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THE BLOG**

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# Trust, Transparency & Integrity in Racing, Part 1 – Top 10 Recommendations

*“Owners are receiving inadequate value for money on too many occasions. Cumulatively, that acts as a potential barrier to new owners coming into the sport and discourages the retention of the owners who are racing’s most active supporters.”*

**I**t has been interesting that when I write blogs on the subject of trust, transparency, integrity and corruption, not a single owner disagrees with anything I've raised. As in everything to do with life and commerce, perception really matters and unfortunately the overriding perception is that the breeding supply chain that brings horses through to owners is inherently stacked against the owner. On occasions it is almost certainly corrupt, and almost daily there are practices being perpetrated that while probably not illegal, lack the necessary standards of integrity.

It is clearly very difficult to gauge the overall impact of this on racing and ownership, but I definitely believe that the BHA is taking the right stance by putting a much greater focus on integrity in all aspects of our sport and is prepared to examine breaches of the necessary standards in the context of the whole sales process.

Unfortunately I can't help but feel that owners are receiving inadequate value for money on too many occasions and cumulatively that must be acting as a potential barrier to new owners coming into the sport while discouraging retention of the owners who are already active supporters.

So I thought it timely to reflect on my "top ten" recommendations for addressing these problems. They are not in any priority order but I do believe that if the BHA puts a searchlight on them, it will definitely be to the greater benefit of the whole ownership community.

1. **Develop an end to end integrity framework.** What I mean by this is to map out every stage in the equine supply chain from breeding through to the eventual retirement of the racehorse. At every step in the chain there is potential for corruption, and this should be mapped out so that the level of risk is made explicit.
2. **Set integrity standards.** Having mapped out the supply chain, it is then possible to state unambiguously what the necessary personal, professional and commercial standards should be, and what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour.
3. **Monitor and police those standards.** Having developed an integrity framework and set the appropriate standards, the BHA then needs to have inspectors who can then monitor and identify the perpetrators of unacceptable practice. The whole industry through the various stakeholder groups to have been warned in advance of what is unacceptable behaviour and for this to be built into the rules of racing.
4. **Identify and copy best practice.** Other countries, particularly Germany, are determined that the breed is strengthened on an ongoing basis by not allowing substandard mares to produce foals. The performance record of stallions should be tracked and minimum standards set for mares. The recent requirement for horses with first-time wind ops to be reported is a step in the right direction because over time it should be possible which stallions are passing on higher than average wind problems.
5. **Give every horse a log book from day one.** You wouldn't buy a £100,000 car without a log book, and I don't see why you should do the same with horses. The racing authorities in England and Ireland as a minimum should make it a requirement that any veterinary treatment to any racehorse is logged, and that when the horse goes into any sale, a PDF of that document can be accessed online for one month before the sale date.
6. **Improve pre-sale veterinary inspections** and change the charging policy. All horses being sold at public auctions should be inspected properly and thoroughly once, with the cost of that being paid by the vendor. A full inspection report should be available. Furthermore the vet making that inspection should be held liable for the quality of it. If the report is inaccurate, the vet should be held to account both commercially and professionally.
7. **Full declaration of anything performance-enhancing.** I know that many trainers argue that owners and the racing public don't understand the pros and cons and limitations of many veterinary treatments and procedures, but I do believe that they should be declared. It is why I'm in favour of transparency on wind operations, but I would extend that to all major interventions.

8. **No limits to transparency.** The simple guiding principle should be that if access to a piece of information can provide a trainer, owner or punter with a commercial advantage, then that information should be in the public domain wherever possible. So for example should there be a requirement to disclose when a horse's tendons have been fired?
9. **Fund more evidence-based research.** Owners are losing money every day buying horses which are genetically predisposed to certain maladies and conditions that will significantly constrain their performance during their life as racehorses. The BHA should fund research to collect evidence over time that will identify more of these conditions. As they will be recorded in the horse's log book, then an informed owner can make an appropriate decision not to invest.
10. **Have all the information readily available.** In the age of social media, all information should be at owners' and prospective buyers' fingertips. There may well be an accusation of information overload, but it would be better for the information to be there if an owner wants to access it, than to be left in the unacceptable position of buying horses where there is significantly asymmetrical information, i.e. where the prospective purchaser knows far less than other interested parties upstream in the supply chain.

I've now been involved in buying and owning about 100 horses, either on my own or with co-owners. Unfortunately I believe that if I'd had full information I wouldn't have bought at least 20% of them. Assuming an average total cost of £50,000, that's £1m of money in effect wasted. This issue is that serious. I hope that in ten years' time I won't have to write another series raising the same ten recommendations.

