

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STANDARDBRED BREEDERS ASSOCIATION Inc.
(WASBA)

52ND Annual General Meeting Friday 26 November 2021

President's Report

Welcome

I would like to welcome you all to the 52ND Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Western Australian Standardbred Breeders Association (WASBA). We have been in existence in some form since 1946, which means 75 years of service to the breeding sector in WA.

I would like to start by concentrating on some of our achievements.

Achievements

A year after the Covid19 first impacted our world, we have continued to push as many boundaries as we can to further our industry:

- **Westbred Bonus:** WASBA worked extensively with MHR to finalise recommendations of the Westbred Review, completed in February 2020. Components of the Review were implemented in September 2020, with the Westbred Bonus extended to the first career win of 4yo and over Westbreds, and the First Win Bonuses increased to \$3,000. We are continuing to work on the remaining objectives to support the racing system, concentrating on breeder incentives to encourage sustainable breeding.
- **Stakes Increases:** In 2021 WASBA put forward a strong business case to support stakes increases across the country tracks. These increases have now been implemented, with the minimum stakes for any starter in WA being \$150, and the minimum race stakes now at \$5,000 (\$8,500 for the major country tracks).
- **Breeding History:** Following our agitation and support from HRA Executive member Bob Fowler, breeder information has been reinstated on the HRA website on individual horse views;
- **The Trots WA:** We greatly appreciate the assistance of the Harness Office and RWWA Marketing in supporting our input for The Trots WA magazine and supporting the distribution of a hardcopy (September/October) edition to industry at commencement of the stud season. All licensed personnel and WASBA members benefited.
- **Monthly News.** As part of our service to members, we have continued to improve and provide a monthly newsletter to our members, providing news items, WA results and official information.

We continued our industry support in an increasingly difficult funding environment.

- **Off The Track/ rehoming sponsorship:** Our contribution for the year was lower than our usual annual contribution. However, we are evaluating how best to progress our support, with RWWA's Off The Track trainers now being better supported through RWWA and less reliant on donations. The need is still there, and we are reassessing our actions. We fully intend to continue our support at the previous levels as a minimum, while we can;
- **Financial contribution:** Continued with our support for breeders and the industry through partial funding of the Annual APG Sales Classic / WASBA Breeding Awards Night in February 2021;
- **Awards:** We continue to support breeders through our Annual Awards, presented at the APG WASBA combined function. Award recipients include breeders of the leading 2yos and 3yos for each sex, leading mare and leading aged horse, leading breeder,

leading WA based stallion for each age and Breeders of the Month. The trophies provided are the equal of the RWWA Annual Award trophies. Our sponsors APG and Decron also provide \$1,000 to the Breeders of Open Group 1 winning horses meeting certain conditions.

- **Rewards and Presentations:** We have continued to deliver our owner and breeder awards in the form of rugs, trophies and garlands for our series of WASBA feature races, along with supporting and recognising owners of major juvenile and Group races. We are currently providing:
 - rug, garland and trophy for the WASBA Country Oaks;
 - rugs and garlands for the Group 1 Westbred Classics and sashes for the Westsired Finals;
 - trophies for the 3 WASBA \$30,000 races and \$1,500 in incentives for the Busselton Sweetheart Series
 - up to \$3,000 for each of our \$14,000 races along with rugs, garlands and trophies.

We appreciate the support of Gloucester Park, Bunbury, Northam, Busselton and Pinjarra clubs.

All in all, WASBA provides over \$22,000 per year in direct support to the industry.

