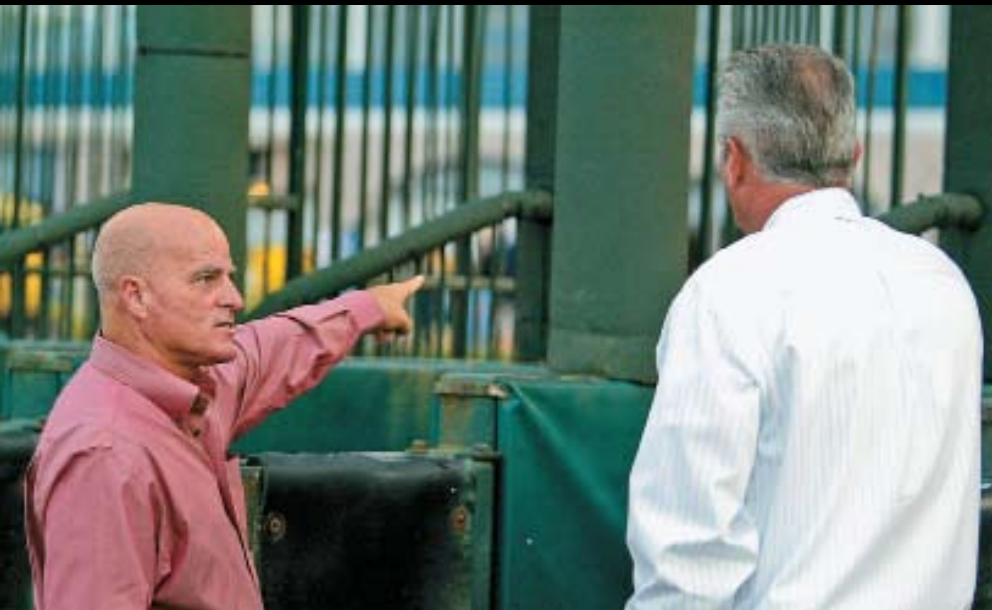


Applications Welcome

BY TOM LaMARRA / PAT LANG PHOTOS

A walkthrough of one racetrack's test to become accredited by the NTRA's Safety and Integrity Alliance



Consultant Richard Lewis (left) inspects starting gate with starter Steve Peterman

It's tedious. It's time-consuming. And at times, it's downright mind-numbing. It's also well worth the effort, according to those involved in the racetrack accreditation process being carried out under the National Thoroughbred Racing Association Safety and Integrity Alliance.

Skeptics may disagree. The words "window dressing" and "whitewash" have been used to describe the accreditation process, which began earlier this year. The impetus was a rough 2008 in which the Thoroughbred racing industry came under heavy fire—even from Congress—for allegedly not doing enough to foster safety and integrity.

Through late September, 12 racetracks had completed the application and been inspected; 11 were fully accredited, and one provisionally accredited. The early successes weren't unexpected given the fact the tracks themselves apply for accreditation and had plenty of time to review the alliance's code of standards before the process began.

There haven't been spot checks or surprise visits—yet. Officials said getting a passing grade will get tougher as the bar is raised every two years.

What the accreditation process has done, however, is educate and demand accountability that may have been missing.

"All of the tracks that have applied have seen things that might have been lacking, and they've gotten them in order," said Richard Lewis, a California-based Thoroughbred racing consultant who has taken part in many of the accreditations. "It has been a learning process for everybody, and I think it has helped some of the tracks.

"We take things for granted, so it's always good to have something wake you up

and make you take a closer look. I think you'll see a lot of tracks sharing applications and feeding off of each other."

"I think those tracks that have asked for accreditation have pretty much gotten things in order by going through the application, so yes, I think it's working," said Dr. Ronald Jensen, also a regular on the accreditation circuit. "Some things have been shifted aside, so as you see a good idea that's not necessarily in the code of standards, it can be put into the standards."

Lewis and Jensen spent parts of three days at Turfway Park, which underwent an application review and on-site inspection Sept. 16-18. On Sept. 17, their workday began at 9 a.m. and continued through the end of the racing program at 11 p.m.

The following is a condensed first-hand account of how Lewis, Jensen, and alliance executive director Mike Ziegler spent that day, which was typical of other on-site accreditation reviews.

APPLICATION REVIEW

A completed application is about three or four inches thick because of all the supplemental information tracks must provide. The three men went through the alliance code of standards and reviewed Turfway management's responses to the application from about 9 a.m. to noon.

"The background material (in an application) just keeps going and going," Lewis said. "Because Turfway has a synthetic surface, there's quite a lot of data from engineers and the studies they've done."

The discussion focused primarily on rules contained in the code, including horseshoes, jockey whips, starting gate padding, on-track ambulance coverage, reporting of on-track injuries and breakdowns, security, and drug-testing protocol. In some cases, proof that a track is pursuing compliance is sufficient.

For instance, there is no out-of-competition testing in Kentucky, but Turfway officials said they support an effort by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission to explore the practice.

"The code of standards allows for an advocacy process," Ziegler said. "But moving forward, if the code of standards gets ratcheted up, advocacy might not be sufficient anymore."

The accreditation process has revealed not all tracks do things the same way. Still, their practices may be considered sufficient.

For instance, at Turfway, there are two ambulances on track. They are positioned in the two chutes at either end of the racing surface; one is always just behind the starting gate before each race. At other tracks, an ambulance follows the field during races.

After consultation, alliance officials determined ambulance response time to on-track incidents at Turfway is acceptable.

PRE-RACE INSPECTIONS

Pre-race inspections of racehorses are a key component of the accreditation process. Ziegler called them a “deal-breaker”—a track wouldn’t pass without them.

