



Soring: A light at the end of the tunnel?

In 1970 Congress passed the Horse Protection Act (HPA). HPA was intended to eliminate the horrid practice of “soring”. Despite this, soring continues almost unabated. The Tennessee Walking Horse industry is the leading offender, however, other gaited horse breeds like the Racking Horses, and Spotted Saddle Horses are suffering from these barbaric practices.



Stacked shoe with a chain on pastern.

Soring is caused by several methods. Most common is the application of caustic or irritating chemicals (like Salicylic Acid, Mustard Oil, Fuel Oil as well as other Petroleum products, see Photo #5) on pasterns. The chemicals cause horrific burns which can cause the death of some horses. After this “treatment” scarring is left on the pasterns, and coronet bands. Due to the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) No Scarring rules, owners will try to hide scarring. The No Scarring rule states; any horse born after October 1, 1975 will be inspected for evidence of “soring”. Soring is indicated by missing hair, scars, or cuts. A treatment for trying to hide the scarring is Salicylic Acid. This acid will burn off the scarred skin. This use of Salicylic Acid is a very painful even with pain medications. The horse will be "scar free" but the treated area will be thicker and is sparsely haired, hence leaving evidence of past scarring sessions.



This horse has severe scarring indicative of soring. © USDA

Pressure shoeing, if possible is even worse. The hooves are trimmed almost to the quick, also known as “road foundered”. Shoes are then nailed on, sometimes with a foreign object inserted against the hoof. This places a tremendous and painful amount of pressure on the hoof. Metal chains and weights are also strapped on the pasterns to affect the desired gait. Another form of shoeing is called “Stacking”. Stacks are made from rubber and/or plastics and can be up to 5 inches tall; they are nailed to the hoof. A metal band across the hoof is needed to help hold the stacks on the hooves. Stacks and chains are used to add weight the feet. The extra weight of these items makes the horse pick up hooves even higher. These techniques are used singly or in combination.

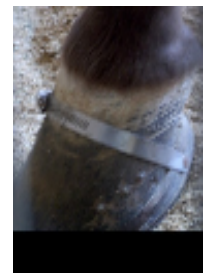


Photo shows stacked shoes with metal band across front of hoof.

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Signs of past soring include the following: wavy hair growth or hair loss in the pastern area, the hair can be darker on pasterns than the rest of the body. An Oozing of blood or serum can be found coming from the pasterns. Unusual rings or cut marks in the outer hoof wall, caused by metal bands on stack shoeing. The horse stands with its feet close together, shifting his weight to his hind legs to take body weight off their feet. Hocks are carried low and may twist outward while in motion. A Horse suffering from soring may lie down for extended periods of time, and is resistant to standing up. This Horse may be resistant to having its feet handled and have difficulty walking causing the horse to fall.

If soring is so horrific it begs the question – “Why do it?” The answer- It’s all for show, to create the desired “Big Lick” in the Tennessee walking horse gait. The “Big Lick” is the exaggerated high stepping gait the Tennessee walkers are renowned for. The pain of these soring methods forces the horse to lift its feet in an unusually high manner, just what the show crowds wants to see. Money is big and the pressure to win is huge, both for the horse and the owners. Times and attitudes must change. The “Big Lick” became popular in the late 1940’s and 1950’s after drawing larger crowd and judges choosing horse showing greater action. Instead of better breeding or more time consuming training, owners and trainers opted for weighted shoes, Stacks, then came chains. If those devices didn’t create the desired effects, caustic or irritating chemicals were then introduced. Once these “less talented” horses began to win, it became an “accepted”, yet controversial practice.

Those who oppose soring in the industry formed a set of alternative breed organizations. These groups include the National Walking Horse Association (NWA) and Friends of Sound Horses (FOSH). They wanted to promote a Sound Tennessee Walking Horse. FOSH will only support flat shod , or barefoot horses. They never support events that allow the use stacks, chains, chemicals or any artificial means to modify the natural gaits of these horses.

In 2005, the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Associations' (TWHBEA) board of directors voted to remove themselves from the National Horse Show Commission (NHSC). The TWHBEA developed a new rule book and strict guidelines for affiliated horse shows and Horse Industry Organizations (HIO) that applied and were examined by the former APHIS, which is now USDA. This is still a heated controversy in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Over the years, the USDA has overseen the inspections for soring. They have found many cases of non-compliance with HPA. According to the HAP, You may not transport to or enter a “purposely” sored horse into events, shows or sales. This decision was upheld by the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals. Court documents stated, a



Horse wearing chains, stacks and a chemical solution applied



Example of pressure shoeing. Notice, the pink areas. This shows how closely the hooves are being trimmed.



Injuries caused by soring.

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Tennessee walking horse named “Just American Magic” owned by Herbert Dedickson was disqualified at a pre-show inspection at the 34th annual walking horse trainer show in 2002. The court upheld the USDA’s decision; Mr. Herbert Dedickson was given an 8 month suspension, and fined \$600 for bilateral soring violations. It was found that this was not Mr. Derickson’s first offense of soaring involving the same horse.

The 2006 World Grand Champion at the Annual Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville, Tennessee was not crowned because of stronger enforcement efforts by the USDA. Many of the finalists’ were disqualified for violations of the HPA. Inspectors disqualified 6 of 10 horses. Even though finalists were disqualified, no other penalties were given.

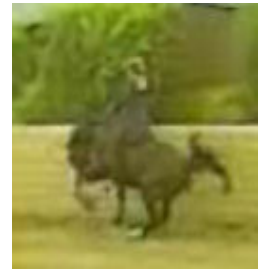
The 2007 crowd at the World Grand Champion was guarded at best but went on with significant controversy. USDA inspectors were met as unwelcome guests instead being treated as federal officials protecting horses against the law breakers.