Current Status

Nationally, harness racing has seen some significant changes in a very short period, and a number of changes/issues have impacted our WA industry. We have continued to consult with industry, review outcomes and put forward recommendations and feedback that best fits our WA industry:

- ☞ Stallion Book limits, hastily introduced in June 2020, have resulted in the top layer of stallion, in terms of popularity, being booked out well before the season commences. This wasn't completely unexpected. Commercial sellers are taking the bulk of the services. It may be damaging in the long term, especially if studs start to "select" their clientele. It will be wise for breeders small and large to book early if they want one of the popular stallions, and perhaps book more than one to give themselves choices as the breeding season proper approaches.
- ☞ The cap inclusive of the free returns is still a bone of contention for breeders. We will continue to work on a change to the stallion cap to exclude free returns, which would give certainty to mare and stallion owners alike.
- ☞ The grandfathering of use of semen from deceased stallions has not been at issue. However, with frozen semen readily available in large quantities from aging champion stallions, the impact will be greatest when one of these stallions die. As with the stallion cap, NZ will not limit the use of frozen semen from dead stallions, creating another disparity between Australia and NZ that owners and breeders have to tackle in the racing product.
- ☞ The extension of the racing season to the end of the calendar year was well received. However, it has resulted in the decision being made to move the majority of juvenile features away from the traditional February to April timeslot to an October to December timeslot. I do not believe such a significant change was necessary and the lack of advice to industry and the impact on the different levels of horses (previously the late maturing and less successful horses had the winter and spring period to earn money) needs to be watched closely.
- ☞ The standalone WA handicapping system continues to cause concern for owners with horses who they consider need to be able to drop back in level, as the national system permits. WA administrators need to be extremely confident that the local system is not only superior to the national system but is having no adverse impact whatsoever on either turnover or participation, if it is to continue. I believe it is time to review whether we revert to the national system with local rules or continue on a standalone path. I believe information on the merits

or otherwise of both systems needs to go out to industry, for industry decision. We cannot continue to use a standalone system if it is causing even low level damage.

- Covid-19 continued to have an impact on racing in WA, albeit small. We have had minimal lockdowns and loss of meetings, a credit to RWWA, but movement of horses and owners across state borders remains impacted. It is sincerely hoped that everyone in the industry recognises how critical it is to the whole industry for everyone involved to be vaccinated.
- 🕒 WA bred horses stake earnings were \$12.8 million, or 54.0%, of the available stakes for the 12 month period ending August 2021, certainly helped by a WA bred winner of the Pacing Cup. Westbreds won 56.6% of the races compared to 53.7% and 52.1% respectively in the previous 2 seasons. Winners to starters also increased to 55.6%, up from 54.4%. There are some positives here – if RWWA were more positive in their language around harness, from a participant perspective, it might help to alleviate the loss of confidence in many quarters.
- 🕒 Westbred and First Win Bonus earnings were almost \$3.6 million over the 12 month period ending August 2021, compared to \$1.9 million over the previous 12 months. Over \$310,000 was earned in Epona Credits, and 52 mares were bred using some, or all, of their previously earned Credits.
- 🕒 Filly and mare owners continue to support the industry, maintaining an upward trend with 30.6% of races won by fillies and mares (up from 27.8% last year)., The number of fillies and mares races dropped by 0.4% to 13.6%, something to watch in the future as the racing system needs to support and provide a career path for fillies and mares in particular.
- 🕒 The disparity in the stakes opportunities for the class mares remains a concern, with only one race available to them over \$100,000. Only two mares (Balcatherine NZ and Westbred Star Of Diamonds) earning more than \$100,000 in the 12 month period. It is critical to retain good race mares in WA by providing their owners with the right incentives to race and breed.
- Microchipping has replaced Freeze branding as the form of identification. Freeze branding has ceased in WA from the 2021 crop inclusive. To their credit, RWWA have arranged a process to enable all WA foals to be branded for a similar cost and the same administrative process as freeze branding. You can still arrange your own identification/property freeze brand. Note that earlier crops must still be freeze branded and microchipped.
- 🕒 Over 90 stallions were represented by Westbred progeny in the 12 month period, demonstrating the willingness of WA breeders to support various stallions. It is imperative that unencumbered choice of stallion remains with breeders, to ensure they have the confidence to breed and race.
- 🕒 Some of our best mid range horses are still flying out of WA. Every owner has the right to make that choice but we really want the racing system to be attractive to owners rather than selling their horses out of the state. We cannot afford to lose quality, particularly mares.
- 🕒 The OTT Passport and Off The Track Retraining program are now in full swing, with 1% of the stakes budget now being put towards this welfare aspect. This is a positive demonstration of our commitment to this process and outcome. Everyone needs to be on board with this. RWWA need to develop KPIs that show it is working for standardbreds.
- 🕒 Stallion levy proposal of a 15% levy on service fees for all frozen and shuttle stallions serving in Australia, was poorly developed, timed and handled, and rejected by a significant majority in every State for being an impost on Australian breeders to fund races.
- Advance Australia concept although outside of the relevant period, does need to be mentioned. Following the total rejection of the stallion levy proposal, HRA took a much greater consultative approach when proposing this initiative to the breeding industry, again suggesting a Registration Fee on stallions. There was a greater receptiveness to the concept (approximately one third of WASBA's survey respondents supported the general concept) but there was still no support by the significant majority of respondents for breeders to be financially supporting an elite race.
- Ownership: The ownership initiative announced in December 2019, allowing for 20 named

