

ISSUE 13

AUGUST 2024

William Jones

THE BLACK HORSE NEWSLETTER

**Shining a fierce light on the GREED, CORRUPTION, EXPLOITATION
and INJUSTICE in horse racing and bloodstock around the world**

LONG WALK TO OBLIVION



The chief executives of HRI, Suzanne Eade (far left), and IHRB, Darragh O'Loughlin (right), on their way to try and explain away the latest scandals to hit Irish racing.

PART ONE

THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?

PART TWO

AS THE DUST SETTLED YET ANOTHER O'BRIEN FAIRY STORY DRIFTED INTO THE ANNALS OF FOLKLORE

WEB

www.goldrushpublications.com

EMAIL

info@goldrushpublications.com

will.r.jones@hotmail.com

SPECIAL REPORT: Abattoir's secret profits**THEY SHOOT HORSES,****DON'T THEY?**

Of the 2,000 horses slaughtered in a Kildare abattoir last year, 1,428 were registered thoroughbreds who between them had run over 3,000 times winning more than E1.5 million in prizemoney.

Racing fans had watched them compete in Ireland, the UK and France and thousands had been bet on them.

Now they were deemed surplus to requirements because they couldn't run fast enough anymore; some could hardly even walk and their reward for all they gave racing was a trip to the slaughterhouse from hell.



Horrific scenes were captured by hidden cameras for the RTE Investigates documentary *HORSES: Making a Killing*. They were repeatedly punched, kicked and beaten with plastic piping by brutal staff working for Shannonside Foods Ltd in Ireland's only licensed equine abattoir in Straffan (pictured).

Horses which were so severely injured they couldn't get up off a concrete floor were left there struggling for hours until they either died or sometimes put out of their misery with a bolt in the head and then unceremoniously dragged out of the way by a tractor.

Traditionally, Irish racing has never had a problem euthanising horses that have lost their competitive edge or didn't even have enough of it to begin with. It takes its core values from the farming community which views horses as no different from cattle, sheep and pigs that are slaughtered for their meat.

Yes, they shoot horses, but Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) insists there is a right and wrong way to do it and the treatment they received in the Shannonside abattoir "deeply disgusted and appalled" an organisation that is receiving E76 million in State funding in 2024 for running Irish racing like the Wild West.

We have been here before and they churn out the same meaningless shock and horror reaction every time something goes wrong. Nothing changes.

An HRI statement said it *"supports euthanising of horses in a humane, ethical and appropriate manner in situations where there is a risk to the quality of life or diminished circumstances for a horse."* That is a blank cheque for trainers and owners to send unwanted horses straight from the racetrack to an abattoir.

What happened to Muzbid is symptomatic of the malaise that has racing by the throat and disgusts the general public. He was bred by John O'Connor at Ballylinch Stud and initially trained by Dermot Weld for the late Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum of Dubai for whom he won one of three races before being moved on. He had one failed attempt over hurdles for serial doper Denis Hogan and then won once in three starts for PJ Prendergast.

His final port of call was County Cork where he was trained by Rodger Sweeney for owner G Penney. He won one race out of 12 for his new connections with his last run in August 2020. Two months later HRI's website disclosed that Muzbid had died. He had been euthanised because he wasn't competitive anymore. He was 6 years old.

But RTE's relentless researchers found that, bizarrely, Muzbid had died twice: they unearthed records which showed he had been exported alive from Ireland in November 2020, two months after he had already died according to HRI, and slaughtered for meat in Italy in December 2020.

Except it wasn't Muzbid but an unknown fraudulent substitute using his passport and microchip number, a scam Shannonside thought they had perfected until reporter Conor Ryan and the team at RTE came along.

The implications are obvious and RTE found many other instances of horses being euthanised in Ireland but then turning up in the slaughter records of other European countries weeks and months later. Ryan revealed they analysed the microchip records of thousands of horses slaughtered in Italy and four Spanish regions.



RTÉ Investigates identified 75 Irish-registered horses slaughtered in Italy among the records released by Italian authorities.

The majority were thoroughbreds, bred for racing careers, and a third of those had been declared unfit for human consumption before they left Ireland.

Some had been given new identities in other European countries, and there were others that had been declared dead in Ireland before they were actually exported.



One of the most depressing stories Ryan told concerned five horses sent to their deaths in the Shannonside abattoir just days after running in a point to point in Cork.

Point to points are widely viewed as a stepping stone to greater places in the racing game, but the owners and trainers of the unloved five decided they weren't up to the job they were bred for; there was no second chance of trying to find them an alternative use in the varied horse world, or maybe just rehomed with someone who would care for them. It was a shot to the head and thanks for nothing.

These were young horses, only four or five years old at the beginning of their racing careers, but they were big and would make their owners five hundred euros and more for their meat.

And still the thoroughbred industry in Ireland has bred even more foals this year just in case there might be another Arkle coming along and many of them will be shot after the horse sales if they don't look and walk like models and no one wants to buy them, or through no fault of their own, simply can't run fast enough when they go into training.

This is Irish horse racing in the 21st Century; horses are commodities to throw away if they aren't up to an arbitrary standard. The horse wastage is criminal. What makes it worse is that even if they win a race or two there is no happy retirement when they are done, the food chain beckons for so many anyway.

The RTE investigation found that around 20,000 horses of all breeds but many of them bred for racing, disappear from Ireland every year and most end up in European slaughterhouses to satisfy a voracious appetite for their meat. Like Irish beef, it's horses also appear to taste so good.

Or criminals use the much cheaper horse meat to dilute the best beef to make their profits even bigger, just as drug gangs blend a cheap mixer with pure cocaine for the same financial motive.

And that's fine with Horse Racing Ireland, who didn't supposedly know of this scandal in Kildare and doesn't care anyway despite their hollow words of pain and anguish. The astonishing truth is 20,000 horses bred in Ireland are surplus to requirements every year and they fuel a welfare scandal that makes millions for organised crime throughout Europe.

It is fraud and animal cruelty on a gargantuan scale which contributes to a growing global scandal. Chris Elliott, a professor of food safety, told RTE: *"There is more money in food fraud than the heroin trade worldwide."*

More damning of all is that Horse Racing Ireland and the Irish Government have refused to confirm or deny the veracity of RTE's claim of the missing 20,000 horses. They say they don't know and they are in no rush to find out.

They do know – it's just that they don't want to own up to the unpalatable truth that they are, effectively, funding the mass slaughter of horses for food through the annual grant to the racing industry which this year has reached E76 million.

RTE discovered an identification fraud and smuggling operation involving thousands of retired, injured or unwanted racehorses, which we previously highlighted in Issue 12 of The Black Horse Newsletter.

As if the systematic cruelty of unimaginable ferocity in the Straffan abattoir was not enough, footage showed the son of the owner fraudulently implanting new microchips in horses' necks to give them a fresh identity which would clear them for entry into the food chain when they had previously been barred.

It is a legal requirement that every abattoir must have a welfare officer to lead the operation on all matters relating to equine care. Aaron Fitzpatrick, son of owner John Joe, was filmed punching and hitting horses as he illegally implanted microchips in their necks before vets would pass them as suitable for slaughter for their meat.

The Department approved Aaron Fitzpatrick's appointment as Shannonside's welfare officer. It is alleged he was 14 years old at the time.

Horses were shot in the abattoir or shipped in trucks on a two day journey without food or water to be killed in European slaughterhouses.

Some needed a new identity because racehorses are invariably treated with substantial amounts of painkillers and anti-inflammatories so they can keep training and racing when injured, particularly Phenylbutazone (known as Bute).

Bute is generally prohibited in animals that might enter the food chain because it can cause rare but potentially fatal side effects in humans who might consume meat contaminated with the drug.

A warning stamped by a veterinary surgeon in a passport that a horse is not fit for human consumption because it has been treated with prohibited drugs like Bute should guarantee the integrity of the food chain throughout the EU, but criminals can easily supply fake passports and microchips as witnessed in the RTE programme.

