

NATIONAL

DISGRACE



Racing's disregard for animal life is appalling

Three horses die at the festival

Should the Grand National be banned?

Are animal protesters right?

IS IT TIME WE STOPPED RIDING HORSES?

THE GRAND NATIONAL'S ABUSES AND WHY THE PUBLIC IS NO LONGER ACCEPTING THEM



This report was compiled by [Ed Allnutt](#), [Ruby Sleight](#) and [Dene Stansall](#) in Spring 2026 following the end of the court procedures for those who took action against the Grand National in 2023. It serves to bear witness to the suffering still endured by racehorses across Great Britain, and as a container of hope for continued actions against the industry.

Thank you to all who were involved, all who continue to act and who will act together to end this unnecessary suffering.

If you are affected by what you read and wish to help, [Animal Aid](#), [Animal Rising](#), [League Against Cruel Sports](#), [PETA](#), and [Merseyside Animal Rights](#) are all actively campaigning to put an end to horse racing.

Image credits front cover and above: Alamy. Image: a fatal fall for Dooneys Gate, 2011.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **67 Deaths** Since 2000 at the Aintree Grand National Meeting (1)
- **Only 47% of horses manage to finish** the Grand National race (last five years average) (2)
- **Rate of deaths has remained close to constant** since 1950 (3)
- **509 whip offences** in 2025 (4)
- **Protests have been effective**, leading to long-term increase in salience and reinforcing positive attitudes (5)

The Grand National has taken place at Aintree Racecourse since 1839. It is the deadliest race in British horse racing, with a record of fatalities kept since 2000. (6) It is representative of the dangers across jump racing – and of the public’s opposition to animal cruelty.

The high rate of fatalities is due in part to the unique challenge it poses: it is the longest race in British racing, with the largest field of horses and greatest overall height of jumps to be surmounted. (7) These pressures supplement the industry’s issues with breeding and selection.

Deaths from racing are unacceptable – the public and industry figures agree. **One death is too many, yet hundreds of horses continue to die each year.** Most people are horrified by the deaths, and an overwhelming majority think that whipping should be banned. Pressure is mounting, and opinions are shifting.

On 15 April 2023, in an unprecedented act of nonviolent disruption, hundreds of activists travelled to Aintree racecourse in an attempt to stop the race. It was a timely intervention in an industry already under scrutiny that measurably raised the salience of horse welfare.

Today, in 2026, the industry faces continued pressure from activists and advocates. A new aspect to this is legal challenge, and the likelihood of prosecutions under the 2006 Animal Welfare Act. (8)

We show the pattern of response from Aintree when fatality strikes: a series of reactive, PR-touted review panels that precede further deaths on track. The public’s acceptance of fatalities and abuse is eroding, leaving the Grand National vulnerable to social, political, and legal pressure.

Horse racing’s social licence, like that of dog racing, is expiring. We are at a tipping point, as **animal racing edges ever closer to its timely demise.**



Image: Wigmore Hall’s death. One of approximately 200 victims a year. Photo credit: Dene Stansall

NOT A RACE – A SPECTACLE

The worst cruelties of the Grand National have always been known, and remain no secret: high levels of fatalities, whipping misdemeanours, falls, false starts, tragic ends to celebrated horses. Protestors and advocates continue to pull back the curtain on this spectacle.

To see industry obfuscation as a curtain is not just a metaphor. The death of a horse on the track will be diverted by cropping the camera away from the suffering animal, with the swift erection of a green tent to hide his or her death from the viewers.

Each time activists reveal enough of the gruesome spectacle, this curtain is rapidly redrawn by the racecourse, industry associations, horse welfare bodies (which are managed by the industry) and the pro-racing press. Corporate distancing and gaslighting attempt to paper over the carnage and cruelty to preserve the idea that this television spectacle is a consensual sporting event. Aintree is the socially normalised torment and death of animals on mainstream television.

Nonetheless, the continued actions by activists, advocates and journalists mean the facts are increasingly unavoidable: the mask is starting to crack. As we pull away the welfarist window dressing, we ask – what are the guts of the Grand National?

At heart, it is a bloody feat of endurance.



Image: Capturing the death of Hill Sixteen in 2023

OF SURVIVALISM

A race between consenting humans is about pushing the limits of athleticism. It pits the natural constitution, willpower and training of two or more competitors against each other – and it almost never results in death. A steeplechase of the Grand National’s length is a commercial spectacle, where the animals have not been able to consent, in which only a small number of muscular but fragile horses can make the distance.

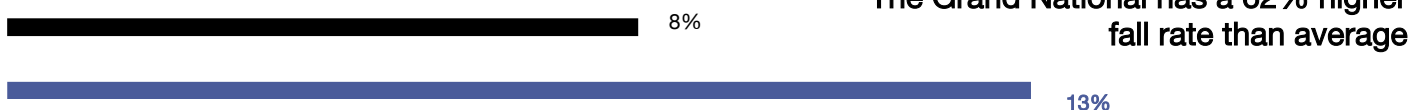
Flesh is wagered against the chaos of obstacles, fatigue and terror. The animals, selected for speed, are pushed to the utmost of their physical limits. Bred into low bone density and heart disease, they are especially vulnerable to bone breakages and cardiovascular stress. Many die from irreparable bone breakages, while others are retired after the stress of the race.

The Grand National is, even in this arena of perilous races, singularly extreme. It has the biggest field size (up to 34 horses compared to the average of 8.42 for jump races), the longest distance and the highest overall jump height in British Racing. (9)

The structure of the fences is a unique challenge to horses who have never raced on the Grand National Course. There are sixteen different fences, fourteen of which are jumped twice. They vary in build, height and gradient. The ongoing challenge to continually jump the obstacles, which are in close proximity throughout the race, can lead to contact with the fences from fatigue, due to the blinkers they are forced to wear, or from bumps from other horses in the race - factors that frequently lead to musculoskeletal injuries.

