

RACE HORSE DEATHWATCH

Race Horse Deaths on British Racecourses in 2014



An Animal Aid Report



WIGMORE HALL BEING SHOT AT DONCASTER
RACECOURSE IN SEPTEMBER 2014

Introduction

Animal Aid established the online database, called *Race Horse Deathwatch*, in March 2007 to catalogue race horse deaths on British racecourses.

We did so because the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) – racing's horse welfare regulator – does not make public the names of individual horses killed or the racecourses on which they died. Neither do they publish meaningful figures on the total number of equines who perish through racing. Not until pressured on 21 May 2013 by way of a Parliamentary Question, did the BHA divulge the number of on-course fatalities

for the three-year period from 2010 to 2012. (The BHA's 2013 total was subsequently reported in a *Daily Mirror* article).^{(1),(2)}

Through detailed research by Animal Aid, every effort is made to record, via *Deathwatch*, all of the horses killed on British racecourses or who die shortly afterwards from their injuries. However, the data provided to parliament and other evidence Animal Aid has seen suggests that the true on-course fatality figure is around 30 per cent higher than we are able to verify.



Summary

- Animal Aid has identified 160 horses who died as a result of racing on British racecourses in 2014.
- The five most lethal courses in 2014, calculated according to deaths against the number of days racing, were Wetherby (1st Jt), Cheltenham (1st Jt), Cartmel (3rd), Wincanton (4th) and Worcester (5th).
- 14 courses saw two horse fatalities in one day's racing. (*See Table 5*).
- Four courses saw two horses die in one day's racing on two occasions.
- There were multiple deaths at the premier National Hunt and Flat racing festivals: Cheltenham and Royal Ascot.
- The five courses with the highest number of deaths in 2014 were: Southwell All-Weather (AW) (9 deaths), Wetherby (9), Cheltenham (8), Worcester (8) and Wincanton (6).
- The most lethal racecourses in relation to their racing disciplines were: Wetherby and Cheltenham in National Hunt (jump) racing; Ascot on the flat; and Southwell's AW track.



- 38 of the 40 National Hunt racecourses saw at least one fatality.
- 24 of the 32 Flat (turf) courses saw horses die. (*See Table 3*).
- All four All-Weather courses saw fatalities. (*See Table 4*).
- There was extreme variability in the fatality rates at different racecourses.

Review of on-course horse deaths in 2014

In 2013, we named 131 horses who died on British racecourses. In 2014, our total was 160. The British Horseracing Authority claims that there have been fewer deaths in recent years. Yet it offers no credible statistical support for this assertion. As in past years, Animal Aid frequently encountered a reluctance to divulge information about the fate of race horses. The information we were able to gain – relating to the 160 equine fatalities – often required diligent research and, in all cases, careful fact-checking.

A number of racecourses merit being highlighted due to their extreme attrition rate in 2014 – in particular, the National Hunt courses Wetherby (nine deaths) and Cheltenham (eight), and the Flat courses Ascot (four) and Southwell (nine).

Wetherby and Cheltenham rank joint top in terms of the rate of horse deaths to days' racing. (*See Table 2*). Over a number of years, horses have been at a greater risk racing on either of these two courses than on any other in Britain.

The Royal Ascot meeting, one of the world's premier racing events, attracts the fittest and highest

performing flat racing equines in the world. This Grade 1 course claimed four horses' lives in five days' racing in June 2014. This would be less surprising – though still disturbing – if it were a jump course, replete with the danger of added obstacles. That the fatalities happened on a premier flat turf course is particularly alarming. The fact that the course management has escaped subsequent criticism from the racing press and, more importantly, from the BHA – which claims to have horse welfare as a priority – is shocking to say the least. At the other end of the racing ability scale, Southwell's All-Weather (artificial surface) flat course attracts fewer equine stars and fewer spectators, but is almost on a par, in terms of the death rate, with its affluent associate. Southwell also saw four horses killed on its jump course.

The vast majority of fatal injuries recorded on *Deathwatch* were due to musculoskeletal injuries. That is to say, bones were broken and tendons damaged. There were nine horses recorded as Collapsed and Died – a result of heart attack or cardiovascular failure. They died during the race or shortly afterwards.

