40,000 horses per year. Far from being a dirty little exposé on the horse meat or racing industry, the *article lays down statistics and truths, all while keeping a humane edge.

Some retired racehorses do end up with new careers once their racing days are over. The NSW Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Trust (TRT) is a program that takes retired racehorses and gives them the three Rs—Retraining; Rehabilitation and Rehousing. The initiative was set up as a charity and this equine welfare program is supported by Racing NSW (RNSW) and the Australian Jockey Club (AJC).

RNSW has donated funds for training, and the AJC has donated stables and facilities at its Randwick racecourse as well as being a management resource for the program.

Shane Brady is the Security and Risk Manager of the Australian Jockey Club in charge of the Royal Randwick Racecourse. Brady was integral in the introduction and development of Mounted Security at

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Randwick. He travelled over to North Carolina in the US to train at the Mounted Security Police Training Academy. From there, he was able to bring his skills and training to the team at Royal Randwick.

Horses are chosen for temperament and training can take from three months upwards. First, ex-racehorses are given an opportunity to be horses again. As Brady explains, "Horses are herd animals and are taken from a stable environment and allowed to romp in a paddock. They need to run around, kick, adjust to grazing from hard feed and become horses again. We give them at least six weeks to do this and then we start training them from scratch."

From there it takes about three months of training for a horse to realise its full potential. Not all horses make it through the training program as they may not have the right temperament for crowd control. Some may be more suited to dressage and other equestrian pursuits.

TRT also has an agreement with Victorian Police to supply them with as many trained Mounted Security graduates as possible of any colour. NSW Police will also take horse trained by TRT but only will only take Browns or Bays. When asked about the restrictions some states have on colour choices, Brady explains, "It harks back to World War I where Australian Imperial Forces would only take dark coloured horses for tactical purposes. South Australian Police have a preference for Greys. Now the colour preference for each state or territory comes down to more of a uniform choice." Brady laughs, "Victorians are great, they'll take any colour, so this makes our jobs much easier."



Brady is understandably proud of how well the Mounted Security program has developed and how effective operationally that's been. The program has been going for nearly a year and will have its official launch in the near future. This program gives racehorses the opportunity to work and be productive in a career that will offer them more longevity than racing.

"Racehorses are bred and trained to run really fast and then stop. When they cease to be any good, or they've failed at their potential for that, then there's not much else they can do without a lot of work. It's not like you can grab a racehorse and stick it in a trail riding facility and hope that kids won't fall off. They're not trained for that, and it's almost like you have to start again with them. Many of these horses have great potential through—they are great horses."

The program is still reliant on charitable donations as they only have partial funding from the AJC, and at present, they're running on a shoestring budget and volunteers. There are currently 35 horses in the program, and as each one graduates, TRT are able to bring in more.

TRT is also looking to expand their training to take on more Mounted Security Riders. They now have the resources to internally offer a course in Mounted Security to people wanting a career in this field. They anticipate their first course will be available in July. To be considered for training, they require people who are proficient riders and who can complete the NSW Security License.

It's fascinating to watch these horses and their riders at work. Mounted Security is an efficient way to manage large crowds, as their sight line is virtually uninterrupted. They're able to work their way through crowds more efficiently than vehicles and are more visible than bike security. Royal Randwick and the AJC should be proud of the achievements that TRT has accomplished in such a short time. No doubt, we'll be seeing more of TRTs graduates in time.

For more information on the Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Trust www.nswtrt.com.au
ph: (02) 9663 8434

* Geraldine Chapman's article can be found here: http://www.eques.com.au/FEB-08/horse_slaughter_in_australia.htm

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