owners for any horse before ASIC syndication rules apply was implemented by RWWA in Transfer of Ownership Forms in late 2020. The next step is to investigate ASICs micro-ownership model;

- ① Implementation of Feature races: Two \$30,000 4YO and 5YO mares races – the Harry Capararo Westbred Mares Final (won by Sheez Our Hope) and the Mares Pace (won by Miss Limelight NZ) are now established in the racing calendar. These races are in addition to the \$30,000 4YO and 5YO Kerry Clarke Westbred Final (won by Fifty Five Reborn) and the \$30,000 Christmas Belles, all initiated by WASBA and supported by the Harness Office;
- ② The Harness Racing Consultative Group (HRCG) meetings have reconvened. More work needs to be done to get better value. WASBA puts in considerable effort to quantify what we consider as necessary to support the racing industry, with little result from these meetings.

Fundraising

We are indebted to our sponsors for the support they provide, enabling us to carry out our activities on an annual basis.

All our activities that deliver benefits and rewards or awards require fundraising. Going forward we expect this to become more difficult.

Our funds principally come from the Stallion Tender, augmented by the Stallion Raffle and our Breeders Stakes night.

- **the 2021 Stallion Raffle** The raffle is an important litmus test for breeding. We were pleased with the outcome of the 2021 raffle – Covid19 lockdowns were continuing in some areas which impacted confidence, along with the ill-timed announcement of the proposed stallion levy and stallion book limits changing the way breeders approach their stallion selection. We could not achieve anything without the support of Woodlands Stud for our major prize, along with Allwood Stud and Alabar Farms, all providing high value stallions;
- **The Stallion Tender**: - is now the major fund raising opportunity for WASBA, with the 2021 Tender almost as successful as the previous year. We had another very good lineup which included the premier stallion based in Australia in Art Major. We are certainly appreciative of the support from the studs, particularly Alabar Farms, Allwood Stud and Woodlands Stud. Other sponsors who provide considerable support include Cobbitty Equine, KTC Bloodstock, Northern Rivers Equine, Soho Standardbreds and new sponsor Westbred Pacing.
- **the 2021 Breeders Stakes** Our regular sponsors again came to our assistance and the Breeders Stakes nights continues to perform for us. Gloucester Park, Allwood Stud Farm, Budget Stockfeeds, Larkhill Vets, Milne Feeds, Pacing WA, PSC Bloodstock Services, Ramsays Horse Transport all supported us on the night.

I would especially like to thank Mark Hughes (Woodlands Stud), Brett Coffey (Alabar Farms) and Bob Flower (Allwood Stud) for their support during 2021.

