



Grayson-Jockey Club

RESEARCH TODAY

The Newsletter for Benefactors of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, Inc.



Jockey Pat Day
photo courtesy Bill Straus

On Jockeys And Horse Safety

Jockey Pat Day retired in 2006 with 8,804 wins and a record \$298 million in purse earnings. His many career highlights include 12 Breeders' Cup wins, victory in each of the Triple Crown races, and election to the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame. Day's current activities include work with race track chaplaincy programs both here and abroad. He also was a participant in the second Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit held by Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation and The Jockey Club in 2007.

He recently sat down to discuss with the Foundation the relationship of jockeys and race-horse safety and soundness. In addition to his opinions, he also cited a harrowing story or two illustrating the need for continuing rigorous and vigorous regulation of horse racing.

Do trainers welcome input from jockeys on soundness of a horse?

I always had an innate ability to sense when a horse wasn't traveling just right. But sometimes when I'd come back and say, "this horse isn't going just right" some of them (trainers) didn't want to hear it. After awhile, you learn who does and who doesn't. However, as my career progressed, I believe I started gaining respect of trainers, and from that point in time almost across the board they welcomed what I had to say.

I might say, "this horse doesn't feel just right behind." I couldn't tell them how to fix the problem, but I could help pinpoint the problem. They appreciated that and acted accordingly.

I was fortunate to have enough God-given talent to be able to tell when a horse was off. A lot of riders don't have a clue if a horse is traveling good or bad. I can't understand that. It's like if you are driving a car and it gets a flat tire, you know it.

How familiar with a horse do you have to be in order to make judgments on his/her soundness?

I could tell the first time I got on a horse if it were traveling smooth. Now, sometimes just the way a horse is built, their way of traveling was not absolutely smooth. Now, I might not be able to answer the question of whether that was just him or her, or if this was because of problems. Often times---especially later on in my career---when I rode a horse for the first time and he didn't have a smooth way of going, the trainer would say, maybe, "this horse seems to be a little bit funny behind. It's just him. He's been tight all his life. He'll probably warm out of it, but don't let it bother you. That's just him." If I sensed something else, I would let the trainer know when I got back.

How difficult or subtle are decisions as to when to ask that a horse be scratched?

For me, it would depend on whether I had ridden a horse before or worked him in the morning and was familiar with how they traveled. So, if now I am in the afternoon and he's traveling different, I would try to warm him up and see if he could come out of it. If not, I would have no

hesitation to take him to the veterinarian at the gate. There again, because of the relationship I had with trainers and the respect they had for my judgment, when that happened, for the most part they appreciated it.

For the rank-and-file rider in day-to-day racing, is there more of a problem in scratching a horse at the gate than for a rider who had achieved a certain status?

I would say that there probably is. When a rider is trying to get established and cultivate relationships, they might be a little bit hesitant to scratch a horse. He might feel the trainer would think that was a personal reflection on his/her bringing over a horse that's not sound. The rider might be fearful of the repercussions-- "the man will never ride me again." So that might make a rider go ahead and take a horse to the post when he didn't feel good in his heart about it.

But, I dare say for the most part there's a thing called self-preservation. Yes, the rider's concerned about the horse's welfare, but he's also concerned about his own, and his fellow

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is the newsletter of

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riders' welfare. The rider doesn't want to hit the ground. They all know that if you take a horse to the post and he's not traveling correctly and it enhances the chances of a breakdown or a catastrophic injury, the first one to fall down is you. We all want to make it to the jocks' room shower under our own power at the end of the day.

However, I did watch the horses in the post parade and if I did see one not warming up right and kept watching this jock and he didn't take the horse to the vet, then I'd watch that horse in the race. If that horse in my opinion maybe shouldn't be in the race, I wanted to avoid the aftermath of that if something happened.

Did you have many cases when you wanted to scratch the horse and the attending veterinarians wouldn't do it?