As a direct result of these extremes, the event sees the highest number of fallers and of deaths. A horse who competes in the Grand National faces a risk of death 3x higher than they do in any other steeplechase. In this context, the choice of horse is crucial. (10)

Fall Rate



Fatality Rate



Fatal Choices

Horses are entered into the race at the choice of their owner and trainer, and selections are reviewed by the British Horseracing Authority. Some, like the 2025 victim, 13-year-old Celebre d'Allen, are close to retirement – a last chance to take money and a share in the glory from an old horse. In recent years, trainers have been entering younger horses who possess greater speed, but may be less experienced jumpers. (11) This in turn leaves older horses more vulnerable due to the increased speed.

This new direction sits in the context of a tradition of breeding National Hunt (jump) horses from horses who have raced only on the flat (without obstacles), usually up to two miles. This means that horses are unlikely to be genetically predisposed to race 4 miles successfully – and there is no adequate preparation for the number and difficulty of jumps.

Stamina and jumping ability are therefore vital in training for the National. The race creates extremes that cannot be met, and only 47% of horses have finished in the last five years. (12) Many fall victim to injury, which is sometimes fatal.

Whip abuses by jockeys are a brutal and often futile attempt to induce a horse to continue when they cannot. They are pushed to the limits of their cardiorespiratory function – as seen in the 2025 death of Celebre d'Allen.



Image: A horse shot at the Grand National meeting in 1980 after severe injuries. Recent images like this are hard to find due to racecourse measures to hide deaths. Image credit: Alamy.

“Unacceptable” but Routine Deaths

“No fatality can ever be accepted as a consequence of racing...”

Roly Owers, Chief Executive, World Horse Welfare

67 horses have died at the Grand National meeting (the weekend of racing from Thursday to Saturday) **since 2000**: 5 have died in the Grand National race itself since just 2020. Clearly, fatalities are routine at Aintree (see appendix).

Knowing this, prominent industry figures repeatedly state that not a single death is acceptable. Yet, however unacceptable a death by steeplechase may be, about six nevertheless die for every thousand who start. (10) This is the irreconcilable dissonance struggling to survive scrutiny.

Horse welfare consultant Mark Kennedy highlights that **in 3 day jump meetings such as the Grand National we can expect to see three deaths each time.** (13)

“No fatality can ever be accepted as a consequence of racing”, Roly Owers, the Chief Executive of industry-friendly charity World Horse Welfare has said, “and it is in racing’s power to continually and vigorously pursue improvements, and we look forward to supporting them in this where we can.”

(14)

At the Crown Court in Liverpool, while giving testimony on oath about the Grand National, the clerk of the course at Aintree Sulekha Capewell (née Varma) was asked if any death from horse racing is ever acceptable, in the official view of Aintree Racecourse. Her answer was a simple “No.” (15)

“The only way of reducing risks even further”, according to welfare consultant Mark Kennedy, “is to discuss the subject more openly. My own view, however, is that it cannot be morally acceptable that we can statistically expect the carting away of three dead horses every time we have a major multi-day jump meeting like the Grand National.” (13)

If any death in a race is truly unacceptable, the race should never be run.

Whipping Violations

2025 | Patrick Mullins

Patrick Mullins, who won on horse Nick Rockett, was found to have used the whip eight times over the final stretch - more than the permissible 7 times.

2024 | Ryan Mania

Mania was banned before being able to compete in the Grand National for using the whip at too great a frequency. Mania has previously been investigated for fox hunting.

2022 | Sam Whaley-Cohen

Sam Whaley-Cohen excessively whipped Noble Yeats to win the Grand National. He used the whip “above the permitted level and in the incorrect place [on the horse's body] in the finish.” He was suspended for nine days and fined £400. The suspension was irrelevant as he retired upon winning. (19)

The frequent deaths of horses are not the only factor that members of the public oppose. 72% of the UK public think whipping should be banned, or 89% of those who expressed one way or another. (16)

There is now a strong consensus amongst vets that whipping causes pain. In fact, a study into the experience of being whipped showed that horses have equivalent pain receptors to humans: skin thickness does not mitigate the experience. Professor Paul McGreevy, a prominent veterinarian, has stated that this should put an end to the argument that whipping does not hurt horses: “I don’t think you will find a veterinarian who will say that racehorses don’t feel the whip or find it aversive.” There is strong consensus among expert vets that whipping causes unnecessary pain. (17)

There were 557 abuses of whip regulations in 2024 and 509 in 2025. (18)

Violations are endemic to the “sport, with jockeys frequently found to have whipped horses beyond the already permitted frequencies and/or parts of the body. For example, Ryan Mania – the jockey riding Hill Sixteen when he died during the 2023 race – was banned before the 2024 Grand National for over-use of the whip. There is no way to regulate our way into an ethically acceptable race that relies upon pain and fear as motivators for winning. (19)

A Lifetime of Abuse

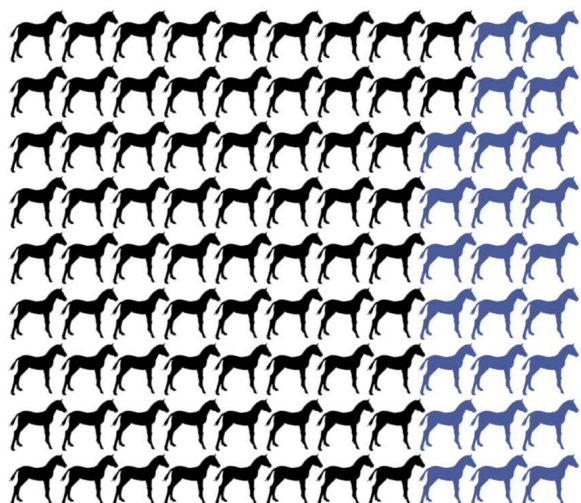
The externalities of racing, though less visible at first glance, are baked into an industry reliant upon horses as entertainment commodities. The animals become either invaluable or expendable, depending upon their odds of winning.