At 3 p.m., Kentucky state veterinarian Dr. Bryce Peckham and two other vets split up around the barn area at Turfway and began inspecting horses that were entered to race that night. Peckham handled the receiving barn, which typically fills up given the fact roughly half of the horses that race at Turfway ship in.

If nothing else, the pre-race exams show how much Peckham and other vets have to do on race day. Peckham went stall by stall, asking horses’ names, checking their front and rear legs, and watching as a groom or trainer took the horses down the aisle for a jog.

Then, using a notebook computer, he entered relevant information for each horse and made notes depending on what he saw. If a horse fails a pre-race inspection, the information is relayed to the stewards.

Each inspection takes four or five minutes, and the grooms and trainers know the drill. The computerized system from InCompass Solutions allows vets to access information from previous exams of horses.

“We’re trying to standardize the process,” said Jensen, who observed Peckham as he made his rounds. “Say a horse racing in California comes here. The examining vet will have some information, as well as his own records. Whoever uses this system will know the observations of another vet.”

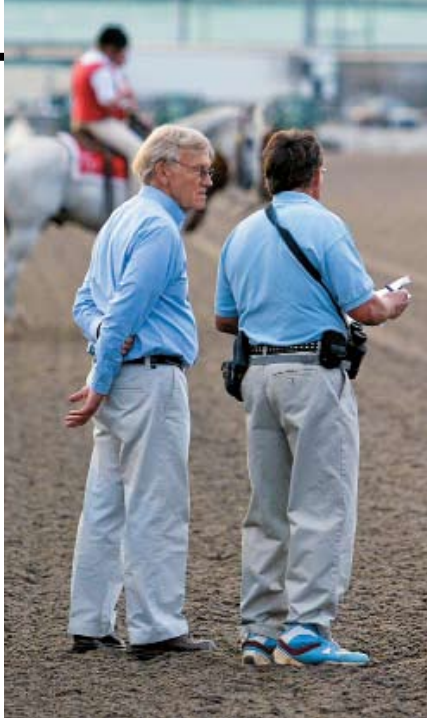
Again, not all states follow the same procedure. Jensen noted that in California, vets handling pre-race exams write the notes on paper, then give the information to other staffers who key it into their computer system.

On race night, Jensen spent most of his time with Peckham, who watched pre-race warm-ups and the start of each race, and met with the ambulance crew. Lewis visited with starter Steve Peterman and inspected the new Best Pad padding in the gate. A recommendation was made for the track to add more padding.

Lewis later observed paddock farrier Gil Rozier examine shoes as each horse entered the paddock. Rozier, a longtime blacksmith, can tell whether horseshoes meet the model rule—no toe grabs up front—by a quick look. If there is a question about a shoe, Rozier will make another inspection when a horse is in its saddling stall.

AFTERCARE PLANS

As part of the application, racetracks must either have a retirement program for horses or be affiliated with one. Turfway has something called a “surrender stall”—horsemen can leave horses there, with no



Above: Dr. Ronald Jensen, left, talks with Dr. Bryce Peckham in between races; Below: Farrier Gil Rozier inspects shoes as horses enter the paddock



ACCREDITED RACETRACKS

Arlington Park
Belmont Park
Calder Race Course
Churchill Downs
Delaware Park
Del Mar
Hollywood Park
Keeneland
Monmouth Park
*Pimlico Race Course
Saratoga
Turfway Park

**Provisional accreditation pending further review*

APPLIED FOR ACCREDITATION

Finger Lakes Gaming & Racetrack

EXPECTED TO APPLY

Aqueduct
Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots
Gulfstream Park
Suffolk Downs
Woodbine

questions asked, and turn over ownership papers.

Turfway is affiliated with the Kentucky Equine Humane Center.

“We’ve said we’ll take on the responsibility to find the horse a home,” Turfway president Bob Elliston said. “This way, there’s nothing that inhibits (horsemen) from making a determination. One of the options, however, is humane euthanasia.”

Barb Borden, horse identifier at Turfway, oversees the surrender stall along with Turfway director of communications Sherry Pinson. Thus far, about 20 horses have been assisted, but Borden said they don’t always end up in the stall.

“About 90% of the time, a trainer will approach me, and I’ll ask if it’s OK for the horse to stay in the barn until we can find it a home,” Borden said. “It works pretty well. Everybody pretty much pitches in to help the cause.”

During the inspection, Ziegler spent some time on the phone with Lori Neagle, executive director of the Kentucky Equine Humane Center, to inquire about its relationship with Turfway. He also held meetings with horsemen and jockeys to get their input and answer questions about the inspection.

LOTS OF PREP WORK

Someone at each track has to prepare the application, and at Turfway, that task fell to director of operations Chip Bach. He said the process began in early June, and the first draft of the application was completed by Aug. 1. Elliston reviewed the document, which was then sent to Ziegler by mid-August.

Bach said he spent an “intense” four hours a day preparing the application. Kentucky equine medical director Dr. Mary Scollay was responsible for about 40% of the document, he said.

“It gets down to having (staff) conduct their business step by step,” Bach said. “We knew we were doing pretty well but realized we don’t have a formal record-keeping process. When people found out things were being watched from an outside source, they realized the value in doing it right every day.”

“We now have a compliance process to make sure jobs are done properly.”

Alliance officials said roughly 200 pages of the Turfway application dealt with security procedures, which include an evacuation plan for the facility. A separate security assessment was performed by the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau the same week as the alliance inspection.

Thoroughbred Racing Associations members such as Turfway don’t have to pay for the TRPB assessment. The alliance accreditation process costs each track \$15,000. 