It showed false documents can be issued online virtually anywhere in Europe, but especially in Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany, and alternative microchips made in China are available in bulk, no questions asked.

It is astonishing that after the 2013 Horse Meat Scandal caused huge reputational damage racing and bloodstock are back in the spotlight for much the same reasons, which makes a mockery of what Ireland's Minister of Agriculture, Simon Coveney, said ten years ago.

ANATOMY OF A SCANDAL

THAT NEVER DIES

Department of Agriculture equine vets do not enjoy a good reputation. When lucky enough to be appointed, they become a part of Ireland's pampered civil service with regular pay rises and perks and a tasty retirement package down the line.

In return, they are required to do as little work as possible and avoid uncovering any scandals that might embarrass the country. Always wear the green jersey of Ireland, is their mantra.

It all gets a bit more sinister when it comes to their involvement in the Shannonside abattoir scandal. Heads should roll but you can bet it won't be a vet's, they are experts at ducking and diving to avoid accountability.



They are clearly the biggest culprits who have facilitated the abattoir owner John Joe Fitzpatrick and his gang of criminals to brutalise helpless horses yet the current Minister of Agriculture, Charlie McConalogue (pictured), has pulled his usual stunt of getting his band of vets to investigate their mates to see if they got anything wrong. We already know what the verdict will be. He always seems to look guilty about something.

It is a legal requirement in Ireland that a department vet must attend at a licensed abattoir on kill days to make sure all horse documentation is present and correct and all welfare procedures followed according to the rules and regulations. The vets at

Shannonside saw nothing adverse to report in 15 years of sleeping on the job. Or maybe they got a brown envelope or two to look the other way.

The secret cameras which filmed the truth about the abhorrent cruelty dished out in the slaughterhouse were set-up in an adjoining holding shed whereas the vets' excuse for seeing and hearing nothing is that they were only licensed to enter the actual kill shed.

That's nonsense – government vets can enter any farm, building or premises in the country if they have concerns about animal welfare, but they never once looked inside the holding shed that prepared the horses for their appointment with their sick executioners.

Consider what Dr Michael Sheahan, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer at the Department of Agriculture, told parliamentarians in July 2021.

Appearing before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Agriculture who were enquiring about horse slaughter in the Republic in light of the shocking documentary from *Panorama, The Dark Side of Horse Racing*, showing atrocities filmed by Animal Aid in a Swindon abattoir, Sheahan said he found the programme “surprising” for many reasons. The real surprise was how the vast majority of horses being killed had been shipped over from Ireland.

Sheahan gave Shannonside an arrogant vote of confidence which, three years later, seriously questions his competence.

“For the avoidance of any doubt, that is certainly not something that happens here. We’re very satisfied with the way things operate in the slaughter plant.”

The facts show that Shannonside has been a rogue operation since the Department of Agriculture first awarded Fitzpatrick a licence in 2009. It hasn't suddenly gone wrong just as RTE came on the scene - thousands of horses have suffered the same grotesque treatment as seen in the programme over the last 15 years.

IN 2007, the template for this never ending equine scandal was created. Animal Aid, a British animal rights group which has campaigned peacefully against all forms of animal abuse since 1977, released footage taken covertly inside the Taunton abattoir of Lawrence J Potter (South West) Ltd.

Animal Aid stated: “The footage shows a succession of apparently fit and healthy horses being shot in the head with a rifle and then butchered for human consumption. It is the first time that such scenes have been filmed in Britain and made public.”



Among the slaughtered animals were children’s ponies and young healthy Thoroughbred racehorses. “One of the horses arrived seriously injured and – after a long delay – was shot while lying in a yard. Another horse looked as though she could be pregnant.”

Animal Aid suggested the unborn foal was shot while inside the mother.

The British Government’s Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) told Animal Aid the Taunton operation and one in Cheshire kills between 6,000 - 10,000 horses a year and their meat exported as part of the food chain.

JANUARY 2010

The ISPCA was alerted about two dead horses and others in desperately poor condition in a field near Sixmilebridge, County Clare. Gardai traced their ownership to John Joe Fitzpatrick and he faced four charges of ill-treating 18 horses. When he came before Ennis District Court in May 2011 neither of the two key prosecution witnesses, veterinary inspectors for ISPCA and Department of Agriculture, attended to give evidence and the case collapsed.

The inspectors had been told by gardai not to go to court as the case was being deferred, but it went ahead and the charges against Fitzpatrick were dismissed for lack of evidence.

An Garda Siochana have so far remained silent about the unacceptable way this case ended, but they need to come clean and provide a full explanation for their actions which enabled Fitzpatrick to walk away from serious allegations of animal cruelty.

AUGUST 2011

Three months later, a Department of Agriculture veterinary inspector and a local vet were called to a field near Gort in Co Galway. Two horses were in such a bad condition they were euthanised immediately.

All the horses in the field were emaciated and suffering from strangles, a highly infectious condition which causes respiratory illness. Gardai again traced the horses to Fitzpatrick, who was found guilty at Gort District Court in September 2012 of cruelty and causing unnecessary suffering.

He was fined a total of €2,000. He lost an appeal against the court's determination in 2013 and his conviction for causing horrific suffering and cruelty as the owner of an equine abattoir licensed by the Irish Government became a crime of public record.

JANUARY 2013

The 2013 Horse Meat Scandal. Ten million beef burgers suspected of containing horse meat were removed from retailers' shelves in Ireland and the UK including major supermarkets Tesco, Lidl, Aldi, Iceland and Dunnes Stores.

After an investigation that commenced in 2012, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) announced in January 2013 that beef burgers supplied by Silvercrest Foods and Liffey Meats in Ireland and Dalepak in England were found to contain substantial amounts of equine meat.

Both Silvercrest and Dalepak are subsidiaries of the ABP Food Group, owned by Irish billionaire Larry Goodman, with 46 processing plants in Ireland, the UK and Europe. Goodman effectively controls the beef industry in Ireland just as fellow billionaire John Magnier controls the horse racing and breeding industry.

And the two are business associates. Magnier's farms amounting to over 11,000 acres in Tipperary operate on an industrial scale just like his horse racing and breeding enterprises and he rears an ever expanding number of calves to be supplied to Goodman's meat factories.



Further tests revealed frozen beef meals and beef burgers contained up to 100% equine meat and Burger King, who had more than 500 fast food outlets at the time, dropped Silvercrest as a supplier when horse meat was discovered in its supply chain.

Silvercrest was found out when they admitted using companies outside their approved list of suppliers to source cheaper ingredients from abroad but claimed they didn't know meat they thought was beef also included meat from horses and sometimes pigs.

Similar investigations throughout Europe revealed large scale criminal activity and in Poland an undercover investigation found mouldy meat routinely returned by shops to a processing plant was cleaned, dried and reused to make sausages and ham.

Hidden cameras showed the plant, a significant exporter to other European countries including Ireland and the UK, was relabelling horse meat as beef for onward sale.

This was happening all over Europe because such was the power of the meat industry it was, essentially, regulating itself which created a golden opportunity for criminal gangs to move in.

Huge blocks of frozen meat delivered to a cold store in Northern Ireland owned by Freeza Foods were rejected by the company because of doubts about its authenticity.

The supplier was County Monaghan based McAdam Foods who said they purchased it from a trader in England who imported it from Poland and other countries as beef. When it was tested it was found to contain 80% horse meat.

This is the way the food chain works - multiple operators trading in multiple directions which confuses what's really going on. Ireland was at the centre of the scandal but no company or individual faced prosecution.

That wasn't the case in France, the Netherlands and in the UK and Northern Ireland, where custodial sentences of up to four years proved that culprits would be pursued and punished.

But Ireland investigated Ireland and anyone who knows anything about how the Department of Agriculture operates wouldn't be at all surprised its verdict exonerated all Irish food companies – none had knowingly sold beef that contained horse meat, the department said.

