



# op/ed

by bill casner

This morning I viewed with revulsion the video posted by PETA. The cold hard fact is that it is a snapshot of how so many racehorses are managed. Our industry is permeated with those who have no regard for the welfare of the horse, nor understanding of the growing negative perception of horse racing. The horse becomes only a tool for fulfilling their own agendas of WIN AT ALL COSTS. Until our value system changes and horses are treated like the living, breathing, majestic animals that they are, we will continue to diminish as an industry until we no longer exist.

Most trainers have little or no investment in the horses they train, whether it is financial or emotional. They will run red light after red light in pushing that horse until it fails and then they will call the owner and spin him a story. Every vet will tell you that 90% of the major injuries have an existing underlying pathology that precedes the eventual failure yet those trainers will tell the owner that the horse "just took a bad step" and "that's horse racing." And what is sad is that most owners will accept it as the gospel.

Where does the fault lie? The owners have to assume the lion's share of the responsibility. So many owners base their trainer choice solely on the number of wins and win percentage. The owner will look sideways on everything from joint injections to race-day medication in order to "not give up a competitive advantage." The trainer's ability to retain those clients and their horses is most of the time based strictly on short-term results rather than managing the horse's welfare to maximize a quality racing career.

It will only change when an owner's choice on "who will train my horses" is predicated on a trainer's integrity, his willingness to tell him the truth at all times and to do the right thing for the horse. Owners will have to become an active part of the process in managing their horses' welfare by demanding accountability. It's not that hard---all they have to do is draw the line on any orthopedic veterinary work without being consulted. If the horse needs injecting, the odds are the horse needs surgery or time. It's the old proverb "A stitch in time saves nine." The horse will heal and come back to race again, usually with a minimum amount of time and will have a better chance at having a productive career. It's the right thing for the horse in which an owner has invested, both emotionally and financially.

Unfortunately, this is probably NOT going to happen. PETA, along with the *New York Times*, has created the tipping point. What will happen is that fewer and fewer owners will be willing to invest in racehorses that in an earlier era offered prestige and excitement.

Now the stigma is being cast and a new world of instant media has revealed the dark side. "A video is worth a thousand words." PETA and those whose agenda is to eliminate horse racing will become emboldened and will become more relentless. Our industry has the potential of going the way of the fur coat --once a status symbol, only to become a pariah.

I have never been in favor of federal intervention into our industry but something has to change. I have crossed over and feel that federal intervention is probably the only way we have a chance at survival.

As the poet laureate of my generation said, "The times they are a changin'." Only time will tell if we have the will or the vision to make that change. It will probably take a miracle. [CLICK HERE TO SHARE THIS STORY](#)

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