Breeding is a lucrative business, controlling every aspect of the mating and birthing process with the aim of producing a race winner. Mares are repeatedly and forcibly impregnated by a 'prize stallion' throughout their fertile lives. Yet out of the approximate 13,000 foals born each year, 34% will never race. Their fate remains undisclosed by the industry – likely sent to slaughter. (20)

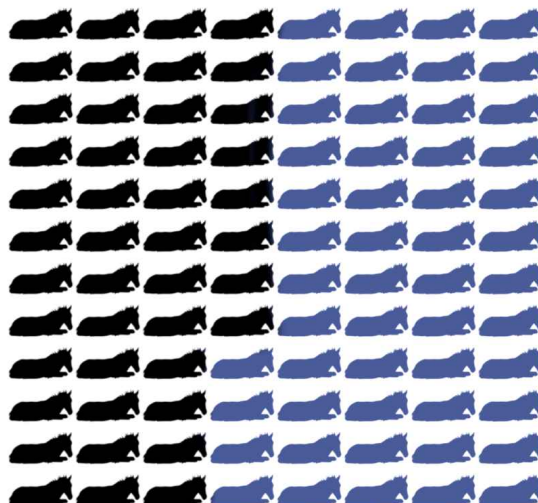
For those who do race, training can begin at about 18 months of age – long before their skeleton has fully developed. (21) Whilst under training, termed 'breaking in' by the industry, many race horses can spend the vast majority of each day locked in their stables. This is far from the open pasture for which they are adapted.

And at retirement? Despite multiple calls for improved aftercare, the volume of ex-racehorses still far exceeds places to go. Freedom of information requests showed that 4,000 ex-racehorses were sent for slaughter from 2019 to early 2021. (22)

Deaths before, during, and after a racehorse's "career"



4,000 foals (as percentage of total in blue) don't meet the standards to race each year, and disappear, unaccounted for



A further 4,000 horses are slaughtered each year at the end of their career

Circa 200 horses die per year from racing.

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

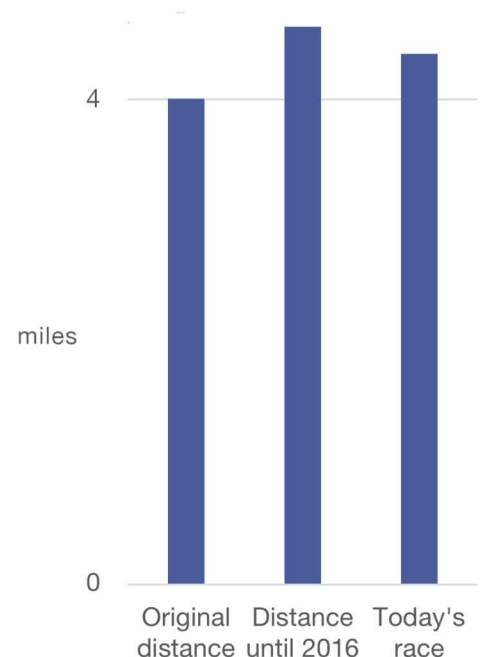
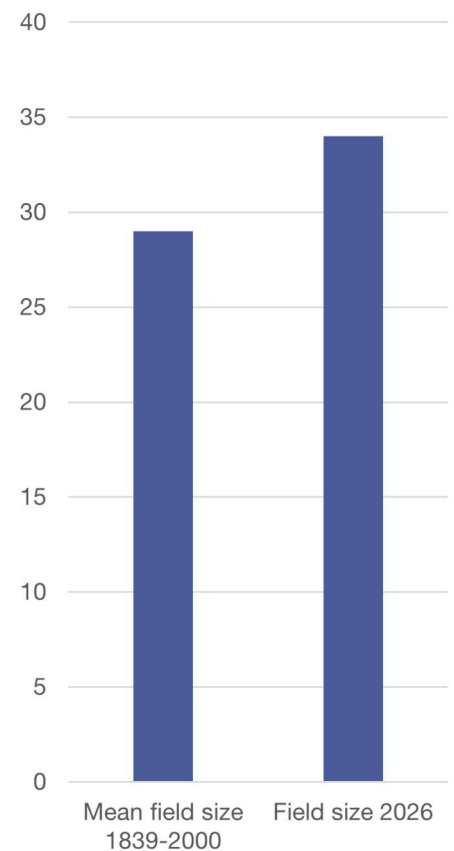
There is, according to the racing industry, a cycle of review and improvement of safety at the Grand National. But **what is presented as evidence-led and progressive is in fact reactive and cosmetic.** Big announcements follow big fatal incidents.

The Jockey Club, the British Horseracing Authority, Aintree racecourse, and the industry-led welfare bodies, make frequent gestures to assure the public of increasing safety at the Grand National. These have taken the form of major reviews, such as those in 1998, 2011, and 2023, as well as the annual reviews and tweaks to the course carried out by the Jockey Club.

However, the particular danger of the Grand National is in its extremes: the sheer distance, the number of riders, the height jumped. These extremes have remained largely constant, and accordingly fatalities have never gone away over its nearly two centuries of existence.

