



Grand National sparks animal welfare debate after three horses die at Aintree – video

Horse racing

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Calls for jump-racing ban after Grand National horse deaths

Animal rights group Animal Aid says change needed after ‘brutal horrors’ at Aintree as three horses die during festival

PA Media

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Animal rights campaigners have called for jump racing to be banned and “much more stringent” safety measures put in place for the sport after three horses died at the 175th annual [Grand National](#) festival.

The third fatality, Hill Sixteen, suffered a broken neck at the first fence at the [Aintree](#) racecourse in Liverpool and died of its injuries.

This followed the deaths of Dark Raven and Envoye Special earlier on Saturday and on Thursday respectively.

Animal Aid called for jump racing to be banned in the wake of the deaths. The campaign group’s horse racing consultant, Dene Stansall, said: “Jump racing must be banned to prevent the brutal horrors seen today at [Aintree](#) and this week from happening again.

“Innocent racehorses’ lives taken from them in the name of entertainment and gambling. Aintree, the worst of all racecourses, is a disgrace and the Jockey Club and British racing should hang their heads in utter shame at what we have seen over the past three days.”

The League Against Cruel Sports said the death toll at the Aintree festival was now 62 horses since 2000 – with 16 killed in the Grand National, including two last year.

The League called for “much more stringent” safety measures in horse racing, including banning the use of the whip.

Emma Judd, head of campaigns and communications at the League, said: “It cannot be more apparent that it is time for change and for the introduction of tighter safety measures in the Grand National, at the Aintree racecourse and at racecourses across the UK.

“One death is too many. [Animal welfare](#) needs to be put before gambling profits and entertainment, and steps need to be taken to end this carnage which is occurring year after year.

“A new independent regulatory body is required which has horse welfare as its number one priority. The use of the whip, which pushes horses beyond what they can safely do, should be banned.”



Animal Rising activists protest outside Aintree during day three of the Randox Grand National festival. Photograph: Paul Greenwood/Shutterstock

Peta UK described the Grand National race as “one of the longest and most hazardous in the world”, saying its “high risk factor” is “what makes it famous”.

The organisation called for the public to urge sponsors to withdraw financial support for the event.

“Almost every year, horses are killed during the three-day festival, sustaining horrific and often fatal injuries at notorious fences such as the Chair, Becher’s Brook and the Canal Turn,” Peta UK said.

“Every time horses are forced to jump over these excessively high obstacles, it puts tremendous pressure on their slender front legs and they risk broken legs, necks and backs.

“In some cases, drugs – both legal and illegal – have been administered by trainers and even veterinarians to mask the pain of horses who should have been recuperating so that they could instead be forced to run with injuries, making them worse.

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“Even those who make it off the track alive are likely to suffer. Thousands of horses – including ‘spent’ thoroughbreds and those who don’t ‘make the grade’ – are discarded like used betting slips every year. They’re abandoned, neglected, or sold for slaughter.”

Campaign group Viva! tweeted that the Grand National is “infamous for killing horses”.

It urged people not to support the annual race. “It is a cruel, outdated sport that needs to end,” the group added.

Dickon White, who runs Aintree racecourse as north-west regional director for Jockey Club Racecourses, said: "Hill Sixteen was immediately attended by expert veterinary professionals during the Grand National, but sadly sustained a fatal injury. Our heartfelt condolences are with his connections."

He added: "While racing in the third race, Dark Raven was immediately attended by our expert veterinary professionals. After assessment, sadly they concluded the necessary course of action for the horse's welfare was to put him to sleep. Our sincere sympathies are with his connections."

Julie Harrington, chief executive of the British Horseracing Authority (BHA), said: "Our thoughts are with everyone connected to the horses who suffered fatal injuries this week."

"British racing works tirelessly to improve the sport's safety record and reduce avoidable risk. Every incident is reviewed by the BHA alongside the race course and other bodies."

"As a sport we have for years shown great determination and commitment to improve welfare standards by taking measured scientific, evidence-based, regulatory and education-based steps."

This article was amended on 18 April 2023 to clarify that Hill Sixteen was not put down or euthanised, but died of its injuries.

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