

# Introduction to the Veterinary Profession

VETS30030 / VETS90122



## The equine industry in Australia

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### Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this week of study you should be able to:

- Describe the importance of the horse industry to Australia and the role of vets in the industry
- Describe the main horse industries in Australia
- Describe the horse breeds commonly found in Australia

### Keywords

Horses; horse industry; racing industry; equestrian sports; Thoroughbred; horse breeds.

### Importance of the industry in Australia

The horse industry contributes more than \$6.3 billion annually to the national gross domestic product, and Thoroughbred racing alone contributes an estimated \$3.9 billion dollars. Also Thoroughbred racing in Australia provides full- or part-time employment for almost 250,000 people, the equivalent of 77,000 jobs.

There are at least 1.2 million horses in Australia. This includes approximately 400,000 feral horses and donkeys.

As well as people who ride horses for recreational pursuits, there are many industry sectors in which people are employed, including the breeding industry; the racing industry (Thoroughbred, Harness racing etc); other equestrian sports and competitions; riding schools, trail riding businesses, stock work, police and army; horsemeat trade; plus trainers, farriers, vets, stable hands and racing stewards. There are also many supported industries, such as feed suppliers, hay growers, pharmaceutical companies, bookmakers, truck drivers, tack makers, and the clothing industry.

### Veterinarian's Role

Equine Veterinarians Australia is the special interest group of the AVA. Members include specialists, GP equine vets, government/industry (eg racing regulatory bodies), researchers and mixed practitioners. They are a source of information for the public on current hot topics include Hendra virus, welfare in racing etc.

## **Common horse breeds in Australia**

### **Thoroughbred**

Used for flat racing (galloping); the so-called 'sport of kings'. Many TBs go on to have successful careers in other disciplines after racing (some racehorses continue racing until 11 years old, but all have to retire by 12 years old). Many retire at 5 or 6 years of age, when they are young enough to be re-trained for careers as eventers, dressage horses etc. Thoroughbreds officially change their age on August 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Standardbred**

Trotters and Pacers; used for harness racing, which is a significant industry in Australia. Very versatile and easy to work with (more relaxed than Thoroughbreds); many are used for pleasure riding after racing. Also commonly used as embryo recipients for embryo transfer. Standardbreds officially change their age on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Australian Stock Horse**

Developed in Australia for working livestock; derived from thoroughbred bloodlines with the addition of arabians, quarter horses and other breeds. Used for a wide variety of disciplines- stock work, showing, campdrafting, pony club, polocrosse, polo. 'The breed for every need'.

### **Quarter Horse**

Originally bred in America for sprint racing (Quarter mile); now used for cattle work (cutting, campdrafting, cow horse), rodeo, western performance, reining, showing, pleasure. Very popular breed worldwide.

### **Warmblood**

Middle weight horses derived from crossing 'hot blood' horses (TB, Arabians) with 'cold blood' horses (draught breeds). Originated in Europe (Dutch, Belgian Warmbloods etc.). Used for Dressage, Eventing, Show Jumping, Showing. Very popular breed worldwide.

### **Arabian**

One of the oldest breeds of horse in the world. Has a distinctive head shape ('dish face') and tail carriage. Used for endurance riding, showing and pleasure riding.

### **Other Breeds seen in Australia**

- Ponies (Welsh Mountain, Australian Riding, Shetland, Miniature)
- Draught Breeds (Clydesdale, Shire, Percheron)
- Others (Waler, Appaloosa, Gypsy Cob, Icelandic Horses...)

### **Terminology (see equine glossary provided on canvas)**

- **Stallion**- Entire male horse over 4 years old
- **Colt**- Entire male horse younger than 4 years old
- **Gelding**- Castrated horse
- **Mare**- Female horse over 4 years old
- **Filly**- Female horse younger than 4 years old
- **Rig**- Cryptorchid
- **Yearling**- a horse in its second year
- **Weanling**- a foal after it has been weaned before it becomes a yearling (usually around 6 months).