One time. And I took off of him. When I warmed this horse up, he had a really crabby way of going. I had never been on the horse before. I got him away from the pony. When a horse is with the pony they are kind of going sideways and not moving just right. So, I got him away and let him extend himself and stretch his legs down the backstretch. He didn't come out of it, so I loped him back to the gate at a pretty good clip. He still wasn't coming out of it. So, I told the state vet, "This horse isn't going just right. I don't like the way he feels." The vet in that case will ask you to jog the horse, so I did and jogging he wasn't going that bad, but galloping he just wasn't extending himself. I had a wonderful relationship with that particular vet, but he said, "Well, Pat he doesn't seem that bad to me," I said, "Well, I can't ride him. You'll have to get another rider." The vet wouldn't scratch him, so he said, "Take him back to the paddock." I did and they got another rider. He rode the hair off him, and he won, but never made it back to the winner's circle. I don't know what the extent of

his injuries were, but they didn't bring him back to the winner's circle to take a picture.

But that was the only time in my career that I asked a vet to scratch a horse and he wouldn't.

We were told of a recent case when a jockey wanted to scratch a horse, and vet would not let him. Then the horse broke down and caused a spill, but the jockey didn't say anything to the stewards.

Did the original jock ride the horse? **Yes.**

Shame on him. He's the one who's on the horse's back. If he felt the horse was so bad that he shouldn't run and the state vet refused, he absolutely should refuse to ride him. I'd have to hold the jockey somewhat responsible in that situation.

So a reason not to report it is that it would reflect poorly on the rider's own judgment?

Yes, it would reflect badly on his judgment.

From another angle, we have heard of cases when trainers and owners know there is something to worry about, but don't tell the jockey. Did you have cases where, looking back, you realized, "That sonofagun should've warned me, or shouldn't have run the horse?"

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Not recently, but a number of years ago I rode a horse that broke down. It was probably 28 years ago. Through the grapevine, I heard later that there was topical stuff they would wipe onto the horse that was a real numbing agent. Nobody told me anything about it going in. The horse snapped his leg at the quarter pole. Seven out of ten horses went down. I was knocked out, and it was a miracle that I didn't break my neck.

Six weeks later, I was back in action, trying to get my business back together. The same trainer put me on a live horse, and I thought, "Well, he

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at least feels a little bit badly about it and is trying to help me get restarted.” But that afternoon the rider who had ridden this horse before came to me in the jockey’s room and said, “Pat, this horse wasn’t going just right the last time I rode him.” “Ooh,” I said, “I don’t like that.” I go to the paddock and the trainer says nothing, just the same instructions as every time. So, they lead me out on the race track and the pony boy happens to be the exercise boy. As he’s taking me to the gate, he says, “Pat, watch this horse. He’s not been going just right.” Now, I’ve got my heart in my throat. So, I figured he’s trying to get this horse claimed. The other trainers will be thinking like I am that he’s put me on this horse and dropped him down in price so I can win a race and help me get some momentum.

At that time, I thought the rule was that the horse had to start in order to make the claim valid. In fact, though, in that state, when the horse leaves the paddock, he’s claimed. This horse gave me no indication he was off, but in the back of my mind I remembered that the other horse didn’t, either. So, I thought I would do the trainer a favor and go ahead and let the horse break and at the first indication of a problem I’d pull it up. It was a stupid move, I’d be the first to tell you. It obviously was not in the horse’s best interest; it wasn’t in the betting public’s best interest, or mine. He broke and didn’t go very far and I felt like he took a funny step---whether he did or did not I don’t know---and I pulled him up.

The trainer got decidedly irate. He called me an “ex-jock,” said I lost my heart and ought to get out of the business.

That was B.C.---before I committed my life to Christ in 1984---and I was known to have a temper. I called him everything but a horse trainer.

Do you think that type of thing happens frequently enough that it indi-

cates the rules and policing of racing are insufficient?

I think it has changed dramatically since 27 or 28 years ago. I think the testing procedures, what they are testing for, and the extent that they are testing has eliminated that to a large degree. Completely? Absolutely not. There are those who work hard to enable themselves to break the law.

How would you summarize the role of the jockey in terms of doing what he/she can do to help keep horses sound?