Ignorance is no defence in law, except in Ireland and assorted banana republics. The scandal for Ireland was that companies like those in the ABP Group were exporting prime Irish produced beef that made top dollar all over the world but at the same time importing cheap meat from anywhere that went into millions of beef burgers.

They didn't really know what was in the cheap foreign stuff that went into the burgers they proudly claimed contained Irish beef until the FSAI started testing them, something the companies should have been doing themselves.

The value of Ireland's prime beef exports in 2013 was almost E2.1 billion, which had risen to E2.7 billion by 2023. It's an industry ripe for criminal exploitation.

Six months after the horse meat scandal broke, Simon Coveney, then Minister of Agriculture, bragged to local media that Ireland was the hero and not villain of the horse meat scandal.

He had his green jersey on and ABP were off the hook; he said the problem was the result of *"bad management, not illegal management."*

"Within 48 hours that scandal became a European scandal and actually, as it turned out, through this process, now that it's over in some ways the whole horsemeat scandal has enhanced the reputation of the Irish food industry because we're the ones that actually exposed the problem in the first place."

MARCH 2014

Department of Agriculture veterinary inspectors and Clare ISPCA were again alerted by a whistleblower who was concerned about the condition of 54 horses in a large shed near Kilmore.

Yet again the animals were traced to Fitzpatrick who faced allegations of neglect at Ennis District Court on 24 November 2016, but the judge decided to disregard the evidence of both the Department vet and the ISPCA inspector and side with Fitzpatrick.

It is remarkable that two cases of cruelty against Fitzpatrick in his home county of Clare involving the Department of Agriculture and ISPCA both ended with the charges dismissed.

JUNE 2015

In the wake of the 2013 Horsemeat Scandal, all Irish abattoirs were required to undergo an extensive inspection of their premises and procedures to satisfy their suitability to hold a slaughter licence.

The Department of Agriculture knew of the Gort allegations and a further pending case of neglect against Fitzpatrick when considering his application. Despite Fitzpatrick's record, Shannonside Foods was granted provisional approval to operate the Kildare abattoir in June 2015.

FEBRUARY 2016

This was upgraded to a full licence nine months later - February 2016. The Department of Agriculture has revealed that such an application concerns the suitability of the premises and Fitzpatrick's conviction for animal cruelty was not an issue they considered relevant.

The subsequent RTE programme proved this was a grave error of judgement by the Department, which always appeared to be recklessly supportive of Fitzpatrick. These vets need to start explaining why this was allowed to happen because public confidence in their organisation is rock bottom.

JULY 2021

An investigation by BBC's Panorama programme found that thousands of racehorses, some owned by the sport's most famous trainers and owners such as Gordon Elliott, were being sent to slaughterhouses in Britain.

Secret cameras installed by Animal Aid in one of the UK's biggest abattoirs showed how rules designed to protect horses from a cruel death were repeatedly flouted.

Freedom of information requests revealed that 4,000 former racehorses were slaughtered in Britain and Ireland since the beginning of 2019. Most had been trained in Ireland.

The film was recorded over four days at the end of 2019. *"When we looked at the footage we were astounded at the sheer volume of young thoroughbreds,"* Dene Stansall of Animal Aid, told the programme.

One of the welfare regulations states that every effort must be made to ensure a rapid death but footage showed that it was often the opposite in this abattoir - death was far from instant.

"On 91 occasions the cameras recorded a slaughterman shooting horses, not close up, but from a distance," Panorama reported.

Professor Daniel Mills, a veterinary behavioural specialist from Lincoln University, was shocked when reviewing the footage of one particular killing.

"It doesn't look like the horse is even stunned. Taking a shot from a distance at a horse, to me, that's completely out of order. If you're going to euthanise a horse, you've got to get a bullet in the right place. If that's representative of how they're being killed, then we've got a really serious problem."

It was representative of how Drury and Sons operated the slaughterhouse as pictured below, but they denied everything. They told Panorama that they *"take great care to maintain high welfare conditions and do not accept any form of animal abuse."*



The BHA said it would “*consider carefully any issues raised*” by the programme. HRI didn’t want to get involved and just said it placed great importance on the welfare of the people and horses in the racing industry.

And so the anatomy of a scandal continues unabated. Another appalling film, more false shock and horror from the racing elite, but nothing changes except for the ever rising tide

of disillusionment surrounding the way the sport is run.

This is how it’s always been in Irish racing; the difference now is that it’s been outed through three horrific films made covertly over the last 17 years. Unless there is change these exposes will keep coming for the next 17 years and beyond because HRI doesn’t seem to get that the general public expects a lot more to be done to improve horse welfare.

HRI accepts unconditionally that, irrespective of the spiel it’s executives throw up to the contrary, it’s fine for Irish horses to be sent to an abattoir to be chopped up for the food chain as soon as they finish their racing careers, which does not sit well in the contemporary world.

It’s also totally out of line with the significant improvements in welfare being achieved in every other leading racing jurisdiction around the world with many making huge financial commitments to aftercare to give racehorses a life after they finish racing, but not in Ireland.

JANUARY 2023

To mark the tenth anniversary of the 2013 Horse Meat Scandal, the current chief executive of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Dr Pamela Byrne, gave a wide ranging interview to the Irish Times in which she expounded on the radically improved food inspection regime introduced throughout Europe following universal condemnation of the meat industry ten years earlier.

The European Commission has strengthened the legal framework with better control throughout the food chain, she said. Sharing of information and intelligence through national food safety agencies has been ramped up and, critically, it has increased awareness of the risks of identification fraud when veterinary inspectors from State agencies and local authorities monitor the slaughter industry.

Never again was her message, yet 12 months later RTE aired their documentary which exposed exactly the illegal activity in the Shannonside abattoir which Byrne said the FSAI and their EU counterparts had now eradicated. Their grand claims are worthless.

It was not totally unexpected because Dr Byrne detailed a couple of the major investigations which had been carried out since the first scandal. The Department of Agriculture were, according to Dr Byrne, involved in these investigations so they would have been fully aware of the latest intelligence on food fraud.

Which poses even more questions about how the Department vets missed the illegal activity that was going on right under their noses at the Shannonside abattoir year after year.

The scale of corruption the food industry continues to face is staggering. In 2019, a joint European and International police operation targeting fake and substandard food and beverages seized E100 million worth of potentially dangerous food and drinks. More than 670 arrests were made across 78 countries.

Horsemeat unfit for human consumption but mislabelled and sold as beef continues to enjoy a notorious reputation for being trafficked by criminal gangs with willing partners in Ireland. Surely Irish regulators would have been on red alert knowing all this?

In 2020, live animals and in excess of 17 tonnes of horsemeat were seized from European slaughterhouses and over 20% of the passports used for these horses showed signs of forgery.

In 2022, an ongoing investigation by Europol into a criminal network involving the illegal sale of horsemeat in Spain, Belgium, Germany and Italy resulted in 41 arrests.

In 2024, the RTE investigation showed that the EU masterplan created over the last ten years at a cost of millions of euro to deal with this ever growing threat is basically useless.

RTE's investigation has had far reaching repercussions throughout Europe which underlines the seriousness of the damage which has been caused to the integrity of the food chain across the entire continent by the illegal activity discovered in the Shannonside abattoir.

Europol has taken over the lead role for the EU investigation with the Department of Agriculture ceding control of aspects of the local response to the organised and serious crime division of the Irish police force. The Department can't be trusted.

But this is far from the first time their vets have been caught looking the wrong way. We told the full story in Issue 10 of The Black Horse Newsletter about a major doping scandal which involved one of their own vets and included new information provided by a whistleblower who sent us 150 pages of Department documents previously kept secret.

How did John Hughes avoid detection for importing steroids and other banned drugs from Australia and the US which he had been supplying to racehorse trainers for ten years before he was finally caught? Surely the Department of Agriculture can't be that inept? Or were his colleagues in on the lucrative scam?