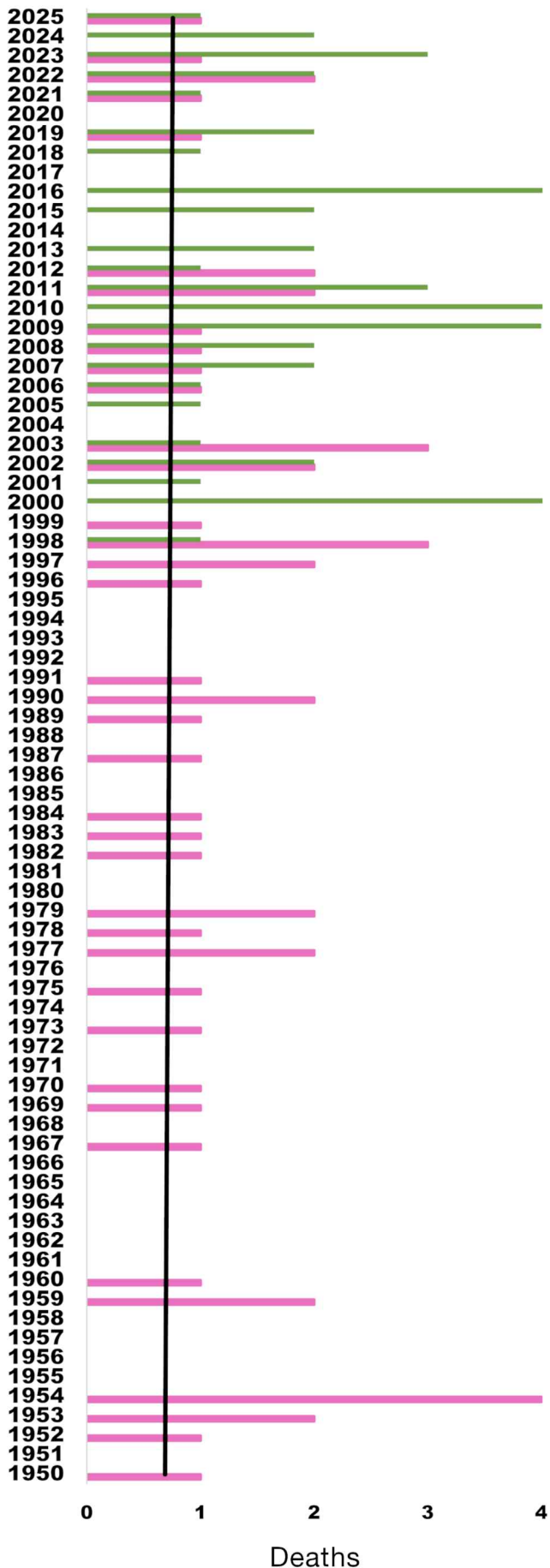
The industry remains driven by profit, spectatorship and tradition. Any changes made to the course, retirement prospects and whipping regulations have been superficial at best, and do not meaningfully address the dangers the horses are subjected to, nor their orchestration as playing pieces in a spectator sport. Ultimately, there are no changes that can be made to prevent the deaths of horses in racing with certainty.

The history and projections of safety adjustments shows a reactive, PR-driven strategy that fails to stop or lower the death toll. We are caught in a bloody circuit. Despite new deaths, prompting new reviews and minor adjustments, this approach will never deliver the safety and liberation needed without abolition. (23)



Figures: When placed in context, changes are superficial, or show no improvement.

Failure of Track Changes



2023

- Maximum field lowered from 40 to 34
- First fence moved 60m towards start
- Changes to start procedure
- Entry scrutiny
- Irrigation improvements
- Handicap raised*

2012-2023

- Race reduced in length (due to new measurement methods, not safety)
- Irrigation improvements
- Washdown area

2012

- Start moved forward 90m: race reduced to “four miles and three-and-a-half furlongs, from four-and-a-half miles.”
- Rigid timber frame replaced with “plastic birch”
- Irrigation review
- Bypass and pen around fence four
- Becher’s Brook ditch levelled

1999

- Creation of Advisory Panel to review entrants

1990

- Becher’s Brook filled in after death of Brown Trix in 1989

1984

- Maximum runners reduced from 50 to 40**

1961

- Fences given an “apron” or slope to improve sightlines

- Grand National Race (1950-2025)
- Grand National Meeting (1998-2025)
- Overall trend (linear) - deaths in main race

(there is limited data for the Grand National Meeting pre-1998)

DISRUPTIVE PROTEST AND



Sections of the public have always disagreed with, and fought against, the Grand National race. As far back as 1838, soon after steeplechasing first landed at Liverpool, the Liverpool Mercury's editorial complained about "these inhumane pastimes". (25) Protest action at Aintree itself has tested the industry repeatedly. In 1993, protestors made it onto the track by the first jump, with a series of false starts and ensuing confusion. The race was declared void that year at enormous cost to the industry.

Long-standing campaigns in support of abolishing horse racing are run by local and national animal rights organisations, with tactics spanning from parliamentary lobbying and petition campaigns, to undercover investigation and the documentation of abuses and deaths. (26)

The industry is under constant pressure and is braced for ethical challenges, even designating a bespoke 'protest area' at Aintree in response to consistent public opposition.

Image: Protesters gain access to the track at Aintree, April 2023. Image credit: Alamy

HORSE RACING

The 15 April 2023 protest was fated to dominate the headlines. A fortnight before the plan was executed, an “undercover” Mail on Sunday reporter told police and public about the plans in a self-proclaimed headline exposé. (27) Any hope of stalling action arguably backfired – this opportunity to speak out about the harms of the race spread, and even more activists signed up to speak out against the Grand National. (28)

In the event, hundreds of activists converged on the course, with a total of 118 protestors arrested. (29) Though the race went ahead, leading to the death of Hill Sixteen, the action was seen by millions. “Society is wedded to a belief that it is OK to control animals for profit,” wrote Animal Rising volunteer Alex Lockwood in the Guardian the day after the protest. “We hoped halting the race would make people stop and think.” (30)

The question is – did they succeed? A non-violent disruption of an animal exploitation event had, as far as we have found, never been actioned with such scale and ambition in the history of UK animal rights protests. Combined with the Mail on Sunday investigation and the media focus on the race, this made for a perfect storm of attention. It was measurably effective in raising the salience of animal welfare – making people “stop and think”.

“We hoped halting the race would make people stop and think.”

