

## VETERINARIAN'S CORNER

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH DR. PATTY HOGAN

**What % of your patients are Thoroughbred racehorses?** About 50% are TB's the rest are STB's – very little of my practice is riding horses.

**What % of your practice involves orthopedic surgery?** Probably 60% of my practice is orthopedics but I do a lot of throat surgery – basically those 2 areas are what bother race-horses the most – musculoskeletal injuries and upper airway issues.

How many years have you been doing orthopedic surgery, and how long have you managed your own clinic at Fair Winds? I have been a surgeon since 1996 and this is my 4th year in my own practice. It has been a wonderful experience and I have enjoyed every minute of it!

**What are the most common racetrack injuries that you see?** The most common injuries that I see are chip fractures involving the knee or ankle joints, and various types of leg fractures that are common in the racing population.



A spiral fracture (l) in Turning For Home retiree 6yo Rolled Up that was fixated with three screws. Rolled Up (r) shown here five months after Hogan performed the surgery.

**What changes would you like to see in medication/racing rules?** I think this is a very difficult area to regulate right now – there are many medications that are very therapeutic and are of great benefit to our equine athletes in helping them to maintain fitness, and address minor issues with inflammation or sickness. However, the fine line is where the use of such medications can be abused or used in a blanket fashion for other “perceived” benefits. Clenbuterol would be an example of that sort of medication. It is a very important and useful drug that has its place in racing, but there have been some questions raised on the potential for its abuse.

I do feel that uniformity in rules is needed, especially from what I have observed in Standardbred racing, where horses may race in a different state (l)every week. Knowing the various rules for each state for legitimate medications puts an undue burden upon the trainer.

**How much responsibility do we, as an industry, have towards horses who can no longer race?** I have great compassion for our horses both as an animal-lover and as a veterinarian. But even if I disregard my personal feelings on the subject and remain objective, at the very least it is obvious that racing is a business vying for the shrinking entertainment dollar. We require the full support of the public on many levels to survive. Any successful company will tell you that positive public relations are absolutely vital to the success of any business and there is no way that we can sell our product to the public without seeing that product through full-circle. The fact that our product happens to be a living animal makes it all the more important to show the public that we care and can think beyond the tote board. We need to have rules and regulations regarding equine welfare, have safety nets in place as horses progress through their racing careers, and have programs in place that can offer retraining, retirement, or euthanasia. In all cases, there should be an acceptable end-result that we control – not one that got away from us and certainly not one that will haunt the sport (i.e. Ferdinand's slaughter overseas). I firmly believe that this concept should be an industry-wide organized and supported goal, not just that of volunteers and private donations. Any of us who makes a living in this sport is responsible for making this happen.

**You mention euthanasia: how can it play a role in the aftercare of these horses?** Euthanasia is a viable option for horses that cannot sustain an acceptable quality of life. I can look at that very objectively if there is clearly an issue with a horse sustaining an injury causing pain, or if the quality of life, for whatever reason, is poor. But if we are having to euthanize perfectly healthy, wonderful horses solely because they are “unwanted” then we need to ask ourselves some very tough questions.

**Your own personal thoughts on horseracing!** I have loved racing since I can remember, devouring every book possible as a child, watching all the big races on TV, and grooming Standardbreds at the age of 10. I am a true fan and also a participant as an owner and breeder. I feel privileged to have also been able to carve out a career as a veterinarian caring for these elite athletes. I am happy that I have something of value to give back and that is what drives me to help whenever possible. If veterinary care can make a difference for one horse to have the opportunity to be adopted and move on to another career, I would like to be there.

*Dr. Hogan was honored with Turning For Home's Special Recognition Award for 2009. Her Hogan Equine Clinic at Fair Winds, LLC, is located in Cream Ridge, NJ.*

