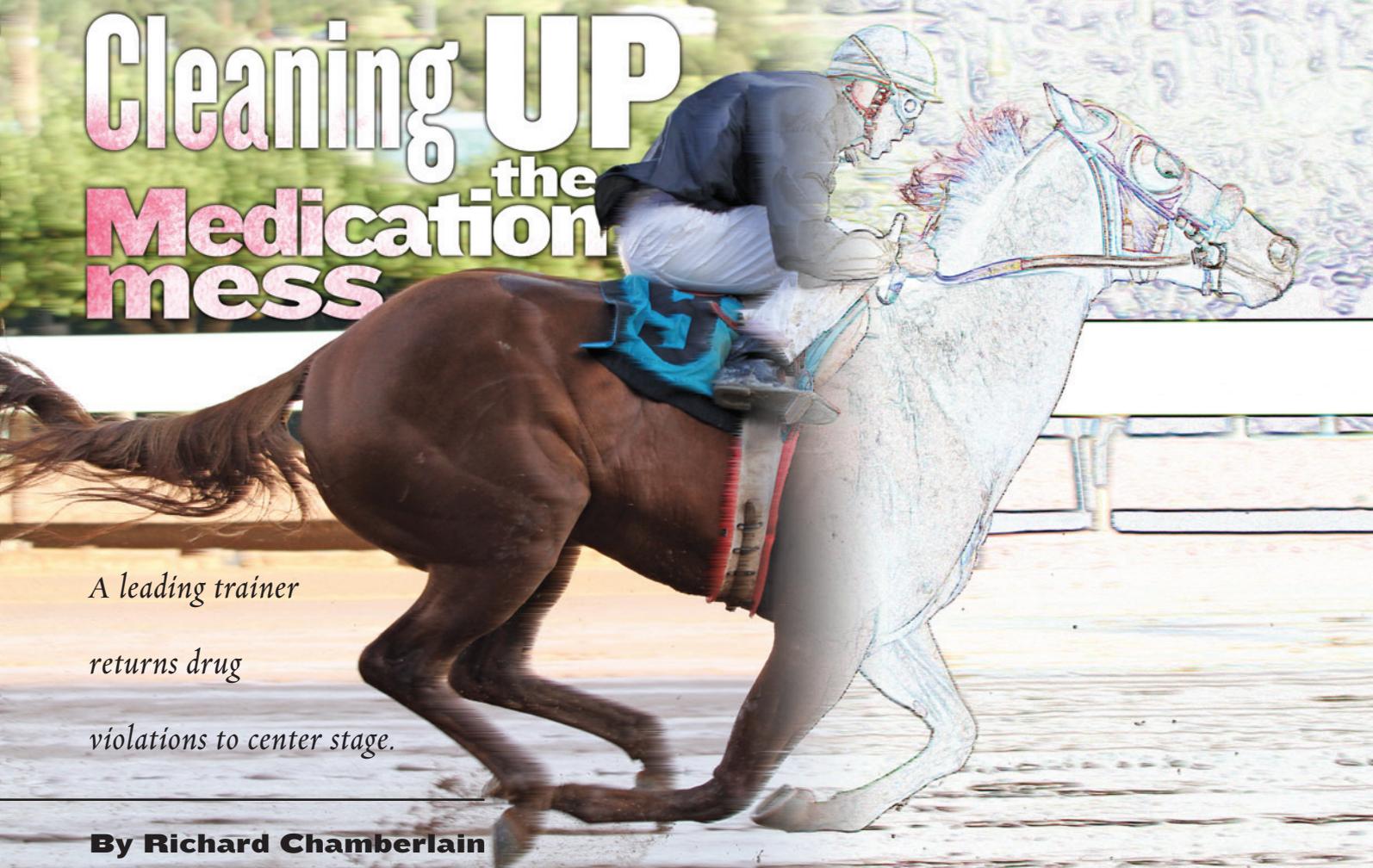


Cleaning UP the Medication mess



*A leading trainer
returns drug
violations to center stage.*

By Richard Chamberlain

HERE WE GO AGAIN. ILLEGAL DRUGS ARE BACK IN RACING headlines.

