

# Racehorse Welfare Guidelines – a summary

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This document should be regarded as an overview only. To ensure your full knowledge, please go to the [New Zealand Thoroughbred Welfare Racing Guidelines 2020](#) developed by NZTR.

## Humans and Thoroughbreds

The guidelines state that the human-horse bond underpins thoroughbred welfare and is exhibited on a daily basis in the racing and breeding of Thoroughbreds.

“We believe that it is acceptable to use horses as long as their use is humane, and that we have responsibilities and a duty to care for horses,” the guidelines say.

“We recognise that each horse will develop differently and because of this, we tailor training to the individual horse.

“We often form emotional bonds with the horses in our care. We have a high regard for their abilities and contributions as an athlete.”

A happy, healthy horse is generally a well performing horse, the guidelines remind owners.

“At all stages during the preparation and presentation of horses for racing, welfare should be a prime consideration.”

The guidelines include welfare benchmarks that clarify:

1. desired or optimal welfare conditions for Thoroughbreds and
2. minimum acceptable welfare conditions for Thoroughbreds in development, racing, breeding and retirement.

The guidelines state, “It is critical, therefore, that licence holders (trainers and jockeys), owners and breeders of racehorses are familiar with this entire document. Ignorance of these guidelines is not a defence or justification for failure to meet minimum welfare standards”.

## Five Domains

The guidelines are created around a model of animal welfare called the Five Domains. They also reflect international racing conventions and the New Zealand legislative and regulatory environment.

The Five Domains model focuses attention on a wide range of factors that can have negative or positive impacts on a horse. These are grouped under The Five Domains of nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state.

Good Thoroughbred care minimises negative experiences for the horse and maximises positive experiences.

The guidelines are then broken into four sections that cover Thoroughbreds prior to racing, in racing, in breeding and after racing.

In racing, NZTR has adopted guidelines formed by the International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians. There include:

- prevention of unnecessary pain and distress
- prevention of avoidable risks
- recognition that properly conducted euthanasia can be a humane option for horses.

### **Retiring a horse from racing**

Under the guidelines for after racing, the document sets out reasons for retirement. It mentions that NZTR has no jurisdiction over Thoroughbreds in retirement and reminds readers there is the Animal Welfare Act and a Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys covering this situation. An appendix lists potential career options in detail and another gives illustrations of body condition scoring for horses.

There are responsibilities and processes for owners when retiring a horse.

The person in charge (the accountable person) of the horse needs to be satisfied that the person intending to own the horse possesses the competence and resources necessary for the horse's future well-being.

He or she must also inform a potential buyer of the temperament and physical condition of the horse, including any injuries or chronic conditions that need to be actively managed or may make the horse unsuitable for the anticipated use.

The person in charge must promptly submit a SR24 Death or Retirement form to NZTR within one month of a horse dying or being retired from racing.

Retraining a retired Thoroughbred ensures a greater likelihood of better future homes and is an effective way to minimise any potential welfare problems arising from the transition out of racing. Having started under saddle, racehorses are prepared specifically to race, but in the right hands are usually very adaptable to retraining and learning new skills.

Racehorses are adapted to sometimes specific, high-energy diets and, to some extent, will need to learn to forage or find water from natural sources, or to negotiate and utilise natural terrain for protection from bad weather. It may take as little as a few days, or on rare occasions, potentially up to 12 months of active and skilled retraining for a horse to physiologically transition out of racing.

Where horses have unresolvable injuries or an unmanageable temperament, euthanasia may be considered. The guidelines set out the required methods.

NZTR's guidelines are now used by other countries' racing authorities as a starting point for their own ones and can be read in full [here](#).