Issues and Opportunities

As an organisation we continue to focus on delivering the required support to the industry at every level. With 70-80% of breeders racing the horses they breed, maintaining a presence in all aspects of the industry where breeders might be impacted is important and will be pursued.

However, we are a small group with limited people resources. As time progresses, achieving our aims is going to be more difficult without more people stepping forward to support the industry through WASBA or one of the other Eligible Bodies.

These are some of our focus points:

- ❖ 2yo and 3yo, fillies and mares and Westbred opportunities. We continued to liaise with the Manager Harness Racing to discuss opportunities for these groups for the long term viability of the industry. The improved opportunities for the 2yos and 3yos under the extended season has certainly helped to alleviate the loss of the July/August Westbred Bonus opportunities that previously existed.

Overall, the racing results for WA bred horses have improved, but this improvement needs to continue for owners and breeders to gain confidence. There are question marks over the lifetime penalty system being able to achieve this in the long term.

We continue to raise the need for a premium race and other races for mares to bridge the gap between earnings for mares against stake earnings of their male counterparts.

- ❖ The Westbred and Epona Schemes are vital for the industry and will continue to be supported to the fullest. The implementation of the remaining Westbred initiatives developed in 2019 is a priority, especially where it supports breeders and the broodmare pool such as breeding credits for existing broodmares.
- ❖ Pay To Last. Most WA breeders race the horses that they breed. For breeding to continue it is imperative that breeders earn enough from the racing system to cater for their breeding decisions. The stakes for first to fourth is where the breeding system is supported and the recent improvement in stakes for placings down to last is a watershed, with no further increases envisaged without commensurate increases in first to fifth. The distribution of stakes should be reviewed for Group races however, to increase the reward for second to fourth (from a combined 28% to 33%).
- ❖ Average season starts. After the initial increase this has now dropped – for a multitude of reasons including horses leaving the racing system and horses leaving the state. The initial racing pattern saw an increase in the number of horses racing more than 30 times a season. This was not desirable and could not be sustained. These numbers have to be managed better to maximise retention in the race pool over a longer period to maintain the racing product. This is about managing the racing stock for the long term.
- ❖ The future of the WA TAB has been decided recently – it is for Sale, although under revised conditions given the elapsed time and changes in the market. It is still intended to be a Sale that is in the best interests of the industry. Our representative on the Working Party is Albert Walmsley;
- ❖ Juvenile feature races. NZ approached changes to their feature race calendar by engaging with an expert group to review the existing calendar. It would have been beneficial to do the same in WA rather than just move the majority of races to the latter quarter of the year. Some of the best racing periods are now underrepresented. For the benefit of the racing animals and their owners and the industry as a whole, I believe we need to review these changes for 2023 to ensure the September through to May racing period is used to maximum benefit without young horses being expected to race more often over a shorter timeframe.
- ❖ Testosterone. The banning of mares from racing and breeding when they have very slightly elevated levels (above screening limits) of testosterone because they have an ovarian tumour must cease. This is inhumane. Any reasonable industry would deal with this differently and with a genuine duty of care to the animal.
- ❖ Breeding Numbers must increase from the low crops of 2019 and 2020. We want to see the remaining options from the 2019 Westbred Review, where they directly relate to breeding, actioned to encourage the breeding of mares in the existing broodmare pool. This will be essential to provide the racing pools of the future.

The extension of the season, the extension of the Westbred Bonus to first time winners of any

age and the increase to the First win Bonus have provided improved racing outcomes for participants and their horses. It will take at least another year to assess the impact on breeding numbers. If the meantime, more positivity around standardbred breeding and racing is needed. This needs to come from RWVA.