In December, the California Horse Racing Board filed six complaints alleging major drug violations against Adan Farias. A leading trainer at Los Alamitos, Farias since 2006 has sent out 1,099 winners and the earners of more than \$15.4 million, including 2009 world champion Freaky and a dozen other Grade 1 winners.

One of those big winners is T Gold J, who came home in front in the October 29 Adequan Derby Challenge Championship (G1). But along with four others that Farias saddled on Bank of America Challenge Championship night, and another that he sent out the week before to finish first in a claiming race, T Gold J came up with a positive for zilpaterol in his post-race drug test. Zilpaterol is a beta-2 agonist used in livestock production to promote lean muscle growth. Under CHRB rules, it is a Class 1 violation, which involves stimulant and depressant drugs that have the highest potential to affect performance and have no generally accepted medical use in the racehorse. In a January 9 hearing, all six horses in question were disqualified and purse money was redistributed.

Hearings are pending to determine what penalties, if any, that CHRB will levy against Farias, who in November disbanded his Los Alamitos stable.

He will not be missed at Los Alamitos, at least not by the management, which has taken a strong stand against illicit drugs and in October banned even threshold levels for clenbuterol. A bronchodilator marketed as Ventipulmin, clenbuterol is a legitimate and valuable medication used by veterinarians to treat

horses with breathing difficulties, but its use also has gotten completely out of hand because of its ability to act as a beta-2 agonist to increase muscle mass.

In September, Freaky finished first in the Go Man Go Handicap (G1), but then tested positive for a clenbuterol overage, a Class 3 violation, and was disqualified. While formerly trained by Farias, the horse raced in the Go Man Go for trainer Sergio Fiscal. At that time and in response to the horse's disqualification, Los Alamitos owner Dr. Ed Allred addressed the subject of drug usage, saying: "We're not going to put up with this. We've got to clean up racing, and once a violation has occurred – and particularly multiple violations – those horses and those people aren't going to run here at my track anymore."

Los Alamitos stewards suspended Fiscal for 90 days and fined him \$7,500. Pursuant to a stipulated agreement between the California Horse Racing Board and Fiscal, the fine was stayed, provided Fiscal has no more Class 1, 2 or 3 violations during a one-year probation.

Creating a Forum

AQHA, ALONG WITH A COUPLE DOZEN OTHER GROUPS THAT include the American Association of Equine Practitioners and the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, is a member of the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium. RMTC is developing, promoting and coordinating national policies, research and educational programs to ensure the fairness and integrity of racing, protect the health and welfare of racehorses and participants, and safeguard the interests of the racing public.

To help coordinate its part in the RMTC program, the AQHA

Racing Committee (at the Racing Conference in conjunction with the 2008 Challenge Championships at Evangeline Downs) formed the Racing Equine Health, Welfare, Integrity and Research Subcommittee. Comprising Phillip Stewart as chairman and members Sharon Brandsness, Bob Broadstock, John Hammes, Rene Hunderup, John Beech, Paul Jones, Dick Harrison, Kevin Dickson and Kirk Goodfellow, EqHWIR in a December statement said, "Rule 302 in the AQHA Official Handbook of Rules and Regulations state, 'Without necessity of referral or recommendation by stewards, to enhance penalties and sanctions, AQHA reserves the right to independently direct disciplinary action or sanction against individuals coming under AQHA recognition by their participation in American Quarter Horse racing conducted under the provisions of the AQHA Official Handbook and regulated by duly authorized state racing commissions . . .'

"The EqHWIR will monitor each situation and work with state racing jurisdictions involving medications, abuse and other issues concerning American Quarter Horses and at the appropriate time recommend penalties to the AQHA Executive Committee against the offender(s).

"The EqHWIR strongly encourages all AQHA members and horsemen to work with their respective racing stewards, commissions and the AQHA Racing office, and to report any person violating the rules and regulations of the state, Association of Racing Commissioners International and AQHA to protect the horses, horsemen and fans that enjoy and participate in the sport of American Quarter Horse racing and all horse racing."

Making It Work

THAT'S WELL AND GOOD, AS FAR AS OFFICIAL STATEMENTS GO, but what does all that mean down on the street – or more to the point, on the track?