Alex Lockwood, Animal Rising Volunteer



Image: Protesters facing arrest at Aintree racecourse, April 2023. Photo credit: Animal Rising

Impact of 15 April 2023

Headlines across all major media outlets followed the protest. Radio and TV talk shows also engaged in the details of police and protestor action, and the wider issues of animal welfare. The protest was mentioned in the top 10 media outlets, frequently quoting Animal Rising, and the death of Hill Sixteen also remained a focus in the week after the event. (31)

Reports from 16th April mention the protest alongside, or before, the news of the winning horse in 13/22 articles, and the protest made the front cover in 3 out of 4 of the Sunday papers studied. This was a rare animal rights protest that reached a demographically significant portion of the population.

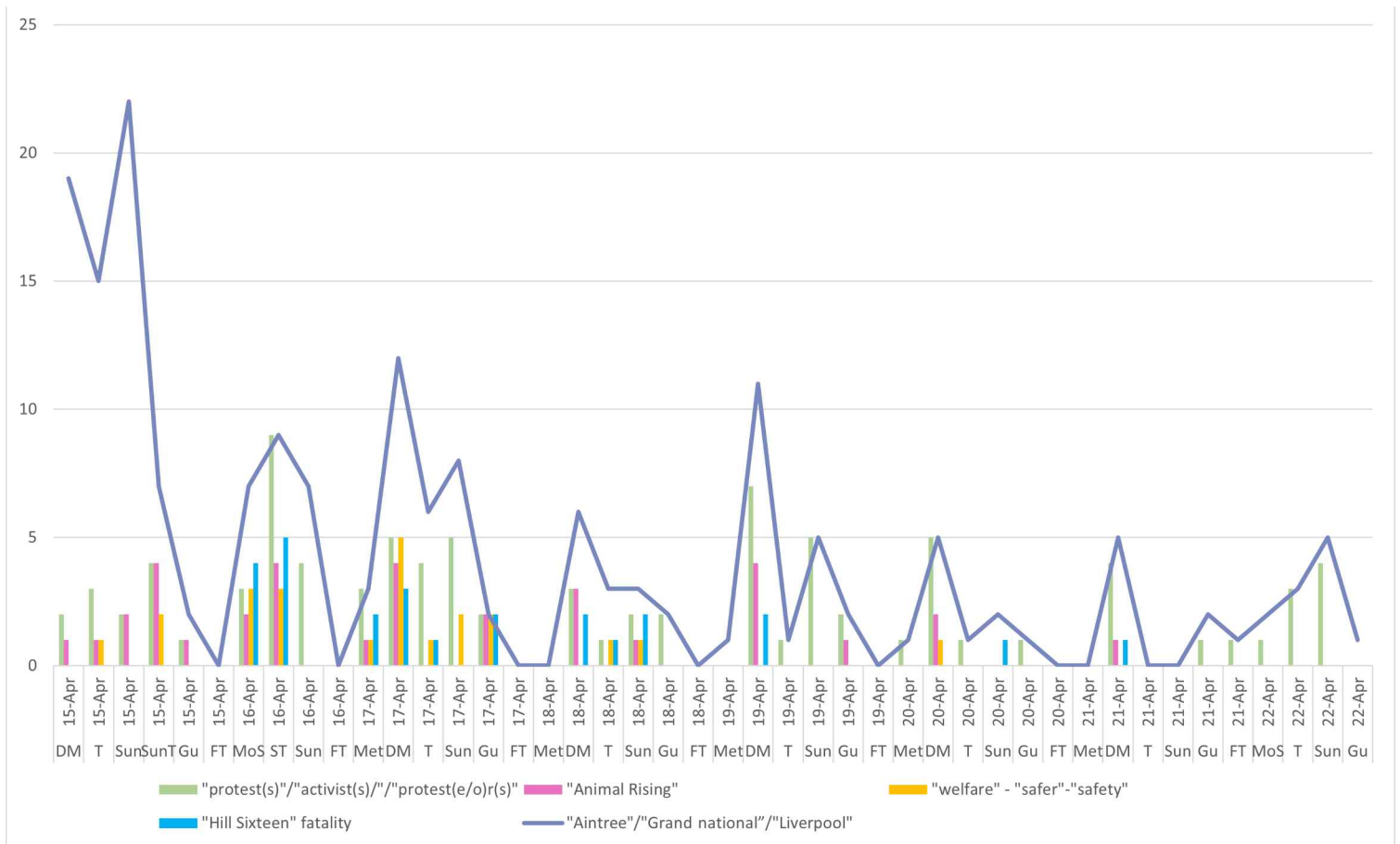


Figure The chart shows the reaction of the UK media in the week after the 15 April 2023 protest, by number of articles mentioning certain themes. The purple line across the top indicates any articles about Aintree and the race. These continue for the week after the protest. Coloured bars show different themes across the top 10 most popular UK newspapers. The data shows that the action was extremely prominent in the news (green bar). Welfarism appeared in the days after, with some sources blaming protesters for welfare concerns. Animal Rising itself was name-checked. Hill Sixteen was mentioned continually even in the week after the event, which we hypothesise is unlikely to be the case for horse deaths in other years.

The large-scale action and subsequent media storm were seeds of change falling on fertile soil. In January 2023, a YouGov poll of 4518 adults had shown that the public in the UK were split 50/50 on the question of a total ban on horse racing. (32)

Academics seized the opportunity of this protest to study the impacts of this exceptionally public display on viewers' opinions. In the immediate aftermath of the event, sociologists agreed that it had notably raised the profile of animal welfare. However, they also found negative impacts on attitudes towards welfare, and towards the idea that our relationship with animals is broken. This suggested a mixed result for the protesters. It seemed that strong negative emotions, brought on by protest, were entrenching resistance to opinion change.

