

ALL MOUNTED UP.....BUT WHERE ARE WE GOING?



This satirical painting by Kenneth Daly was rendered out of concern over the advent of jockey and equine advertising. Titled *BILL ABOARD* by the painting's owner, it depicts the potential of advertising for creating conflict and divisiveness, and for injuring the traditions and aesthetics of our sport.

Dear Dysfunctional Horse Racing Family,

What is wrong with this picture?

Jockeys want to put advertising money in their pocket while being paid by an owner to ride his horse and wear his uniform. Clearly, as an industry, we need to bring more sponsorships and revenue to our sport. But it is the owner who pays the bills and seldom wins on the bottom line. If Jockeys wish to earn extra money for themselves from advertising, they need to look for endorsements when they are not sitting on the backs of their employers' horses.

Jockeys have lawyers and some degree of organization. Owners have no collective voice. Taking advantage of this imbalance, several jockeys have coerced and wrangled their way through two local jurisdictions (Churchill Downs and The Maryland Jockey Club) and worn advertising. **But no precedent exists for what the Jockeys have managed to do.** NASCAR, for example, has extensive experience with sponsored patches and branding, and the relationship of track-owner-driver-car is analogous to track-owner-jockey-horse. At NASCAR, however, all patches worn by the driver are the **property of the owner**. Contracts with sponsors are negotiated by the owner and all monies are paid to the owner (who may or may not share with the driver). Furthermore, in England, jockeys are allowed to wear sponsored branding, but only under the strict rules and controls of the British Horseracing Board, and only with **permission of the owner**.

This latest money-grab is just a microcosm of the self-serving and short sighted way we typically do business with each other across the industry. Instead of working together for the common good, each faction, unilaterally, tries to seize today's pot for itself. Instead of joining cooperatively, and fighting to take market share back from our main competitors (NASCAR, the NFL, Major League Baseball, casinos, off-shore betting parlors, etc.), we squabble among ourselves and chisel one another. **Our main industry problem is that we forget we are on the same team.**

An almost universal fascination with the Horse gives us the biggest competitive edge in all of Sports. Yet, we humans, collectively, keep finding ways to screw it up. Our essential owner base is shrinking dramatically, while a bright marketing voice like TVG can only transmit a portion of the major racing. Our efforts to grow handle, attract new fans, and increase purses suffer because we do not work together. The current advertising conflict and controversy give owners and jockeys a special opportunity to reverse this adversarial trend and develop a plan that is beneficial to all groups involved. Together, we might set a standard for others in our industry.

What do you think?

Sincerely yours,
Rob Whiteley