"Our subcommittee is trying to reflect a genuine interest by the members of the Racing Committee to enlighten the public and give credence to the fact that we are trying to police our own industry and keep track of things like the clenbuterol issue," said Stewart, the farm manager at Bob Moore Farms at Norman, Oklahoma. "At the Racing Conference in Opelousas, there were suggestions for three different subcommittees that we were asked to volunteer for. This one was the most intriguing to me because of the direction that the public's perception of racing is going. I'm basically a hay, oats and water guy. But I'm not a trainer. So I would just like to see the public perception of horse racing – and specifically Quarter Horse racing – to not to have the black eye that it has now."

Stewart does not view the industry from an isolated ivory tower. The 58-year-old horseman has been involved with Quarter Horses most of his life. He has been at Bob Moore Farms for 30 years, and in the 1960s and '70s, one of his cousins trained Quarter Horses in Colorado and Los Alamitos.

"So I've been around it for quite a while and actively involved for the last 30 years," he said. "And there have been a lot of changes over the last 30 years, some good, some not so good."

The EqHWIR is trying to effect good changes.

"In the early stages, we were feeling our way around as to which direction we wanted to go," Stewart said. "As clenbuterol became a dominant issue, we were talking and working on ways to somehow figure out testing and protocols. As we were doing that, California and Canada (specifically Ontario) came on board and established a no-tolerance rule, which we've monitored very closely and has had a great impact in California and Canada."

For the past couple of years, the subcommittee has been

considering and debating what AQHA can do to further penalize offenders who repeatedly abuse medications. The general consensus, first of all, is that AQHA should take no action against a trainer, jockey, owner or horse until the legal process has been completed in the racing jurisdiction that the violation occurred.

"We're discussing what the penalties should be for first, second, third and beyond offenses," Stewart said. "I don't think the committee wants to penalize someone for an error, for instance, a medication given too close to race day. You give bute or Lasix too close to a race, and you're going to have some positives. You have an overage and that's a mistake. That's not a habitual offender. And we all make mistakes.

"If it happens a second time, we have to look at it a little closer," he continued. "We are looking into legalities, as well, with AQHA's attorney. We're looking at what AQHA does on the show side for overages, and we are looking into whether we can incorporate any of that through AQHA Rule 302 – we're looking into just how far we can go with that. There's another issue: Can you penalize a trainer who isn't a member of AQHA? Do you penalize the owner? Do you pull the papers on the horse?"

"So we're looking at whether those are options," he said. "We've had a lot of good discussion, but as always happens when you get six or eight people in a room, you can have six or eight opinions. The goal that we set at the Racing Conference last October in California is to go to the (AQHA) Convention with something specific and present to the Racing Committee for discussion."

The AQHA Convention is March 9-12 in Las Vegas.

"I hope we can come up with something that will deter trainers, but maybe more specifically owners who knowingly put their horses in places where they know they will get unfair advantage from medication just to win," Stewart said. "Believe me, I understand the economics of Quarter Horse racing, of raising and running Quarter Horses. But those folks don't have the best interest of their horses at heart."

Stewart also pointed out that everything the EqHWIR Subcommittee does is breed specific.

"It only pertains to the Quarter Horse industry," he said "The Thoroughbred people across the country seem to have a different view of clenbuterol than what we do here the Quarter Horse industry."

It's the same at AQHA overall. The Association works closely with other breed, racing, show and industry organizations across the nation, but first and foremost is concern for the welfare of the fastest horses on earth.

"The American Quarter Horse Association fully supports industry leaders who have taken strong steps to protect the integrity of racing and ensuring that racing has the betting public's trust," said AQHA Executive Director of Racing Trey Buck. "For example, the Association has worked closely with CHRB and Los Alamitos to tackle the issue of clenbuterol in racehorses. The welfare of the American Quarter Horse is paramount to all other considerations and AQHA is committed to that belief. AQHA will continue to educate horsemen and work with all industry groups to make the sport safe for horses and humans."

Here's a final note: One of the horses that got Farias nailed was the fittingly named Illegal Smile, who dead-heated for the win in the John Deere Juvenile Challenge Championship (G2). "Illegal Smile" is the title of a 1971 John Prine song about drugs.

"Illegal Smile" is supposed to be humorous. But this illegal smile is not a joke. ■