Six months later, however, the same researchers returned to survey the same members of the public. What they now found had huge implications for theories of social change. They discovered that the initial negative reaction to the protest had faded with time, but the awareness of the overall issue ("salience") remained. Over time, the protest had reinforced and increased concern for animal welfare amongst the public. Their conclusion was that both awareness of the ethical issues, and positive views of welfare for animals, rose in the long run. (33)

“Over time, the protest had reinforced and increased concern for animal welfare amongst the public.”

This finding is supported by wider public debate. In comparison to the January poll with 50/50 split, a post-action poll saw 54% of the public agreeing that the Grand National is cruel to horses, with just 12% saying “it is not at all cruel”. (34) The apparent success validates what most academics think: that protest is effective, especially nonviolent disruptive protest. (35)

Would you support or oppose a ban on horse racing?

All adults (4518 GB adults - 25 January 2023)

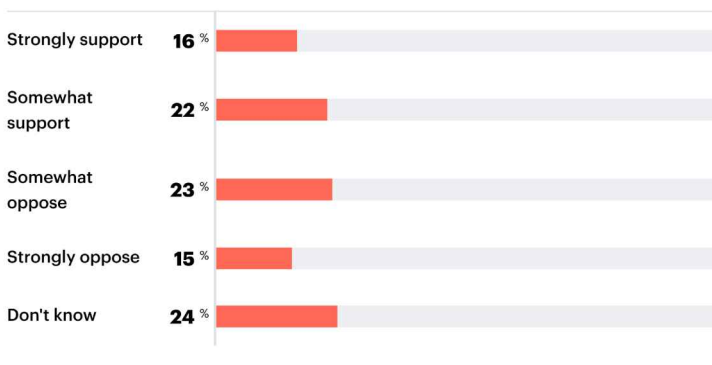


Figure: Tipping Point. Prior to the protest, a YouGov poll of 4518 adults had shown that the public in the UK were split 50/50 on the question of a total ban on horse racing. Source: YouGov

Social License Up For Review

Many experts are now discussing the use of the concept of a 'social licence to operate' in relation to Animal Welfare. This concept suggests that an activity is able to continue only so long as it has general acceptance among the public. As people find the activity in question less and less acceptable, it faces multiple pressures, such as adverse media, protests, and political opposition. (36)

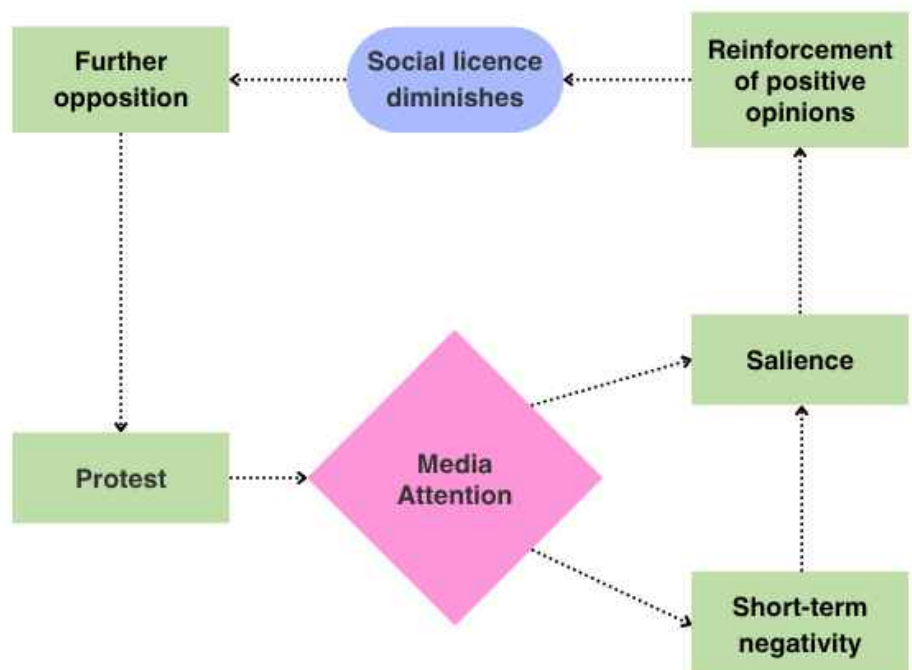
Experts view the 2023 protest as an event that changed the social licence of racing, a shift in which non-violent disruptive protest was central:

The ensuing commentary from racing aficionados and animal activists alike laid bare some of the fundamental issues surrounding the sport. This event highlights how the racing industry is increasingly subject to public pressure around the safety and welfare of horses. (37)

A newly urgent question about the future of horse racing permeated the press, including the professional media. Vets, a pillar for the whole industry, asked in their leading journal, "What's next for horseracing?" (38)

2023 saw public opinion on a knife edge. At the outset, an equal portion of the public supported and opposed a ban. After the protest, with the deaths of horses exposed, a majority of people thought the Grand National to be cruel. Supporting a ban on horse racing had become a mainstream opinion.

Image: The long-term effect of protest on public opinion. Despite some short-term negativity, overall raising of salience leads to a reinforcement of positive opinions, and a loss of social licence.



Aftermath

The trials of Animal Rising activists equally support the claim that the race is losing public credibility. From September through to November 2025, activists spoke openly in the courts about prevention of overwhelmingly probable harm to horses as their reason to attempt to stop the race. Throughout the trials, no activists were convicted of a crime, with one trial resulting in a hung jury and two juries giving unanimous “Not Guilty” verdicts. With juries repeatedly acquitting, two further trials were dismissed. (39)

In the face of a sustained attack on its social licence, the industry has only one option if it is to survive: it has to renew its claims to be taking welfare seriously. (40) As we have seen, this has been its tactic for the last 75 years, yet deaths and cruelty have remained a constant.