WASBA continues to, as best as we are able, support and encourage breeders and the industry, in the following ways:

- providing relevant up to date information and promotional material to breeders;
- supporting the right of breeders to make informed choice on stallion selection
- supporting a standalone yearling sale in WA;
- advocating for the provision of the right races for our WA bred horses;
- supporting the higher Bonus incentives for WA based stallions to ensure the continuation of affordable breeding bases for mares;
- Identifying gaps in the racing system and creating targeted races like the \$14,000 mares races, the Country Oaks and the 4YO/5YO races;
- liaising at national and state level to improve outcomes for breeders

We would like to see all southern hemisphere racing administrators work better with breeding organisations and breeders in general to produce a viable and attractive racing industry for the future, with greater transparency on major issues and greater involvement of participants on major issues.

Future issues

- ❖ *New Semen extender.* The status of this project is unknown. The new semen extender appears to have been unable to pass the field testing phase due to the inability to maintain the required temperature. Regardless of the future of this, we do want to continue to see stallions based in Australia and not be reliant on the more expensive frozen semen process.
- ❖ *Embryo transfer.* The “level playing field” concept and ethics must be the primary considerations around rules and restrictions, to meet community and our own expectations. Actions to date cover the banning of sex sorting and use of frozen embryos, but there remains other issues to resolve.
- ❖ *Provision of timely Information.* We are still not able to get timely breeding information, nationally or locally, that enables the right strategies to be put in place. A greater use of technology and online real time recording is overdue.

Recognition

The sole purpose of WASBA is to support the standardbred industry in WA by promoting, assisting and encouraging breeders and the sustainable breeding of standardbreds in WA. WASBA provides awards, rewards and recognition to many members in the industry through the various breeding awards and sponsorship. Not everyone who receives this recognition is a member, and yet the WASBA Committee continues to make every endeavour to do what is best for the industry, without compromise.

I would therefore like to sincerely thank the current Committee for the manner in which they continue to support WASBA members and the industry in Western Australia.

We cannot operate without a Committee and we do ask our members to consider what they can contribute if we are to continue to support the industry.

In particular, Vice President and Treasurer Howard King is directly responsible for the success

of our Stallion Tender and Raffle, without which we could not continue to deliver.

WASBA member and our Facebook coordinator Denise Trobe had until the latter stages of the season provided fantastic support under extreme difficulties, and we would like to congratulate Denise for her extremely well deserved "Ladies Of Pacing Dedication to Harness Racing Award".

We hope that we can renew our Facebook and other web activity in the future, when the situation allows. Unfortunately, we have had to prioritise our workload to ensure we can deliver the best results for the industry.

On behalf of WASBA, I thank former Manager Harness Racing Kerry Hanks for the work done to provide a more sustainable industry in WA. I would also like to thank our representative on the RWWA Board, Bob Fowler, for his efforts in support of Harness racing in WA.

Thank you to everyone who attended the AGM. This is a critical element of running any Association and a legal requirement. As irrelevant as it seems, we cannot continue to function without members turning up to support the AGM.

The AGM is a moment of reflection on the past year, and an opportunity to take stock of the direction an organisation is taking and to try to improve. It is an opportunity for members to show their support and at the same time question and challenge.

We are always on hand to answer queries and respond to industry concerns. However, we would appreciate that if you seek our assistance that you do so as a member.

To all our members, the Committee thanks you for your support and contribution to WASBA and to harness racing and breeding. Please encourage others to become members of WASBA.

In Closing

I will close as I have done in previous years – it remains a relevant statement:

No Horses = No Industry.

Without a breeder and a mare, there is no industry. Of high importance is the attraction of owners of all ages to breeding, particularly younger owners who can carry our industry forward, We want you to breed from your race mares to make up the fields and participants of tomorrow.

Please relay your comments, concerns of feedback to us so that we can make harness racing a success in WA for you..

A final quote from one of the leading harness administrators in Australia:

"It is important the industry understands the correlation between a strong breeding sector and an increase in the number of Standardbred owners in harness racing. The principle of supply and demand means attracting more owners can play a significant role in increasing future foal crops, which will attract bigger fields and create a product more attractive to punters."



Everybody benefits from a strong local breeding industry

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