Two horses died as a result of starting stall incidents – both at Southwell.



Reasons why horses are killed on racecourses

Horses die on British racecourses for a variety of reasons. These include inappropriate racing conditions, an inability to cope with the prevailing conditions, or over-raced horses. Such factors push animals to their physical and mental limits, which can result in them breaking down with fatal musculoskeletal or cardiovascular injuries.

If motivated to do so, the racing regulator and racecourse operators could make courses considerably safer. Yet the industry continually downplays deaths as 'accidents' or 'par for the course'. The lack of responsibility and empathy revealed in such comments

probably stems from a combination of apathy and a desire to limit the damage to racing's reputation.

And yet there are clearly identifiable factors that increase the chances of horses coming to grief. These include: whipping tired, often exhausted horses in the later stages of a race, and jockeys continuing to jump horses over the final obstacles when tailed off behind the placed (prize-winning) horses. To these can be added: unsuitable/false racing ground; speed and pace; race distance; stiff/tricky fences, or poorly positioned obstacles; and a loss of confidence by the horse.



Case studies

State of the ground

Questions about the state of the ground are particularly pertinent in relation to the four deaths that occurred at Royal Ascot in June, as well as to the five fatalities over three racing days in July at Worcester.

Trauma injuries are more prevalent on fast ground than on a surface with 'give' (cushion). Of the four Ascot deaths, the first, **Case Statement**, came as a result of a fractured fetlock. The next two victims, **Sir Graham Wade** and **Inchila**, each broke their pelvis, while the fourth, **Tiger Cliff**, collapsed and died after his race. The ground, which was declared as Good changing to Good to Firm, had been artificially watered to add 'give' to the turf. Yet, on one of the days' racing, all the race times recorded were at above average speeds, with two of them eclipsing all previous records.

To get a reading as to the condition of the ground, racecourse staff pass a 'going stick' into a number of areas of the course throughout the meeting. When this was done at the June 2014 Ascot event, the indications, despite the artificial watering, were that the ground was drying and would run fast. Firmer grounds present a greater risk of injury and death to horses.

The four deaths on the flat at Ascot was a greater number killed than seen on most National Hunt jump courses. Given this background, racecourses have questions to ask of themselves about the extent to which they will allow a proper consideration of horse welfare (which can mean calling off some meetings) to be overridden by commercial imperatives.

With the comparatively recent advent of summer jumping and drier, firmer ground, the risk of horses coming to grief has increased, though the development has enabled smaller courses, such as Worcester and Cartmel, to survive financially. Worcester's racecourse sits on the bank of the River Severn, which has a history of flooding and waterlogging the racing turf. Over the years, this has caused meetings to be abandoned. In stark contrast to courses that race over the winter, Worcester races predominantly during the summer (as does Cartmel) with additional meetings in the spring and autumn months. Worcester and Cartmel both have a high percentage death rate compared with the vast majority of racecourses in Britain. Of the five victims in July at Worcester only one had been brought down and killed due to a fallen horse. The other four were fatally injured between obstacles. Could this have been caused by the condition of the ground – formally rated as Good to Firm on each of the days the fatalities occurred? With regard to the high death rate at Cheltenham over the years, in March 2014 Animal Aid produced a detailed account of their frequency and likely causes.

See: *Why more horses die at Cheltenham than at any other British Racecourse*
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/booklets/Cheltenham2014.pdf>

A spate of deaths was seen at Southwell All-Weather flat racing track during January and February 2014, and again in November and December. In total, nine horses were killed, putting the course at the top of the numerical death list alongside the jump course Wetherby. While two of the fatalities involved the starting stalls (which plainly demand a radical redesign), seven of the nine victims broke down with injuries when running on the Fibresand artificial surface – the only one of its kind in Britain. The rate of attrition was almost as high on Southwell's All-Weather course as on its National Hunt circuit, and is close to the average for all National Hunt courses in terms of deaths to days' racing. The three other All-Weather courses saw more days of racing but fewer deaths. Even so, the attrition rate on artificial surfaces, in general, is indefensible. The danger they present to horses is greater than that deriving from flat turf courses. (*See Table 1*).