The “social licence to operate” of horse racing is dwindling, and it could feasibly be banned in the next decade. It may go the way of the dogs – greyhound racing has recently been outlawed in Wales and opinion polls suggest similar changes coming soon to the rest of the UK. (41) There appears to be a progressive trend, whereby greater awareness leads to a diminished social license for animal racing, which finally leads to prohibition.



Images: Twelve activists celebrate - either acquitted or not found guilty in 2025.

IN THE HEADLINES

The Mail ON SUNDAY APRIL 2, 2023
£2.160 to subscribers

The Canny Cook's Easter recipes for just £2 per person

ONLY IN YOU MAGAZINE

Undercover MoS team exposes plan by up to 100 Animal Rebellion activists to storm Aintree - then glue themselves together on the course

VEGAN MOB PLOTS TO SABOTAGE THE GRAND NATIONAL

'We'll stop the race... It'll be our biggest spectacular.'

INVESTIGATION
by Sabrina Miller

A SECRET plot by more than 100 activists to sabotage the Grand National has been exposed by an undercover MoS Sunday investigation. Activist vegans and animal rights campaigners plan to use ladders and hot cutters to storm security fences before the race at Aintree, then glue themselves together as a human barricade and sit across the course. The conspiracy - revealed just two weeks before the race meeting - was uncovered by an MoS reporter posing as a member of the Animal Rebellion campaign group. Last night we handed over our dossier of evidence to Merseyside Police. Our journalist secretly filmed as the activists, who include a former top financial journalist and a nurse, stilled charge

ing at security guards and boasting they would ruin this year's event - which has a TV audience of up to 600million across more than 140 countries as well as tens of thousands of spectators at the course. The investigation reveals that: Ring leaders have already conducted

Turn to Page 4

↑ The Mail on Sunday, 2/4/23

Protesters made race itself feel like a besieged fortress

David Walsh Chief Sports Writer

In the end, it could be said that everyone won. The Grand National was delayed but not cancelled. Liverpool and the racing community breathed a sigh of relief. Lucinda Russell, an outstanding trainer from Scotland, won for the second time in six years, this time with the classy Corach Rambler. And the protesters, in their pink Animal Rebellion T-shirts,



↑ The Sunday Times, 16/4/23

Images: In the run-up to the race, and straight after the protest, headlines focused on the plans, the disruption, and horse deaths. Media reporting in this initial stage exacerbates the negative image of activists.

News

Activists breach Aintree ring of steel

↑ The Daily Telegraph, 16/4/23

Three horses die at the festival

THREE horses died at the three-day festival this year - marring the jubilant

assessments. Dark Raven also had to be put down after falling during the Turners

↑ The Daily Mail, 16/4/23

Trainer: Protest led to death of horse



↑ The Daily Mail, 17/4/23

Images: after 15 April, welfarism in the papers was mixed with serious debate about whether racing has a future, even in traditionally pro-racing publications.

I've been a fan all my life, but the Grand National must be made safer

Daily Mail, 20/4/23

Are animal protesters

THE disruption to the Grand National caused by animal

deal with the challenge of Aintree, are subjected to this

right: should the Grand National be banned?

the race and therein lies the dilemma. If the Grand National was made

to its fall and death. Maybe so, but it's still a weak excuse. Two other horses

looking after animals that really have been ill-treated.

SUE HYDE, Thoresby, Devon

↑ Daily Mail, 19/4/23

F1 listened and improved after tragic deaths, now Aintree must too

THE morning after Ayrton Senna was killed at Imola on the first day of May

into barriers during the Friday qualifying session. The presenter at the other end of

fatuous, or both. When sport is invaded by death, the natural reaction is to say

make them safer. The halo device now fitted to grand prix car cockpits has

↑ Daily Mail, 18/4/23

Racing

Aintree's unsettling spectacle risks alienating viewers



↑ Guardian 17/4/23

Racing's disregard for animal life is appalling

Regarding the RSPCA's call for a

is quite simple. Can the animals



↑ Guardian 21/4/23; The Telegraph, 8/24 →

THE FUTURE

As the social license is weakened, the racing industry becomes more vulnerable on many fronts, including challenges to its lawfulness. The industry cannot keep saying that deaths are unacceptable in racing, whilst continuing to race horses to death.

The future of the Grand National, and horse racing more generally, depends upon the ability of the industry to sustain widespread dissonance. If it is to uphold sufficient public support, belief in the effectiveness of its course review and adaptations, and perceived welfarism, need to dominate the news.

As public support for legal change, and banning the “sport”, rises, the risk of successful legal challenges to the industry becomes very real. Indeed, the laws are already there. It seems increasingly likely that races like the Grand National could be found unlawful under existing legal frameworks, should prosecutions be brought.

The Animal Welfare Act (2006)

The Animal Welfare Act from 2006 prohibits negligently or intentionally causing an animal unnecessary suffering, and also creates a positive duty to provide a suitable environment for the animal, protecting them from pain and disease.

The demands of jump racing, the infrastructures of breeding, stabling and training and the lack of aftercare consistently and regularly undermine these criteria. We believe that there are many instances in which racing stables, jockeys and racecourses have fallen short of these criteria – not just once, but thousands of times. Whipping is universally agreed by vets to be painful to equine animals for example, and each year brings hundreds of violations at the hands of jockeys. The race environment, with horses often blinkered and closely flanked by runners at top speed over long distances, is a highly stressful and unnatural environment to endure.

Private Prosecutions

Legal acceptance of malpractice and harm is also dwindling.

Last year, Animal Aid considered bringing a private prosecution against the jockey Micheal Nolan for racing Celebre d'Allen to the point of death in the 2025 Grand National. Celebre d'Allen was whipped on even after he was seen to be flagging, and died a few days after the race of an infection likely exacerbated by exhaustion. Aintree's stewards found Nolan guilty of "continuing in the race when the horse appeared to have no more to give". (42)

This March, the group Lawyers for Animals wrote to the owner of racehorse Constitution Hill. Their letter raised concerns that this prestigious horse, who had suffered a series of falls, would be in danger if entered into Cheltenham. The owners withdrew Constitution Hill from the race over concerns in his confidence with obstacles, likely fearing a legal battle they might have lost. (43)

The emergence of legal challenges to the protest signals a broadening of public opposition to horse racing. Future protests will continue to raise the salience of animal rights to public attention. With attitudes shifting, it is highly likely that the legal precedents set by juries in 2025 are the wave crest of the growing legal alienation of horse racing.

