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## Special Report: Racehorse Durability

by: The Blood-Horse Staff

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In this exclusive report, *The Blood-Horse* investigates whether the Thoroughbred racehorse is as tough today as it was 30 to 40 years ago. Editors of *The Blood-Horse* recently sought the answer to this question by producing a comprehensive review of 34 years of historical Thoroughbred stallion progeny records pulled from The Jockey Club's extensive database. The full study, containing more than 200 pages, is available as [a free download in PDF format](#).

Eric Mitchell, executive editor for digital media of The Blood-Horse notes, "There has been anecdotal evidence for years that the Thoroughbred of today is not as tough as it has been in the past. We compiled stallion progeny race records for foal crops from 1970 through 2003, broke the data down by decade, and then calculated starts per foal for each stallion and each decade to look for trends. We were looking to see whether the starts per foal have decreased over time and clearly they have."

The study shows that foals born from 1970 through 1979 made an average of 20.42 starts. For foals born between 2000 and 2003, the average number of starts per foal has fallen to 13.15. Among older racehorses the decline has been even more dramatic. The starts per starter for horses 4 years old and older were 25.97 in the 1970s and have since fallen to 12.97, a drop of 50%, for the foals born in 2000 through 2003.

"We know that not all racehorses are managed the same," Mitchell said. "The graded stakes winner is managed differently than the claimer. So to better understand the trends, we grouped the stallions within each decade by the quality of their best runners--sires of grade I stakes winners, sires of a grade II or grade III stakes winners, sires of non-graded stakes winners, and finally sires that are not represented by any stakes winners. Besides looking at the starts of older horses, the study also looked at starts per starter of 2-year-olds and 3-year-olds. Among the stakes-producing sires by starts per foal and for starts per starter in each of the age groups, the same declining trend occurs.

"The big questions now are why we are seeing these trends and what can the industry do to reverse them?" Mitchell continued. "This study is just the first step toward identifying the changes and their cause."

In order to understand what the numbers might mean, *The Blood-Horse* assembled a group of prominent Thoroughbred industry breeders and owners to evaluate the statistics and debate the impact in a round-table discussion. [Watch Part 1 of the video here](#). Parts 2 and 3 will be available Friday and next Monday, respectively.

**Readers are cautioned to seek the advice of a qualified veterinarian before proceeding with any diagnosis, treatment, or therapy.**

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