DEEP TROUBLE SHORTLY BEFORE FALLING – HAPPILY NON-FATAL





CHESTERFIELD SUFFERS A NON-FATAL FALL AT KEMPTON

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Mental trauma from falls

Our contact with industry figures over many years indicates that the mental trauma horses suffer caused by falls is well known. It can rob a horse of confidence when entered in future races – a situation that can have fatal consequences.

Dickie Henderhoop a.k.a. Henry was a 7-year-old gelding who had fallen in two successive races prior to taking a fatal fall at Carlisle in April 2014. The first of his falls came when he was challenged at the final obstacle. As a consequence he brought down Romany Ryme. Henry's confidence may have been shaken because in his next race he fell soon after the start – and again early in his fatal race. In this, he crashed to the ground, breaking a leg. Romany Ryme may also have gone on to suffer a confidence problem, given that he fell in two of his next three races.

Over-raced

A Thoroughbred horse probably needs around three weeks to recover *fully* from a race. If racecourses, veterinary officials and the regulator were vigilant and predisposed to do so, they could prevent owners and trainers over-racing horses. It is reasonable to ask whether a demanding race programme contributed to the death, for example, of **Dancing Freddy**.

This 7-year-old gelding was raced more than 90 times from April 2009 to April 2014 – a physical workload at the very extreme end of what can be expected of a racing horse. During the last seven weeks of his short life, he was forced to race seven times. Dancing Freddy met his end at Yarmouth on 21st April 2014. He broke down badly during the race and, according to his owner '*...broke his pelvis and was bleeding to death internally so had 2 be put 2 rest*' [sic]. Yarmouth is a flat turf course that, over the past eight years, has seen far fewer fatalities than most other racecourses.



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There are other frequently-raced horses who met a sudden, traumatic end. In Animal Aid's first *Deathwatch* report, published in 2008, it was noted that frequency of racing was a likely factor in horses breaking down. **Earl Compton** had met his death having raced five times in just 17 days. Whatever the truth about the fatalities on which we have focused, until the regulator and racecourses deal with the issue, horses will continue to be quite literally raced to death.

A key reason why owners and trainers race horses frequently is the way the Handicap system is structured: it allows a winning horse to run off the same Handicap Mark for a week, before being reassessed, usually with a higher rating for future

races (resulting in them carrying more weight). Alternatively, horses performing consistently less well than before will be given a lower, potentially winning, Handicap Mark.

For lower-end horses, there are straightforward financial reasons why they are over-raced. Thousands of horses in Britain in this category are chasing minimum amounts of money at the bottom end of racing to aid their keep-costs. This can not only give rise to a punishingly busy race programme for them but, in some cases, has the potential to encourage corrupt betting practice. It might also lead to Handicap Marks being fixed, and prohibited drugs administered to horses to mask injury and improve performance.

A Winded Horse



Statistical Analysis

Table 1 The Chance of a Death Occuring at a Day's Racing in Relation to the Racecourse Discipline and the Racing Surface 2014