The Department did a deal with Hughes, who admitted four specimen charges of possessing unauthorised drugs and one of possessing Nitrotain when he appeared at Carlow District Court on 3 October 2013. Other serious charges were struck out.

They also agreed a ridiculously lenient penalty. After all, he was one of their own. Hughes donated E10,000 to the Kilkenny Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and paid E3,000 prosecution costs.

He walked away with no criminal record for years of corruption and the Department of Agriculture avoided any kind of investigation into how he was able to get away with importing a significant amount of illegal equine drugs for over ten years while working as a government vet.

We wrote in our report over 12 months ago: *“Hughes is consigned to the wastelands of history but Ireland needs to consider its relationship with the Department of Agriculture and racing in 2023 because all this is happening again with the current scandals involving HRI and IHRB. Corruption is being covered up and taxpayers are being shafted. When will enough be enough?”*

Nothing changes. The utterly inept Department of Agriculture is again investigating its own vets and no one will be held accountable.

JUNE 2024

The Irish parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has been kept busy investigating horse racing over the last few years.

Their remit to ensure accountability and transparency in the way government bodies like HRI and IHRB spend and manage their finances has been stretched to the limit as new scandals keep breaking.

IHRB chief executive Darragh O'Loughlin told the PAC the IHRB has responsibility for the welfare and safety of all racehorses during their racing careers.

That responsibility ends when a horse has run its last race and is no longer being trained for subsequent races.

Galway TD Ciaran Cannon asked if the IHRB has any further welfare role once a horse has concluded its racing career?

O'LOUGHLIN: "It is not open to us to take on a role outside of what is provided for in the legislation and our mandate."

Cannon asked John Osborne, HRI's Head of Welfare, when does HRI's remit begin and conclude?

OSBORNE: "Our role is the promotion and development of horse racing on the island of Ireland. Our direct involvement in the care of the horses relies largely on the responsibility which the owners have to their horses. We have developed an ecosystem which attracts investment and rewards success. We still rely on owners to take responsibility for their animals throughout their lives, which can....."

CANNON: "Can I just stop Mr Osborne there? Is he saying that HRI relies almost wholly on the owners to act responsibly and that HRI has no oversight?"

Osborne's response will surprise many not least because HRI falsely claims that it spends millions on horse aftercare when it's actually buttons. The emphasis in Osborne's reply is ours.

OSBORNE: *"It is not oversight, as such. We have encouraged investment but we have not stepped into the breach in respect of the care and responsibility for individual horses on a day-to-day basis. We are not in a position to be that organisation.*

- *Some [horse] owners may take ill of the old slogan about a puppy being for life, not just Christmas.*

In the case of horses, the responsibility for care on a day-to-day basis is down to the owner. We have tried to assist with this. Our function in the welfare space relies on the three pillars that we work towards. These are traceability, standards and safety nets. The Deputy will be familiar with traceability. We are very confident about our standards of care in the context of the care of racehorses throughout their lives from birth to the end of their racing careers. The safety nets element considers what can happen to racehorses when their racing careers are over.

- *That is why we have been so active in supporting Treo Eile, a not-for-profit organisation which promotes and facilitates second careers for racehorses.*

We also support the Irish Horse Welfare Trust, IHWT, which positions itself to rescue the small number of animals.

- *At the moment it has ten thoroughbreds in its care out of a population of some 40,000 thoroughbreds on the island.”*

Osborne’s arrogant joke about the difference between owning a horse and a puppy sums up HRI’s position on welfare and graphically explains why thousands of racehorses in Ireland end up in abattoirs like Shannonside here, in the UK and all over Europe.

Osborne’s point was that horses are expendable commodities used for a bit of entertainment and when they are no longer useful it’s easy to get rid of them. If it wasn’t like this many owners wouldn’t bother to get involved in racing at all.

There is always demand for Irish horse meat and every year another 10,000 plus thoroughbred foals are produced to complete the circle of death which is facilitated by the Irish Government of the day with nearly E80 million of public funds in 2024.

Cannon was scathing of what he had heard from HRI’s Director of Equine Welfare and Bloodstock, a very grand but meaningless title. Osborne does what the racing elite tells him to do and is a quango all on his own.

CANNON: *“From his response, Mr Osborne seems to be trying to keep this at arm’s length from his organisation. He has said that it is the responsibility of the owners and HRI has no real oversight in the matter. If that is the case, so be it, but it is not my understanding. As a member of the public and the Oireachtas, I would have imagined that Horse Racing Ireland – the entity responsible for the industry and positioning Ireland quite rightly as a global exemplar in managing the equine industry – should have a far more hands-on approach to equine welfare, rather than just saying it is the owners’ responsibility and that it funds a charity for the end of life of horses.”*

The real picture is even worse. Suzanne Eade repeatedly claims HRI contributes millions towards equine welfare. She has even lied about it to the Irish parliament, as has Darragh O’Loughlin for the IHRB. Eade said: *“Equine safety and care is HRI’s top priority and this year HRI will invest E16.1 million (£13.58m) in welfare and integrity services.”*

Around E14 million of the figure quoted by Eade represents the grant HRI provides IHRB to operate its anti-doping programme and all the support services needed on race day. None of it directly connects to equine aftercare; this money is used for

integrity and administration. Most of the remainder of E16 million constitutes regular donations and loans made to the Irish Equine Centre, which provides diagnostics, education, research and allied services to the general horse population and has no connection to the aftercare of racehorses.

Osborne claimed HRI is “*so active in supporting*” two organisations to show Irish racing’s commitment to equine welfare. HRI is so active it didn’t refer to Treo Eile and IHWT by name in the sections of its latest public accounts for 2022 which detail grants paid out to deserving causes.

It’s not surprising because the amounts they gave these organisations are embarrassingly small which shows how far Osborne and Eade will go to hide the truth about Irish racing and the routine slaughter of so many of its equine participants.

Treo Eile is a website which lists operators offering their services for a fee to retrain retired racehorses and IHWT is a charity that rescues neglected horses and ponies and retrains a small number of horses for other equestrian disciplines like eventing and showjumping. Retraining is a costly commitment and HRI doesn’t want to get involved.

HRI’s accounts for 2022 state they donated E545,000 to the Order of Malta ambulance service for their work treating injured jockeys on race days and E292,000 to Blue Cross for providing an equine ambulance for treating horses that were injured during races.

- We had to contact HRI to find out what funds they gave Treo Eile to support the retraining of retired racehorses in 2022. It was **E38,000**.
- HRI said they also donated **E94,000** to IHWT towards horse rescue. That’s not for racehorses, it’s for all breeds.
- THE BIG LIE. HRI didn’t give millions to anyone to retrain retired racehorses in 2022 as they claim. Their total contribution was **E38,000**.

What happens to horses when they retire from racing is of major importance in every leading racing jurisdiction in the world except Ireland. At the 40th Asian Racing Conference in Japan last week, Masayoshi Yoshida, President and CEO of the Japan Racing Authority, told delegates:

“It has become increasingly important for the racing industry to properly address the issue of horse welfare. Horse racing is an exciting and enjoyable sport with a long history. I believe that addressing the issue of welfare and aftercare of

racehorses is an unavoidable challenge that must be met to sustain the sport and sports betting worldwide.”

This year Japanese racing has a budget of E10 million to promote and assist the second careers of retired racehorses. HRI’s Eade and Clíodhna Guy, Head of Legal at the IHRB, were at the conference in Sapporo but didn’t want to talk about how they spent E38,000 on the aftercare of Irish racehorses.

Few racehorses enjoy a happy retirement in Ireland, most end up as horsemeat, but Eade and Osborne have lied about HRI spending E16 million in 2024 on equine welfare. Eade’s weasel words to the PAC reveal her two faces.

“We work with organisations such as the Irish Horse Welfare Trust and Treo Eile which connect, support and promote thoroughbreds as they transition after their racing career. We provide education and training to industry participants, and held our first welfare symposium in May, which brought together stakeholders from across the sector to discuss the way ahead for equine safety and care. We consider the sharing of information, experiences and best practice across the entire industry to be key to achieving excellence in equine welfare.”