In 2008, inspectors didn’t inspect all horses for “pressure shoeing”. Mainly the winning horses in flat-shod classes were giving a closer look. The penalty for this type of shoeing is a five year suspension. Other more severe penalties for pressure shoeing are available but they are rarely used.

It’s very sad, that those who claim to love the breed, are willing to inflict such cruelty. A growing number of owners and breeders are not willing to use such cruelty just to obtain a certain look or gait. Many have been working to end the practice of “Horse Soring”. Some trainers/owners have gone as far as “teaching” a horse not to react to pain with being inspected, further trying to hide this inhumane practice.

Due to this ongoing cruelty, many groups have come forward trying to help end soaring in the gaited breeds. The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) has suggested many ideas to end soring. August 2008, The AAEP release white papers named “Putting the Horse first: Veterinary Recommendation for Ending Soring of Tennessee Walking Horses.” The AAEP suggested a change is judging standards. Promoting and rewarding natural elegance in gaited breeds not the exaggerated and artificially created gaits. AAEP also would like to see an increased use of thermographs and digital radiography which are used to find soring victims. Other suggestions include 24 hour security personnel; increased inspections in stabling areas as well as show grounds and other known places were violation most often occur.

Inspection in the past years has been spotty at best. The budget of the USDA does not permit them to attend every show in the season. Only 10% of Tennessee Walking horse shows each year had USDA inspectors attending. When USDA inspectors are not attending, Designated Qualified Persons (DQP) are responsible for inspections. Many DQPs’ are licensed by the HIO’s and personally own, train, and show these same horses. HIO is filled



This horse is falling while in a show arena, due to the stacked shoes and sore feet.



Oozing from pastern



USDA X-rays of pressure shoeing with stacks.

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with the same offenders who want to maintain the same old status quo. According to Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) this is like “the fox guarding the henhouse”. Both HSUS and AAEP have similar concerns about the DQP program. The AAEP and HSUS would like to see this program done away with.

HSUS and AAEP are in complete agreement with these suggested changes. August 8, 2008, HSUS announced a \$10,000 reward for any information leading to arrest and convictions of the Tennessee violators of the “horse soring” laws. If you would like to report any information about soring practices, you may call 1-866-411-8326. Your name will be protected by HSUS. HSUS and other horse industry groups form, “The Alliance to End Soring”. The Alliance intends to work with the USDA, Congress and Tennessee walking horse industry to raise public awareness.



Double chains, and stack are being used to achieve the “Big Lick” gait.

In 2009, Kentucky lawmakers introduced SB 176. This bill raises penalties fees to between \$1,000 and \$2,500 for a first time offense. Second time offenders will receive penalties between \$2,500 and \$5,000, and a 1 year ban from exhibiting or selling horses in the state of Kentucky. Third time offenders will face a 2 year ban from exhibiting and sale of horses as well as fines from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The bill will also increase more reliable funding. Senator T. Buford states another bill may be seen in the future.

During two days of meetings, the Walking Horse Trainers’ Association (WHTA) has recommended the removal of the National Horse Show Commission (NHSC) as the HIO. WHTA suggests the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration implement their own HIO named SHOW. SHOW will be responsible for taking over NHSC’s functions. On



Example of sore shoeing.

March 9th, 2009 an eight member board which had four representatives from WHTA and representatives from Walking Horse Owners Association (WHOA) gave recommendations to leave the NHSC. The board members did decide to reschedule the upcoming Trainers’ show to a later date.

[SB 176](#) (BR 1506) – Bill Sponsored by Senator [T. Buford](#)

Bill Status: Pending

Legislature Status: In Session

AN ACT relating to horses.

“Create new sections of KRS Chapters 436 246 to ban the act of soring horses; define "horse", "sore" "soring", and "management"; create the crime of soring and set fines; establish various ways offenders may be banned from showing, exhibiting, or selling at auction; specify fines for violating a ban; specify violations for hiding or destroying evidence that a horse is sore; list duties of management of any horse show, exhibition, sale, or auction;



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provide that management has reporting responsibilities to the Department of Agriculture and to a peace officer; require that a peace officer shall enforce the new provisions ; allow for exceptions; require the Department of Agriculture to license and regulate horse shows, exhibitions, sales, and auctions and promulgate administrative regulations; repeal KRS 436.185.

Feb 13-introduced in Senate; to Agriculture (S)”

In response to an industry that is either unwilling or not able to self regulate, the USDA will be employing stiffer enforcement of the HPA (Horse Protection Act) rules. The USDA is not longer willing to allow self-policing in this industry. The 2009 show season will be filled with many necessary changes. Several meetings will be held to further explain the updated enforcement policies.

These are a few of much needed changes in gaited industry. The DQP and VMO (Veterinary Medical Officers) **WILL NOT** be allowed to inspect horses owned by any member of the DQP's immediate family **OR** any horse owned by a DQP's employers.

In order to identify any potential horses suffering from soring Pre-show inspections are held. A horse is not allowed to be wearing a saddle or any type of tail brace. The mouth and tail area are to be inspected for foreign objects and any distractions. Inspectors will also have the authorization to have shoes and stacks removed if further inspection is deemed necessary and a farrier is available. The farrier can be enlisted to test hooves with a hoof tester. The hoof testers can be applied to both flat- shod and padded hooves.

Inspectors will be present at warm-up areas, in barns/stables, around horse trailers, as well as in other areas. The increased inspections will surely help to stem these inhumane practices. The USDA in conjunction with all other gaited horse groups should have the horses' health and safe as priority #1! No longer can we allow such abusive treatment any horse for any reason.