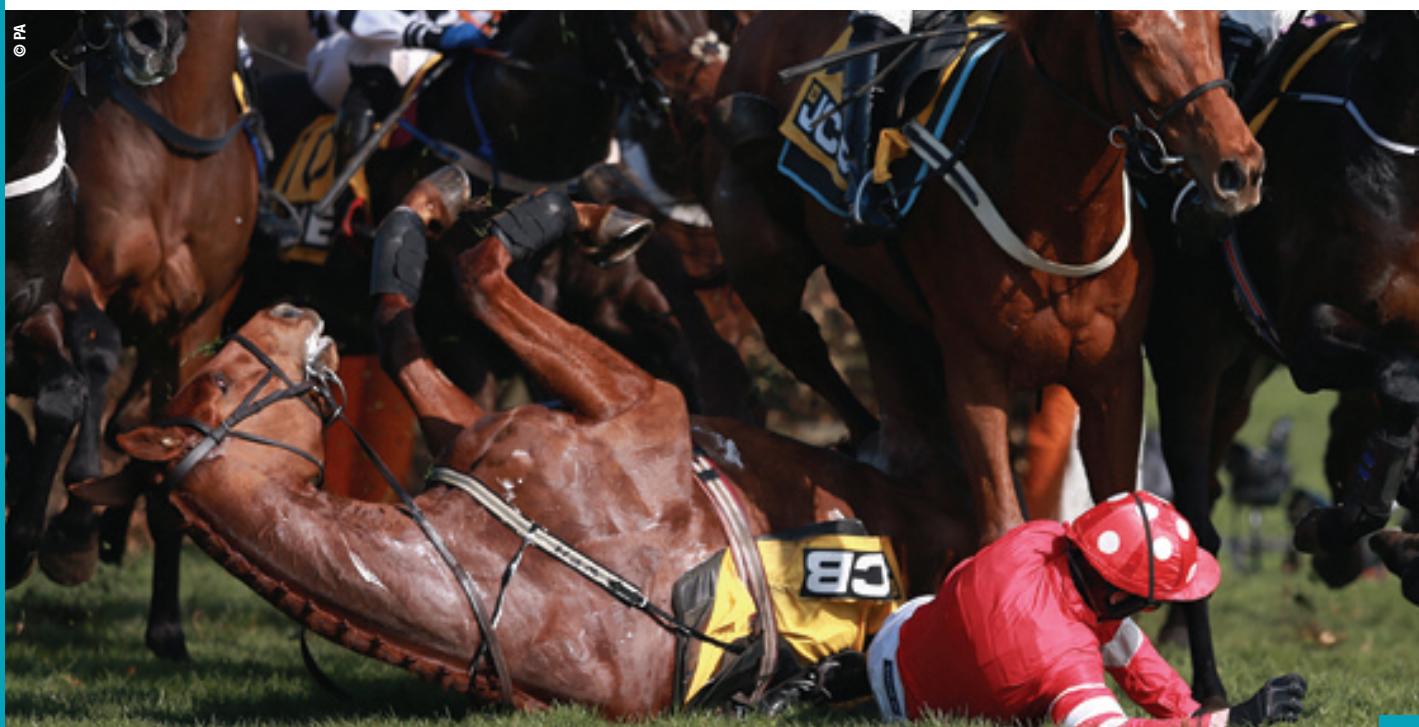
Flat Turf Course	5.69%
All-Weather (Artificial Surface) Flat Course	7.12%
National Hunt (Jump) Course	19.52%

Table 2 National Hunt (Jump) Racecourse Deaths 2014

Racecourse	Horse Deaths	Days' Racing	Chance of a Death Occuring at a Day's Racing
Wetherby	9	18	50.00%
Cheltenham	8	16	50.00%
Cartmel	3	7	42.90%
Wincanton	6	16	37.50%
Worcester	8	22	36.36%
Sedgefield	5	20	25%
Perth	4	16	25%
Aintree	2	8	25%
Market Rasen	5	21	23.81%
Stratford	4	17	23.53%
Uttoxeter	5	22	22.73%
Ludlow	3	14	21.43%
Southwell	4	20	20%
Musselburgh	2	10	20%
Newcastle	2	10	20%
Lingfield	1	5	20%
Ffos Las	3	16.5	18.18%
Doncaster	2	11	18.18%
Kempton	2	11	18.18%
Huntingdon	3	17	17.65%
Carlisle	2	12	16.67%
Chepstow	2	14	14.29%
Plumpton	2	14	14.29%

Table 2 ctd. National Hunt (Jump) Racecourse Deaths 2014

Racecourse	Deaths	Days' Racing	Chance of a Death Occuring at a Day's Racing
Taunton	2	14	14.29%
Sandown	1	7	14.29%
Haydock	1	7.5	13.33%
Towcester	2	16	12.50%
Newton Abbot	2	18	11.11%
Fontwell	2	20	10%
Catterick	1	10	10%
Warwick	1	10	10%
Ayr	1	11	9.09%
Fakenham	1	11	9.09%
Newbury	1	11	9.09%
Kelso	1	12	8.33%
Bangor	1	13	8%
Exeter	1	14	7.14%
Hexham	1	14	7.14%
Ascot	0	8	0%
Leicester	0	9	0%
Total	106	543	19.52%