I think we all have to work closely together---the trainer, the jockey, the exercise rider, the groom. The groom’s around a horse 24 hours a day. If he walks into the stall and the horse is not acting the way he has since he’s been taking care of him, then something’s wrong. Start looking for the problem. By the same token an exercise rider gets on the horse over and over, takes him out to the track. He should be aware of the way the horse is getting over the ground and the way he’s acting. And I dare say most of them do. They’ll come back to the barn and say, “Boss, this horse just didn’t act the same today.” I think the trainers value that information. And the same with the riders in the afternoon. You try to do what’s in the best interest of the horse. You ride the race and when he pulls up, if he’s not acting just right, you tell the trainer. And, like we said, if he’s not acting right in the post parade you take him to the gate vet. If you’re going to err, err on the side of caution. I’d rather refund the money to the betting public because a horse is scratched at the gate than to pick a rider up off the ground or have the horse suffer the consequences of catastrophic breakdown.

What is your opinion about use of whips? Would a jockey be really missing a safety tool if he didn’t have a whip?

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In Memoriam:

JOHN HETTINGER

John Hettinger, who died on Sept.6, was head of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation as President and then as Chairman from 1991 until stepping aside for health reasons in 2005. He was then elected Chairman Emeritus.

Hettinger’s lifelong standards of integrity and devotion to quality in all dealings have been admirably stressed in tributes in the trade press. His leadership of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation also underscored an ability to see broad perspectives.

Hettinger became passionate on the issue of horse slaughter, and he was perhaps the most articulate a proponent of the anti-slaughter movement. Still, he recognized that the Foundation’s role was to promote the health and safety of the living horse, and he instructed us, “Don’t get the Foundation involved in this (slaughter) issue.”

Furthermore, in advancing the aims of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation and its donors, he worked easily and with mutual respect with individuals involved with equine research but not always in agreement on his slaughter position. He could segment the pursuit of his goals so that one ambition did not hamper the opportunities of another.

What a statesman he would have been!

---Edward L. Bowen, President

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No. However, there are rare occasions when a horse is bearing out and you can tap him up on the muzzle, but you have to be so careful that you don't hit him in the eye. In this day in age, with the Humane Society and all those people looking so closely at where horses are being hit, regardless of why, I dare say riders today better not even think about that. You might wave it at them and cause them to go ahead and make the turn, but if you reach up and try to slap him on the muzzle you are probably asking for trouble. If you are not able to guide a horse with the reins and the reins alone, I don't believe that the whip is going to play a major role in correcting their actions.

One of the issues being pursued by the Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summits is education, both for new licensees and in the form of continuing education for

those already licensed. Do feel that many of your fellow riders of your era could have benefited from more mentoring than they received, before they started riding?

I think we all could probably have benefited. I started way too soon. I started galloping horses on a farm in January, and I started riding races in July---same year. Won my first horse race July 29. I was born and raised around horses, so I had a good deal of horse sense, but I had never ridden on a flat saddle, an exercise saddle.

Seven months was not enough time to be adequately prepared. It was more than ten years before I appreciated the God-given talent I had been given. I didn't have a clue what I was doing before then, but I was riding the hair off those horses. After that, until the time I retired every race was a learning experience. No two races were ever the same, no two horses

were ever the same, and it was an awesome 22 years.

Considering that lack of training that a lot of riders have, do you think there should be an institutional solution. For example, would you be in favor of racing commissions requiring more stringent tests before someone could ride?

I think it would really hinder riders from our country. It would enhance the chances of riders from foreign countries, because just about every other country in the world that has racing has a jockey school program that's very extensive. Riders come out of those schools very well prepared. Chris McCarron is doing a wonderful job of getting a school up and going, but I don't know if there's any other place in America where you can go to get some education. Every other way of going to the race track is just a shot in the dark.



Rokeby Circle Members

In honor of the generosity to the Foundation by the late Paul Mellon, Grayson-Jockey Club designates inclusion in the Rokeby Circle for those donors/members at the \$10,000-plus level within the year. The honor is named for Rokeby Farm, Mr. Mellon's estate in Virginia. Current members of the Rokeby Circle as of September 2008.

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