## **Different horse industries in Australia**

### **Australian Racing Industry**

- Biggest equine industry in Australia: About 300,000 people have a direct interest as individual owners of, or members of syndicates which own, the 30,000 horses in training in Australia
- Flat racing- gallop around a track (usually turf, sand or synthetic)
- Jumps racing (only in Victoria) - obstacles (jumps) added in at regular intervals
- Racing is the second most popular spectator sport in Australia
- Huge revenue from gambling (>\$15 billion wagered each year).
- Regulatory bodies in each state- e.g. Racing Victoria, Racing Queensland
- Strict regulations governing the integrity of the sport.
- Generally horses are 'worked' every morning for fitness and education and may be raced every fortnight or every 3-4 weeks. Horses are spelled (rested) for a few weeks/months after 5-10 races.
- The top races have huge prize money, such as the Melbourne Cup (\$6 million) and the Everest (\$13 million).

### **Thoroughbred Breeding**

- Stud farms range from small boutique farms with only a few mares, to large corporate holdings with hundreds of mares and 6-8 stallions.
- Live cover – no artificial insemination allowed.
- Stud fees may be as much as \$220,000 per cover (payment on birth of live foal).
- Australian genetics are famous all over the world; some 'shuttle stallions' move between the Northern and Southern hemispheres each year.
- Breeding season in Australia / NZ is September to January
- Foals are weaned at approximately 6 months of age, and identified with freeze brands
- Parentage verified with a hair DNA test; all registered horses identified with a microchip
- Yearling sales are a very important part of the horse breeding calendar; there are several big sales around the country
- Most horses are broken in and put in to pre-training before they turn 2yo

### **Harness Racing**

- Pacers- legs move laterally (ie move right front and right hind together)
- Trotters- legs move diagonally (ie move right front and left hind together)
- Horses pull a small cart or 'gig'
- The Inter Dominion is the most valuable race on the calendar, worth \$500,000.

### **Dressage**

- Rider must demonstrate complete control through a series of manoeuvres in an arena and are scored by a judge.
- Mostly Warmblood horses.
- An Olympic sport, regulated by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)

### **Show Jumping**

- Series of jumps in allotted period of time
- Scored based on number of jumps cleared and time taken
- Penalties given for refusing or knocking over a jump
- International competition regulated by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)

### **Cross Country**

- Horses must clear a series of obstacles on a large outdoor course (up to 6 or 7km) within the allotted period of time.
- Penalties are given for exceeding the time
- Requires high levels of fitness to clear the course in time.
- International competition; a component of the 3-day event, which is an Olympic sport, regulated by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)

### **Showing**

- Shows are held in most towns across the country.
- Royal shows tend to be held in large cities
- Horses are judged on conformation, appearance, behaviour etc
- Ridden or led classes, plus different breed classes

### **Endurance**

- Courses may be 80-400km. Can place a lot of stress on the horse – heavy veterinary involvement.
- Amateur sport in Australia (prizemoney prohibited).
- (Popular and wealthy sport in the middle east)

### **Camp-drafting**

- Unique Australian sport involving using horses to cut out cattle in a small yard before manoeuvring the beast around a course
- Increasing in popularity in recent years- now held in every Australian state

### **Rodeo**

- Originated on the ranches of North America.
- Involves timed events- calf roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing, team roping
- Also roughstock events- saddle bronc, bareback, bull riding

### **Cutting**

- Originated in North America but gaining popularity in Australia
- Riders select one head of cattle from a mob and cut it out
- Judged based on ability of the horse and rider

### **Polo**

- Each rider has a team of 5 or 6 ponies, and changes mounts throughout the game.
- (purpose-bred polo ponies; smaller thoroughbreds are also now becoming popular).
- Wooden ball hit with a mallet towards goal posts; centuries old sport.
- Many professional riders (some international), engaged by wealthy team sponsors.
- Compare with **Polocrosse**
  - Amateur sport; one horse per rider.
  - Ball carried in a net on the end of a cane, rather than being hit with a mallet

### **Other Equine Uses**

- Western sports- reining, western pleasure, team penning
- Pony club
- Adult riding clubs
- Trail riding
- Agricultural use

### **Challenges**

- **Welfare** – all equestrian sports carry a risk of injury (some more than others) and veterinary involvement is important.

### **Other challenges to the equine industry:**

- Reduced land for equine pursuits- urban sprawl, national parks
- Risk of exotic disease (Equine Influenza outbreak 2007; Hendra virus)

### **Issues within the equine veterinary profession:**

- The dentistry debate- lay equine dentists vs equine veterinarians