ABYSSIAL FALLS IN THE JCB TRIUMPH HURDLE AT CHELTENHAM IN MARCH 2014

Table 3 Flat Turf Racecourse Deaths 2014

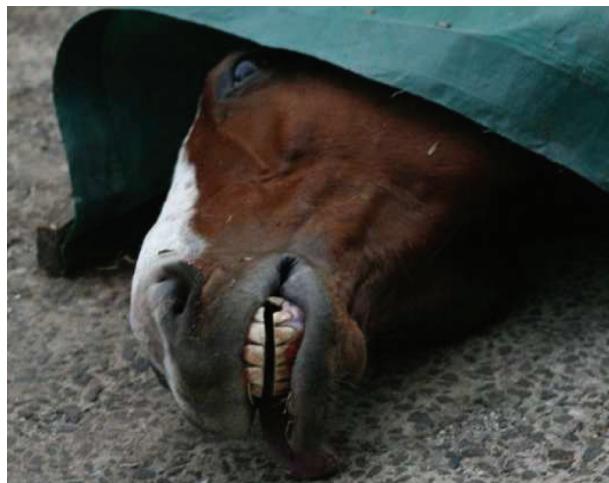
Racecourse	Horse Deaths	Days' Racing	Chance of a Death Occuring at a Day's Racing
Ascot	4	18	22.22%
Bath	3	20	15%
York	2	17	11.76%
Warwick	1	10	10%
Lingfield	2	21	9.52%
Nottingham	2	21	9.52%
Epsom	1	11	9.09%
Yarmouth	2	25	8%
Chepstow	1	15	6.67%
Chester	1	15	6.67%
Pontefract	1	15	6.67%
Salisbury	1	15	6.67%
Ayr	1	17	5.88%
Musselburgh	1	17	5.88%
Newbury	1	17	5.88%
Newcastle	1	17	5.88%
Beverley	1	18	5.56%
Redcar	1	18	5.56%
Goodwood	1	19	5.26%
Brighton	1	21	4.76%
Haydock	1	23.5	4.26%
Doncaster	1	24	4.17%
Windsor	1	26	3.85%
Newmarket	1	39	2.56%
Ffos Las	0	6.5	0%
Carlisle	0	11	0%
Thirsk	0	15	0%
Ripon	0	16	0%
Sandown	0	16	0%
Catterick	0	17	0%
Hamilton	0	18	0%
Leicester	0	21	0%
Total	33	580	5.69%

Table 4 All-Weather (Flat Artificial Surface) Racecourse Deaths 2014

Racecourse	Horse Deaths	Days' Racing	Chance of a Death Occuring at a Day's Racing
Southwell	9	49	18.37%
Lingfield	5	70	7.14%
Wolverhampton	4	91	4.40%
Kempton	3	85	3.53%
Total	21	295	7.12%

Table 5 Courses with Two Deaths in a Day/Date 2014

Racecourse	Date	Date
Cheltenham	12 March	14 March
Wetherby	22 April	26 December
Wincanton	23 March	16 October
Worcester	16 July	29 July
Ascot Flat	17 June	
Cartmel	21 July	
Ludlow	27 February	
Newcastle	15 March	
Musselburgh NH	02 February	
Plumpton	11 May	
Sedgefield	11 March	
Southwell AW	20 January	
Stratford	13 April	
Uttoxeter	17 May	



References

- (1) What follows is the number of horses, according to the BHA, who died on course between 2010 and 2013. Animal Aid's *Deathwatch* equivalents follow in brackets.
2010: 225 (145); **2011:** 181 (157); **2012:** 211 (143) and **2013:** 196 (131).
- (2) Nick Sommerlad, **Shocking picture shows racehorse champion Wigmore Hall destroyed at packed course**, *Daily Mirror*, 14 September 2014
<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/shocking-picture-shows-racehorse-champion-4290791>

SOME OF THE HORSES SHOWN RACING AND FALLING IN THIS REPORT SURVIVED. PHOTOS ARE FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY.