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Notice to the Industry

Update on the Standardbred Use of the Whip Initiative ORC announces Pilot for new driving requirements

For a two week period starting Thursday, April 9th, the drivers at Woodbine Racetrack will be required to drive the entire mile with a line in each hand. This new pilot is an outcome of the work of the Standardbred Use of the Whip Working Group, which has been meeting over the winter to develop recommended changes to how the whip is used in Ontario horseracing.

The purpose of the pilot is to allow the drivers an opportunity to provide input on how a new rule will be developed, which will make it a requirement that a line be kept in each hand for the entire mile. Currently the Ontario Rule 22.23.01 (d) requires a line in each hand only to the head of the stretch. This short term change in the rules has been authorized through the issuance of Ruling SB40/2009 by Executive Director John Blakney.

At its last meeting in March the Working Group reached consensus that a line in each hand will provide the necessary restrictions to the use of the whip, making racing in Ontario more palatable to a wider general audience of new fans. Dependant upon the outcome of the pilot, new rules will be provided to the Board of the Ontario Racing Commission for its review and consideration.

The pilot is restricted to a two week period at Woodbine Racetrack, so that the evaluation of the change is in a controlled learning and experimental environment. All drivers have met with the Judges to discuss the change and to develop appropriate driving styles to effect the change to the rule.

Luc Ouellette and Jody Jamieson provided the input of the drivers during the Working Group sessions and will coordinate with the drivers at Woodbine to provide feedback to the Judges. The drivers will be encouraged to provide their input on what should be considered a violation under the rules of this new driving style and provide recommendations for a penalty structure.

Opportunity for Input

Fans, customers, industry participants and drivers are all encouraged to compare the product on the racetrack during this pilot and provide their feedback directly to the Judges and the Use of the Whip Working Group, as follows:

Contact the ORC Judges at Woodbine directly at (416) 675-7223

Email: inquiry@ontarioracingcommission.ca

Fax: (416) 213-7827

Brought together by the Executive Director of the ORC to discuss industry changes required, the Standardbred Working Group represents many facets of the industry, including participants (trainers, drivers and owners), associations, veterinarians, and racetracks.

The Working Group recognizes the importance of the issues related to the use of the whip in standardbred racing. It understands and has knowledge of the many varying opinions on its use, from an industry participant perspective and the public interest perspective. Many suggestions have been received and are being discussed, including changes in technology, presentation of product, safety of participants and communications.

The Use of the Whip Initiative started in Ontario last September with an all-breed meeting called by the Executive Director with over 50 industry representatives. Outcomes from that meeting were the development of breed specific working groups, which have been meeting over the winter to address the issues raised.

The following principles were developed at the original meeting, which have guided the many discussions:

- Ensure the welfare of the horse
- Promote safety for participants (including the horse)
- Create simple, clear and consistent rules (and enforcement)
- Address customer/public perception and education
- Support growth of the customer base

The ORC believes this close examination of the degree of acceptability of the practice is both appropriate and timely, within the framework of the racing product, social responsibility and concern for the welfare of the horse.

Contact: John L. Blakney, Executive Director