While Eade and Osborne talk the talk truckloads of unwanted racehorses from an industry which they claim contributes E2.46 billion annually to the Irish economy die in horrific conditions throughout Europe.

JUNE 2024

The Department of Agriculture finally woke up and belatedly took action against John Joe Fitzpatrick . They impounded 65 horse carcasses from the final kill at Shannonside before Minister of Agriculture McConalogue closed the abattoir down and informed Fitzpatrick the carcasses would be destroyed.

Department vets also raided a separate property owned by Fitzpatrick in O’Briens Bridge in Co Clare and took possession of over a hundred equine passports which he could not match with the horses he held. There were many horses for which Fitzpatrick had no identification.

These horses were said to be in poor condition. Fitzpatrick took legal action and asked Judge Patricia Harney to overturn the decision to destroy the impounded carcasses.

RTE reported that Superintendent Veterinary Inspector Ann Quinn told the court the food chain information for the animals slaughtered was *“inaccurate, inconsistent and misleading”* and did not meet the minimum legal standard for food safety.



She said the slaughterhouse documents on the status of the horses were created retrospectively after the kill by Shannonside Foods Ltd and were not credible.

Solicitors for Shannonside told the court the value of the 65 carcasses was E80,000 and Department of Agriculture vets had raised no issues when they oversaw the slaughter in the abattoir to which they relate.

Judge Harney found in favour of the Department of Agriculture and the carcasses were destroyed. Gardai have opened an investigation into Fitzpatrick (pictured) to determine allegations of animal cruelty and food chain fraud.

SHANNONSIDE FOODS LTD.

The company, owned 82% by John Joe Fitzpatrick and 18% by Patrick Sweeney according to records filed at Company Registration Office (CRO), was issued with a licence by the Department of Agriculture in 2009 to slaughter horses in an abattoir it had constructed in existing buildings on a farm in Straffan, Co Kildare.

An application to register Shannonside Foods Ltd as a new company was received by CRO on 6 February 2009.

From its first accounts filed with CRO in 2010 right through to its latest accounts for 2022, Fitzpatrick and Sweeney have claimed they are entitled to the benefit of certain exemptions as a small company.

Accordingly, they have filed skeleton annual accounts – referred to as Unaudited Abridged Financial Statements - which obscure many important financial details from public scrutiny that would reveal how a company is performing and

conducting itself. We showed the latest accounts to a financial professional, who reported:

“As the accounts are unaudited I would place no credibility on the content.

The directors use a small company audit exemption and are exempt from audit by registered auditors.

If I was a bank or a supplier dealing with Shannonside I would not accept their unaudited accounts and would avoid financial exposure to Shannonside.

There is no profit & loss account, only a balance sheet.

Profitability is unknown.

We have no idea of turnover (sales), costs or overheads.

The directors could be taking out large salaries to generate a loss.

The balance sheet shows the company is insolvent (liabilities exceed assets) and continues to make losses (2021 EURO 77,123 loss; 2022 EURO 60,159 loss).

In 2022 they had 3 staff (includes the two directors).

The statement prepared by the directors is unaudited and worthless as an indicator of profitability or solvency.”

Shannonside’s accountants are listed as McKeogh Gallagher Ryan, Shannon Street, Limerick, who give no indication in the accounts filed with CRO whether they stand over them as a true record. They are 100% created by Fitzpatrick and Sweeney since the company’s inception in 2009.

Notes on the accounts make revealing reading. Under Directors’ Transactions it states:

The following amounts are repayable to the directors:

John Joe Fitzpatrick 2022: E156,388

2021: E154,452

Why would the company owe one director so much? For what? No explanation is given.

The company is making significant losses so Fitzpatrick could be selling stock to the company at a high price, higher than he paid. He could be doing this for legitimate tax reasons or as part of an illegal scam.

Fitzpatrick has said that while there is supposedly a kill of horses on only one day a week he has admitted to sometimes carrying out a second day to fulfil a special order.

The truth is the Department of Agriculture has shown that it was duped about what was really going on at Shannonside and, bearing in mind the fraudulent activity RTE exposed in its programme, Fitzpatrick could have been regularly slaughtering horses on multiple days without notifying the Department to supply vets to oversee it.

Who is behind the disappearance of 20,000 horses in Ireland every year? Somebody has to be facilitating this extraordinary black market in unwanted horses and for sure the Department of Agriculture doesn't want to find out who is responsible.

Perhaps Fitzpatrick can shine a light on what's been happening; we will give him all the space he needs in the next issue of the newsletter.

Numerous complaints were made by whistleblowers that injured and malnourished horses could be seen on the site of the abattoir. Deputy chief veterinary officer Sheahan admitted that five complaints had been received but they had been investigated by Department vets who found nothing wrong. TD's at the PAC claimed they have evidence the number of complaints is much higher.

Sheahan told the PAC: *"They were welfare complaints but they were not complaints that were upheld. We go out and look at every single complaint we get. To be fair, in the case of all the five complaints we got, we did not find something that merited prosecution or even the service of a notice."*

TD James O'Connor said Sheahan was missing the point: *"That should raise alarm bells. As somebody who lives on a farm where we have dairy and horses, I think five complaints is an extraordinarily high number. We now know that following the five complaints, the Department was saying there was no problem but the work of RTE Investigates has debunked that."*

Sheahan replied: *"It has."*

That admission makes the Department of Agriculture's equine veterinary department not fit for purpose. Thousands of horses have suffered horrific abuse over the last 15 years and Ireland's reputation as been shredded again because government vets are lazy and useless and have the view that they should do

nothing that would attract bad publicity for Ireland PLC. By doing nothing they've ended up with something far worse.

Under relentless pressure at the PAC to face up to the situation, including from highly critical TD Catherine Murphy, Sheahan repeatedly covered up for his colleagues and John Joe Fitzpatrick.

“As I have said, the standard of animals coming into the plant were in good condition. Despite the impression that might have been given in the programme of sick and dying animals coming in, they were not. Should we have known about the horrific stuff in the footage and should we have known that this was happening? I would love to say that we should have.”

He admitted nothing. Clearly Fitzpatrick kept the horses in better condition for when the government vets were in attendance at the abattoir and slaughtered others when they were not there. He had unwanted horses grouped in numerous lots being held all over the west of Ireland.

Nothing is going to change. The Department of Agriculture will, as usual, be exonerated of any blame.

In addition to his equine abattoir, Fitzpatrick is a high profile publican and scrap metal dealer in Co Clare. At this stage we have seen no records which show that the directors of Shannonside Foods Ltd had any experience of equine slaughter prior to the Department of Agriculture awarding them a vital government contract.

He is also chair of Horse Care Ireland, an opaque outfit which has met government ministers, TDs and racing authorities as part of a campaign to relax the restrictions on horses that can be slaughtered for the food chain.

When restrictions weren't lifted Fitzpatrick went on slaughtering unsuitable horses for their meat anyway.

MORE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Where has the money gone?

As we report earlier, solicitors acting for Fitzpatrick attempted to overturn a court order for the 65 carcasses from the final kill at the Shannonside abattoir to be destroyed before it was shut down by the Minister for Agriculture.

Their argument was that the carcasses, which they claimed had a valuation of E80,000, were legitimately acquired with Department vets raising no issues during the kill in which the horses were slaughtered.

The Department countered that since the day of the kill they had discovered the information Shannonside had provided for the slaughtered horses did not meet the minimum legal standard for food safety.

The case has raised some important questions about why Fitzpatrick's company went to great lengths to hide its financial history since it was incorporated in 2009.

Fitzpatrick's solicitors provided a clear benchmark from which to estimate the abattoir's potential earnings when they told the court the 65 carcasses from one day's slaughter were valued at E80,000, or approximately E1,230 each.

