

Question

of the month



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Do you think the current method of preparing and offering two-year-olds for sale is the appropriate one for both the buying public and the horses themselves? How do breeze shows, the time of year and lack of uniform medication rules, among other things, affect them?



Question
of the month
Continued...

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Liberation Farm owner Rob Whiteley:

My hat is off to the pinhookers and two-year-old sale consignors. They do a damn good job for the most part, while lodged between a rock and a hard place. Quite a few pinhookers possess some of the keenest eyes in the business, and they show tremendous horsemanship in getting a number of their hand-picked babies to the sales in one piece. Yet, the current obsession with speed makes their job extremely difficult and defies common sense.

Asking a young, developing horse for a maximum burst of speed on a given day in February or March (and putting him or her through such a demanding preparation) doesn't prove much, and unnecessarily risks ruining the horse. I believe we need to turn back the clock to the days when we let the babies show themselves under a strong gallop. (I think Frank Stronach has this one right when he conducts his entire sale under something close to a two minute lick.)

I think also that we are selling trainers and other real horsemen short when we suggest that they can only tell a good horse by the time it takes them to go an eighth or a quarter. This game is all about having an eye to see athletic, fluid motion, and about inferring quality and competitiveness in an untried horse. It is not about cheap speed. Real pros used to have no trouble picking out the stars when they were galloped, so where did we blow the turn? Do we really think that Richard Mandella or Mike Ryan needs to watch a horse go in :10 flat to see that it's a promising race horse? What time did Afleet Alex or Monarchos or Stevie Wonderboy work in when they were two-year-old sales horses? Go look it up.

Making astute selections involves discerning how a horse moves and uses himself, not about how fast he can pick up his feet over a couple of football fields. Photographer Eadweard Muybridge was the pioneer in motion analysis, and he did quite well using horses at a gallop. Even the contemporary stride analysis folks at DataTrack, Equix, or EQB don't require intense speed, because you can't hide inefficiencies of movement. Furthermore, individual stride analysis can still be performed meaningfully with horses galloping strongly, because an individual sale horse's score or profile is relative to all of the other horses in that sales group.

In short, and for many reasons, speed is our enemy. Training for intense speed causes too much attrition. It's hard on pinhookers who bravely make the investment, and it's obviously hard on the immature horses.



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At the end of the day, are we really happy selling only 35 percent of the two-year-olds catalogued for a sale? So, what will fix this dismal reality? It's time the consignors, buyers, and sales companies sat down together and figured it out.

In general, two-year-old sales continue to produce racehorses competing at the very top of the game. The days of the stereotypical precocious two year olds or sprinters are long gone. Just glance at any weekend stakes results or Kentucky Derby prospects to see the impact two-year-old sale graduates are making.

Regarding medication, sales companies have been proactive in adopting policies for the benefit of the well being of the horse and the protection of the buyer. Consignors have welcomed and supported the effort. Medication policy is a constant work in progress the sales companies continue to monitor. It is in the best interest of the entire industry for sales companies and all other industry participants to work together addressing the use of medication at the sales and the races. In the near future, I am confident policies will be adopted throughout the nation restricting the use of anabolic steroids. It is important to realize medication is no more of an issue at two-year-old sales than other sales or at the racetrack.

Two-year-old sale graduates continue to shine on the track as they rack up stakes wins coast to coast. International buyers are increasing their participation not only taking advantage of the weakened dollar but also recognizing the potential of their purchases to compete at the highest level.

E-mail us your suggestions for the
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**Excellence abounds at the Keeneland
April Two-Year-Olds in Training Sale.**

One Preview Day
Monday, April 7

Two Evening Sessions
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