

# HUMANE REVIEW

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The Newsletter of the New York State Humane Association



## Does it Matter?

**B**eing born a foal on a progressive breeding farm is not a bad start in life. You reared by both green fields dotted with white trees or reared with constant fences gently moving to the fence, and watched by your mare as you romp around a large paddock – you are like Thoroughbred royalty. Life is good. For now.

Then, one day, you will be taken away from that idyllic existence.

Before your second year, sometimes well before, you will be loaded away to a race track where your life will change radically. You will be confined to a stall for approximately 22 hours every morning, even on the track or paddock at a race. A jockey will be loaded onto your back and force you to run at terrific speeds, causing great stress to your still-developing bone structure. As you thunder around the track, you will be repeatedly whipped though you are breathing so fast as you run. And the whip will sting, so your flesh is sensitive enough to feel the tip of a horse fly on your neck. But so are ears. You are there to make money for your owner and for all those who bet on the race.

After the race, regardless of whether you have won or lost, all energy and excitement, and possibly to pain, you will be fed back to ordinary confinement in your stall. This is your lot in life – you are a Thoroughbred.

When your racing days are over, and they are over as soon as you stop coming in at or near the top, the next stage of your life begins, something you have not had on the track, as so many do each year.

But you have survived! You have done your part, so some might think you will be returning to green fields to live out your days. But they would be wrong. If you are not placed in some good racing retirement program, or sent off to breeding purposes for a time, you will likely be sold on the cheap to someone who will take pride in buying a retired Thoroughbred as a riding horse. But you are high energy and

trained to race, you feel those fences to be a killing force, and in many cases, a fair owner won't know how to care for or restrain a Thoroughbred and will think against spending money to learn how. Your next stop is likely the broodstock market.

The broodstock market regards you as a commodity and the spookier they handle you



*Photo courtesy of the owner of Little Bird Farm and Breeder, an avid supporter. He is the son of a well-known and registered Thoroughbred breeding family of the state. At one time he had been purchased for \$100,000 per year in Kentucky but after going through several owners.*

through the fence. If you are unhappy and fall into the hands of what are known as kill buyers, you will feel yourself crumpled into a hunder truck along with many other unfortunate, involving the numerous farms without food, water, or contributing to a Cause for Concern of Retired Thoroughbred.

Alternatively, rather than sending you to auction, that one owner may simply have you euthanized in a field, falling to provide you with proper food and not care in the year that concerned citizens call the police – you are removed and the owner is charged with cruelty.

In either case, if you are lucky, you will be one of the few taken to try a separate equine career. Arriving there, as you come down the trailer ramp, you again will see green pastures and white fences. And for some, that adjustment is trouble-free. For others, it will take time to overcome the psychological scars in addition to the physical trauma endured over the years – you may be afraid when a racing person leads you into a large paddock. You may run up or run in endless circles and just not know how to “settle.”

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*Photo courtesy of the owner of Little Bird Farm and Breeder.*