Going on the evidence accepted by a judge, this places the potential gross sales for a one day kill of 65 horses per week equates to E4 million for the year. No one knows for sure how many days a week Fitzpatrick operated his abattoir; it would have been easy to double it to two days a week, or even more, with or without the questionable oversight from the Department's veterinary team.

Using those same figures provided by Fitzpatrick's solicitors, sales of E4 million a year over the life of the company could have theoretically brought in E60 million. It could be substantially less, but it also could be much more because of the cloak of secrecy surrounding the slaughterhouse.

No one knows what the profit figure would have been on these estimates because the abattoir owners claimed they didn't have to publicly disclose this information.

What the unaudited abridged financial statements do reveal is that Shannonside's government approved abattoir posted significant losses without explanation in most of the 15 years it has operated.

We also know that Fitzpatrick ran his slaughter business on a cash basis – the many adverts and reports he placed in the media and elsewhere offered a collection service by *"licensed operatives"* to any owners who had unwanted horses to sell with cash payment on the spot.

He also owned or rented numerous holding facilities around the country in which to keep horses before they joined the horse meat trail. It all pointed to a far larger operation than a one day a week kill the Department knew about.

Finding out the truth about the way Shannonside Meats operated an official abattoir is of major public interest for these reasons. This may seem obvious to most, but the Department of Agriculture has a habit of never looking in the right places for answers to the tough questions.

- It is of prime importance to make anyone found guilty of the appalling equine abuse as seen on the RTE programme face the full consequences for their actions.
- Those found guilty of illegally inserting fake microchips in the necks of horses to make them acceptable for the food chain must receive the maximum possible prison sentences.
- The financial history of Shannonside Foods must be investigated – the Department needs to explain why they facilitated the company to withhold information about how they were operating for 15 years and was this a cover for wide ranging criminal activity including money laundering?
- Answers are needed now not in two years' time. The usual Department of Agriculture ways of delay and cover up on these occasions is no longer acceptable.

2. Why did RTE only name three trainers who had sent horses to be slaughtered at Shannonside?

And what was the criteria they used to select Luke Comer, John 'Shark' Hanlon and Philip Rothwell to feature in their documentary out of all the other trainers in Ireland who were clients of John Joe Fitzpatrick?

Comer and Hanlon might be viewed as safe choices considering they are serial breakers of the rules of racing, including for the arch sin of doping. Comer has just been disqualified from training for three years over a steroid scandal and Hanlon has previously received a suspended ban when, not for the first time, his horses had been administered performance enhancing drugs on race day.

Rothwell was aggrieved that he had been named considering his much cleaner record, but he was an easy target as he trains low grade jumpers, although he had his best season in the last 21 in 2023/24.

It must be remembered that Comer, Hanlon and Rothwell broke no laws or rules of racing by sending horses they deemed surplus to requirements to be liquidated in the Shannonside abattoir, but it wasn't a good look all the same and would have done nothing but harm their reputations, such that they were.

In fact, they were carrying out HRI instructions for the slaughter of racehorses in Ireland, as we mentioned earlier. HRI's statement when the RTE story broke said they *"supported euthanising horses in a humane, ethical and appropriate manner in situations where there is a risk to the quality of life or diminished circumstances for a horse."*

RTE revealed FOI requests to government agencies throughout Europe were a crucial part of their investigation and they knew the names of the horses killed at Shannonside over many years and who trained them.

RTE sent out dozens of letters to these trainers seeking a response for their documentary. Comer and Hanlon responded that they followed HRI's advice on the disposal of unwanted horses and Rothwell didn't reply.

There is an important moral consideration in naming these three trainers only - surely all or none should have been named otherwise it wasn't a fair or equitable report bearing in mind no trainer has broken any of HRI's rules.

We contacted RTE and asked them to share the full list with us and if they refused we would make an FOI request. We told them this was not in any way a criticism of their "brilliant" documentary but was an issue of immense public interest which should be disclosed. They declined to reply.

Here's the reason why. RTE carries out many current affairs investigations but are careful about what they say about racing as they play a major long running role in broadcasting the sport on its biggest days in both flat and jumps disciplines.

They have a clear conflict of interest in wanting to expose corruption in the food chain in Europe but went easy on racing's role in it because of their close involvement with televising the sport.

They were prepared to sacrifice Comer, Hanlon and Rothwell to add gravitas to the shocking film they aired but that was as far as it went. As a matter of principle we have made an FOI request for the names of the horses and their trainers involved in the Shannonside slaughter facility because we believe they have covered up for the biggest trainers and most powerful racing operations in Ireland.

It is ironic that without FOI laws which helped them identify so much criminality in the European meat trade RTE would have only had the footage they were able to gather in the abattoir, but now they don't want to play when the boot is on the other foot.

It must also be remembered that RTE, the state broadcaster, has recently been saved from bankruptcy by a government bailout worth E725 million over the next three years.

We have been told senior politicians are in damage limitation mode and RTE and the Department of Agriculture have been instructed to prevent any further harm to the already battered reputations of the food and racing industries.

WARNING: THERE IS SOME DISGUSTING LANGUAGE IN THIS REPORT

AS THE DUST SETTLED YET

ANOTHER O'BRIEN FAIRY

STORY DRIFTED INTO THE

ANNALS OF FOLKLORE

Thirty years ago, around the time Aidan O'Brien became John Magnier's choice as successor to the incomparable Vincent O'Brien at Ballydoyle, Coolmore stood a new stallion at Grange Stud in County Cork.

Jim Bolger trained Topanoora to win seven races in 1990 and 1991. An admirably tough and consistent Group 2 winner, he was never out of the first four in his 14 races but wasn't quite top flight. He was retired to stand as a dual purpose stallion at a fee of about E3,000.

JP McManus was the legendary gambler who was fast becoming the biggest and most successful National Hunt racehorse owner Ireland had ever seen and was a friend and business partner of John Magnier.

Coolmore ran a promotion for Topanoora which said that McManus was so impressed with the first couple of foals by the stallion out of his own broodmares that he decided all of his mares would now be covered by Topanoora.

It was, of course, a porky pie; McManus did not have every one of his broodmares covered by the stallion, it was a ruse to encourage gullible mare owners around the country to use the stallion, which they did. Topanoora still failed at stud and Coolmore rolled a new stallion in to take his place.

As Coolmore grew their propaganda tricks became bigger and bolder with the truth optional. They would routinely name some of their best broodmares as being

covered by the latest big stallion hope retiring to their covering barn, but it didn't really happen.

Aidan O'Brien has become the face of the Coolmore marketing programme; they moulded him into their own likeness and he spins fairy stories ad nauseum about the attributes of the horses he trains. They are not ordinary horses; they have wings like Pegasus and some are even half human.



There are numerous stories in Greek mythology which tell of how Pegasus was born in a far distant place on the edge of Earth, now known as Ireland. The one favoured around Rosegreen, the nearest village to Ballydoyle, is that he appeared from the foam created when the genitals of Uranus,

the ruler of the universe, were cut off by his enemies and cast into the sea. This may seem a little improbable to normal people but in Tipperary it's the sort of stuff that happens most days.

In 2024, it appears many people have finally had enough of O'Brien talking complete bollocks day in and day out. If the racing media didn't keep repeating every word O'Brien utters no one would have their brains constantly fried, but he's everywhere, just like Donald Trump, and a lot of people appear sick of him right down to the bottom of their guts and even to the bottom of their bottoms.

Michael Tabor, John Magnier's key partner, doesn't get it; he loves listening to O'Brien talking nonsense because he likes to talk a good bit of nonsense himself. City Of Troy is Coolmore's Frankel was one of his more memorable lines after the horse flattered to deceive as a two year old.

Coolmore Stud is getting touchy, and Tabor very touchy, about Aidan O'Brien being ridiculed. He's still knocking a few winners in, but horses he constantly insists are the best he's ever trained are sometimes running disastrously.

He has been accused of over hyping City Of Troy and Auguste Rodin and then making up fanciful excuses when they don't perform as he predicts, which is quite often. Funnily, the increasingly sensitive Tabor insisted after the Juddmonte

International that the common man or woman doesn't understand O'Brien and provided a short lecture.