The gap is closing between the perception of horse racing as benign and its fundamental cruelty. It is the job of advocates, activists, journalists and lawyers to keep this dissonance at the top of the headlines.

Those who support a ban on horse racing now outweigh those fighting to maintain the status quo. The next faller at these unsurmountable jumps may just be the racecourse itself.



APPENDIX

Death Statistics

In memory of all the horses killed at the Grand National Meeting, 2000 – 2025

Horses listed in blue died during the Grand National event itself, whilst others died during other races over the course of the Grand National meeting. (44)

2025

Celebre d'Allen – aged 13 – Collapsed Race Related Pleuropneumonia

Willy De Houelle – aged 4 – Fell – Broke Neck - Dead

2024

Giovinco – aged 7 – Fell – Injured – Destroyed

Pikar – aged 7 – Fell – Broke Neck – Dead

2023

Envoye Special – aged 9 – Fell Running Loose – Injured – Destroyed

Hullnback – aged 6 – Died From Infection Caused By Racing Injury

Dark Raven – aged 6 – Fell – Broke Hind Legs – Destroyed

Hill Sixteen – aged 8 – Fell – Broke Neck – Dead

2022

Eclair Surf – aged 8 – Fell – Died From Head Injuries

Discorama – aged 9 – Pulled Up – Injured Pelvis – Destroyed

Elle Est Belle – aged 6 – Collapsed During Race – Dead

Solwara One – aged 8 – Pulled Up – Injured – Destroyed

2021

The Long Mile – aged 7 – Broke Near – Hind Leg – Destroyed

Houx Gris – aged 4 – Fell Ran Loose – Fatally Injured

2020

Race meeting abandoned

2019

Up For Review – aged 10 – Brought Down Broke Neck – Dead

Forest des Aigles – aged 8 – Broke Foreleg – Destroyed

Crucial Role – aged 7 – Fell – Injured – Destroyed

2018

Lilbitluso – aged 10 – Fell – Injured – Destroyed

2017

No Deaths Recorded

2016

Kings Palace – aged 8 – Pulled Up Lamé – Destroyed

Gullinbursti – aged 10 – Fell Broke Neck – Dead

Minella Reception – aged 10 – Fell – Dead

Marasonnien – aged 10 – Collapsed – Fatally Injured

Clonbanan Lad – aged 10 – Collapsed – Fatally Injured

Arzal – aged 6 – Injured – Destroyed

2015

Balder Success – aged 7 – Fell – Injured Shoulder – Destroyed

Seedling – aged 6 – Fell – Broke Neck – Dead

2014

No Deaths Recorded

2013

Little Josh – aged 11 – Fell Broke Shoulder – Destroyed

Battlefront – aged 11 – Collapsed and Fatally Injured

2012

According To Pete – aged 11 – Brought Down – Broke Leg – Destroyed

Synchronised – aged 9 – Fell – Broke Leg Running Loose – Destroyed

Gottony O'S – aged 4 – Fractured Right Foreleg – Destroyed

2011

Leo's Lucky Star – aged 9 – Injured Destroyed

Inventor – aged 6 – Injured Destroyed

Dooneys Gate – aged 10 – broke back

Ornais – aged 9 – broke neck

Bible Lord – aged 10 – Injured Spine Destroyed Months Later

2010

Baba O'Curragh – aged 4 – Knee Injury Destroyed

Pagan Starprincess – aged 6 – Head Injury Killed Instantly

Plaisir D'Estruval – aged 7 – Broke Neck

Prudent Honour – aged 8 – Broke Neck

Schindlers Hunt – aged 10 – Broke Foreleg Destroyed

2009

Hear The Echo – aged 8 – Collapsed & Died

Mel In Blue – aged 11 – Broke Neck

Exotic Dancer – aged 9 – Collapsed & Died

Moscow Catch – aged 6 – Broke Neck

Lilla Sophia – aged 4 – Broke Leg Destroyed

2008

McKelvey – aged 8 – Injured Destroyed

In The High Grass – aged 7 – Fatal Fall

Time To Sell – aged 9 – Fatal Fall

2007

Graphic Approach – aged 9 – Injured / Later Complications PTS

Lord Rodney – aged 8 – Brought Down Injured Destroyed
Into The Shadows – aged 7 – Internal Haemorrhage During Race

2006

Tyneandthyneagain – aged 11 – Injured Destroyed

Terivic – aged 6 – Fatal Fall

2005

Lilium De Cotte – aged 6 – Internal Haemorrhage During Race

2004

No Deaths Recorded

2003

Goguenard – aged 9 – Injured Destroyed

Coolnagorna – aged 6 – Broke Hind Leg – Destroyed

2002

The Last Fling – aged 12 – Fatal Fall

Manx Magic – aged 9 – Fatal Fall

Anubis Quercus – aged 9 – Fatal Fall

Desert Mountain – aged 9 – Fatal Fall

2001

The Outback Way – aged 11 – Brought Down – Spinal Injuries Destroyed

2000

Toni's Tip – aged 8 – Fatal Fall

Rossell Island - aged 9 – Fatal Fall

Strong Promise – aged 9 – Fatal Fall

Lake Kariba – aged 9 – Collapsed & Died

Architect – aged 4 – Fatal Fall



Image: Race horse is shot, 2014. Photo credit: Dene Stansall

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Dedicated to horses forced to race, past, present and future, and to those who have been given sanctuary.



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