TABOR: You have to understand that with Aidan, it's not hype. This is what he genuinely feels.

THE COMMON MAN: But mad Vlad Putin feels exactly the same. He believes Ukraine is full of Nazis and he kills anyone in his way because of what he genuinely feels. O'Brien's hype about his horses is to enable Coolmore to sell more nominations to their stallions at inflated fees.

TABOR: I'm not mentioning any names, but if that horse was trained by a different trainer their attitude would be different. They don't, we do, and yet we get criticised for hyping. Well, we're not hyping. We're just telling the truth. You can write that.

THE COMMON MAN: Tabor is, of course, referring to Coolmore's great rivals, Sheikh Mohammed and Godolphin, who let their horses do the talking rather than shoot from the lip. Tabor and O'Brien are not telling THE truth, but are telling their version of it which becomes a bit tiring eventually. It's fake news.

MV MAGNIER: A lot of people have been slagging off Aidan and this horse for a long time. Well, I wish they made more horses like him. If they did we would be in pretty good shape. The Classic (in America) is the dream. It's a shot to nothing so we may as well give it a go. People want to see horses do different things. That's what they want. Why not give it to them?

THE COMMON MAN: Coolmore doesn't race its horses or manage its stallions to satisfy what the people want, their motive in all such situations is what is best for business. Did they send Holy Roman Emperor and Blackbeard to stud at the end of their two year old seasons because it was what the people wanted? Watch what happens to Whistlejacket in a couple of months – he could well follow the same road as they are short of new stallions.

O'Brien has been recklessly throwing out the hype, spin and propaganda at a ridiculous level in 2024 and the reaction he has faced has twice forced MV Magnier to come out and defend his trainer in an unprecedented public display of support. Here's a recap.

Ryan Moore invariably stands taller than his 5ft 7ins. The best jockey in the world and a careful talker with it effortlessly summed up the situation in the aftermath of the BetFred Derby at Epsom.

He said he didn't know how City Of Troy would run after his embarrassing flop in the 2000 Guineas a month earlier, but he knew he was the best horse in the Derby field on form, which was a simple truth.

What he didn't say was that anything is possible when a horse has one of the greats doing the steering, and that's how it played out. He coolly and calmly gave the horse a winning ride.

But the racing media preferred the story that O'Brien was some sort of messiah for turning around a mess he created. If the trainer had, by his own admission, not made such a disaster of City Of Troy's preparation for the 2000 Guineas, Coolmore might now be well on their way to Doncaster in September knowing that with Moore in the saddle the horse would likely become the first English Triple Crown winner since Nijinsky in 1970.

The irony of the situation is that City Of Troy could have been a serious Triple Crown contender in the face of the endless propaganda put out every year that this or that Ballydoyle horse could win all three classics only to end in embarrassing failure. When the real deal came along O'Brien screwed it up.

“We knew the Guineas was totally wrong and I made mistakes training him, that's the bottom line. There were stones I didn't look under, he was too fresh, he was unprepared, he blew up, that's the reality.”

But racing hacks, among them Richard Forristal and Lee Mottershead, are more into make believe than reality. O'Brien's very public mea culpa was just another part of the fantasy the media likes to paint around the trainer, who played them along beautifully.

Forristal, the Racing Post's Ireland editor, wrote: *“At a time when Irish racing is basking in the glow of Aidan O'Brien's latest supernatural exploit.....(his) transformation of City Of Troy from Newmarket to Epsom ranks among the greatest training feats of our time.”*

Mottershead noted O'Brien was happy to be surrounded by his friends in the media who idolise him and his word of the day was genius. He revealed O'Brien was overcome with stress before the big race such was the pressure to get City Of Troy

back from the brink at Newmarket and two unknown passers-by happened to be in the right place at the right time to help him with his story.

“You’re a genius, an absolute genius,” they called out to O’Brien as he walked by to greet his victorious horse. *“Fortunately, thrillingly, and as a genius called O’Brien had predicted, it was all so very worth it,”* Mottershead spewed.

The record shows the horse came home a forlorn 9th of 11 beaten 17 lengths in the Guineas and it was the trainer’s fault. Better to blame him than a horse who might be worth a hundred million plus in any currency to the Coolmore gangsters when he gets to the breeding shed.

“For us Justify (sire of City Of Troy) is the most incredible horse. The great stallion we had was Galileo, but Justifys are like Galileos but with more class which is a very hard thing to say but we see it every day, their strides, their minds, their movements. They’re quicker than Galileos which is really exciting.”

Galileo had a defining influence on O’Brien’s unprecedented success as a trainer and earned him millions of euros. He was O’Brien’s first winner of the Epsom Derby in 2001, when he achieved a Timeform rating of 130. City Of Troy has been rated 127, which by normal calculations is lower than Galileo.

O’Brien’s reckless exaggeration that City Of Troy is without doubt the best of his ten Epsom Derby winners doesn’t stand scrutiny. High Chaparral’s and Camelot’s official ratings are also superior to City Of Troy at this stage.

It’s extraordinary to hear O’Brien denigrate the reputation of some of Ireland’s greatest racehorses but, of course, these heroes of the past are now dead and won’t be contributing to O’Brien’s bank balance which will be under pressure if long running rumours are true that he and his wife Anne Marie have separated, although he might still do a U turn like Rory McIlroy who was a bit slow to realise he could lose half of the considerable fortune he’s accumulated for being quite good at golf if he went through with a divorce.

There are also numerous indications that O’Brien has moved on and is now close to former jockey Rachel Richardson, his number one work rider. Tabor alluded to her

prowess when interviewed at Epsom which added to speculation that her skills are bringing a burgeoning influence at Ballydoyle.

Certainly, the Ballydoyle ménage à trois put thousands on the gate for day two of Royal Ascot. Richardson briefly floated around Auguste Rodin like an effervescent butterfly after his hard fought victory in the Prince of Wales and Anne Marie cut an equally radiant figure showing that she's not going anywhere, which may explain why John Magnier is keeping out of the way as much as he can.

It's very hard to keep a low profile when Coolmore is organising a major propaganda show; all this posing for photographs is a typical production to emphasise that, paradoxically, there is nothing to see. And the winner of Best Supporting Actress is.....

Justify is the future, O'Brien keeps telling anyone, a little frantically. It was noticeable after the trainer's uncomfortable meltdown live on ITV at the Derby that Coolmore took greater control of media announcements for City Of Troy to give an aura of calm, but it didn't last long. Controlling the media is O'Brien's oxygen.

When Galileo died aged 23 in 2021, O'Brien said he was renowned for passing his own determination down to his offspring.

“You would train a lot of horses, different types of horses who all have different traits, but very few of them, in fact none of them, put that mental trait into their horses the way Galileo did. What he put into their minds, that genuineness, was out of this world.”

That was then, now is different according to Coolmore's trainer. To date, Galileo has sired a record 100 Group/Grade 1 racehorses. Justify has sired two crops of racing age and has produced a promising six elite winners including City Of Troy. It's far too early to be comparing Justify to true greats like Galileo and his sire Sadler's Wells.

There is a problem with Justify that may adversely affect his future as a stallion anyway – his fertility is currently around 60% which means that about 40 of every 100 broodmares he covers will fail to go into foal no matter how hard he tries. That's a big dent in his earning power and his potential super sire status.

This is not the only current Coolmore stallion suffering low fertility which may explain the palpable relief of the Coolmore mafia after City Of Troy came good in the Derby.

Reports in Ireland indicate new stallion Paddington failed to get many of his early mares in foal and Little Big Bear had a pregnancy rate of around 25% in his first season recently ended. Rising star Sioux Nation also had his latest season terminated prematurely because of unknown issues.

Coolmore Stud is in desperate need of City Of Troy to join its stallion roster in Fethard or Kentucky. He won't get anywhere near Frankel's record of 11 Group 1 wins in a 14 race career which earned him a Timeform rating of 147, but he's winning without impressing.

O'Brien and Moore expected City Of Troy to win the Eclipse at Sandown by at least 10 lengths but the horse again underwhelmed, leaving the watching Coolmore elite looking like the Tipperary Men's Sheds Association suffering severe constipation on their annual day out.

The Coolmore circus headed for the Juddmonte International at York hoping for more divine intervention. Ryan Moore obliged and City Of Troy beat another substandard field which prompted Tabor and Magnier to mount their soapboxes.



The QIPCO British Champions Series Hall of Fame was launched in 2021 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the formation of the British Champions Series of races sponsored by QIPCO, a private investment company owned by the Qatari Royal Family with an international portfolio valued at billions of dollars.

O'Brien was inducted into the Hall of Fame on the same day City Of Troy was supposed to lead his coronation in the 2000 Guineas for an award claimed by the organisers to be the highest accolade available

in British Flat racing.

The aim of the Hall of Fame is to immortalise the equine and human champions of British Flat racing focusing on the modern greats of the sport from 1970 onwards. O'Brien joined Vincent O'Brien, Sir Henry Cecil and Sir Michael Stoute as one of only four trainers inducted into the Hall of Fame so far.

It was a cruel irony that Godolphin's Notable Speech maintained his unbeaten record as City Of Troy bombed.

O'Brien's achievements are legendary, but he's been taking himself far too seriously lately. Apart from his innumerable domestic victories in Ireland and the UK, he became the most successful trainer ever at Royal Ascot with 83 wins when Paddington took the St James's Palace Stakes last year and Auguste Rodin winning the Prince of Wales Stakes at the 2024 Royal meeting marked his 400th Group 1 success worldwide.

He has won top level races in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, UAE and the US, where his exploits at the Breeders Cup include a record number of victories in the BC Turf (7) and Juvenile Turf (6) and in France he famously had the first three home in the Prix De l'Arc de Triomphe at Longchamp in 2016.

A year later he set a new world record for training the number of Group 1s in a calendar year with 28. He has over 4,000 career wins and in Britain alone he has been Champion Trainer on six occasions. To add a small bit of perspective, France's legendary Jean-Claude Rouget has double the number of O'Brien's 4,000 race wins.

The list is endless and he's still only 54, but his success is testament to the extraordinary conveyor belt of supreme equine athletes produced by Coolmore Stud every year and other million dollar yearlings purchased at auction by Magnier and his billionaire pals. These are the real reasons O'Brien sits on top of the world.

QIPCO didn't believe all this was enough for O'Brien's profile on their Hall Of Fame website; some O'Brien acolyte decided we needed to know his bizarre take on the meaning of life.

He is teetotal and attends church regularly, which we have known for years, and he encourages everyone to stay in contact with their beliefs.

"You can only control the things you can control, and you don't worry about the things you can't. You just hope there is a far greater power there that might help control the things you can't control for you.

That's the reality of life for us all, really. Everyone has their own beliefs, and nobody knows who is right or wrong but it's always a help if somebody has a belief. We do our best every day and then if there is extra help out there, we are always very grateful for it."

Then he climbed up into his pulpit again and his bevy of media luvvies sat agog in front of himself waiting for the latest words of wisdom, just like they might have done 2,000 years ago when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments and delivered a message that changed the world.

Now O'Brien wanted to rewrite history. He had the answer to why Auguste Rodin sometimes produced a horror performance in between ones of pure class. Don't mention that he's a bleeder. The trainer said he had been giving jockey Moore the wrong instructions.

"He gets a mile and a half very well, but when he gets to the front he waits, so I was probably giving him the wrong instructions all along. We were riding him too far back and when there was no pace he was too far out of the race."

What a horse - he won five Group 1s when he was ridden using the wrong tactics. Imagine what he could have achieved if he had a trainer and jockey who knew what they were doing.

"I promise, I feel the blips were my fault, the instructions were wrong and it took us time to start getting it right," he told the punch drunk hacks who could only nod feebly in wonderment as they looked around for a stiff drink.

And then it was back to the sales patter for Auguste Rodin's upcoming stud career. Don't mention that he's a bleeder. *"He has the action, the movement, the pedigree, the temperament. He's very special."*



O'Brien is pictured at Royal Ascot 2024 with wife Anne Marie and daughter Ana

There is no law or rule in racing which prevents Auguste Rodin from standing as a stallion at the end of his racing career and it's possible he might become a success but probable he won't.

Brave or stupid mare owners might take a chance on him, at a price, and a brave or stupid racehorse owner might spend silly money on buying one of his yearlings when his first crop come to market. It happens all the time.

It will be fascinating to see how it all plays out but it's a crying shame because he is a stunning looking horse and on his good days there is no doubt he is champion class, but there is always going to be a nagging doubt about what has caused his rank bad flops and whether he could pass that fault on to his foals.

Then Auguste Rodin crashed again in the King George, beaten over 11 lengths in fifth. O'Brien moaned about the going, which he said was nowhere near his preferred ground of good to firm although he has won on most types of ground.

Auguste Rodin's two pacemakers ran to O'Brien's orders as part of a pre-race plan for the favourite to race nearer the pace and come up the inside, which proved to be a disaster. How could they sacrifice the genuine chances of dual Group 1 winner Luxembourg (11-1 shot) to act as a pacemaker without informing punters, who were shafted yet again?

O'Brien made a total cock up so the best way out was to blame the ground. Excuses, excuses and even more excuses are all we've heard from O'Brien this season, he has become an old wind bag.

Auguste Rodin has clearly regressed this year, as we have previously suggested was likely as a bleeder. The hard evidence is in the Racing Post ratings for his four races to date.

30 March	Meydan	12/12 runners beaten 22 lengths	RPR 88
26 May	Curragh	2/8 runners beaten 3 lengths	RPR 117
19 June	Ascot	1/10 runners won by 3/4 length	RPR 126
27 July	Ascot	5/9 runners beaten 11 lengths	RPR 108

The outlier here is the 126 the Racing Post gave him for narrowly beating two French horses, Zarakem and Horizon Dore, in the Prince of Wales, a poor race by the usual Royal Ascot standards. Zarakem and Horizon Dore have never won above Group 2 level which puts Auguste Rodin's rating nearer 121 rather than 126.

After this latest flop O'Brien again destroyed some past Coolmore greats in one last desperate attempt to save Auguste Rodin's potential stud career.

"Why we've always been so excited about this horse is we never thought he was a down and dirty streetfighter. He was never a Duke of Marmalade. When horses go to stud, most of those Duke of Marmalade type horses end up being failures. They get an odd horse but they don't put class into every horse.

We think this horse will put class into everything. All he will need is a little bit of toughness from the mares. I only say what I think. I don't ever try to spin anything. People can accept it or not. "

No stallion in the history of the Thoroughbred, which traces back to the late 17th century, has been able to put class into every one of his foals. Not even Galileo, who sired 3,247 foals in his stud career.

According to official breeding stats he has sired 1,723 winners from 2,522 runners, which means that around 700 of his foals weren't able to even race. About 53% of his runners had the class to win a race, even a modest maiden, though he was mated with the best mares on the planet.

If O'Brien is talking about pure class he would have to be referring to how many of all Galileo's foals won Group 1 races like he did. To date, he has sired 100 individual winners of Group 1s which means that over 3,000 of his foals didn't have the class to win at the highest level. And this is Galileo, regarded as one of the best stallions anywhere in the history of the Thoroughbred. If not the best.

In 2024, O'Brien has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous to the very sad. You have to wonder who he thinks he's fooling with his incessant hype, but sublime might swing back into vogue again if City Of Troy wins the Breeders' Cup Classic.

Whatever happens, we can all play the same game again next year; exciting two year old Lion In Winter looks to be out of the same mould and is already favourite for the early classics in 2025. The burning question right now, though, is will I get a ticket to see Oasis in Dublin?