

Sept 6/2008

To Mr. Blakney

This letter is with regard to the whipping rule review that is being held at the industry working session held in September 2008.

I have made my living exclusively from driving horses for more than 20 years. I am proud of my accomplishments so far & I hope to add to those accomplishments in the future.

It is because I make my living driving horses that I am writing this letter & requesting that it be submitted at the whipping review session. I am well aware that the use of the whip is turning potential customers away from the sport that I love & that has served me well for many years now & agree that the status quo is not acceptable but the proposed rule change I have read so much about from so many parties that a driver must keep a line in each hand for the entire race will in my opinion put the safety of myself & all other drivers & horses at increased risk.

While I strongly believe the whip is an over used tool there are certain horses that definitely respond to an aggressive smack with the whip. If I am driving one of those horses I will do my best to give that aggressive smack & the only way to do that is to take as big a swing as is possible. In order for that big swing to be possible I will have to slide my hand back on the line. I also believe most other drivers will do the same. Because there will be much more slack in the line, if my horse takes a sudden step sideways the response time will be greatly increased before I can correct him & when you are in tight quarters through the lane any reduction in response time can only lead to a much more unsafe environment.

I have talked to many drivers about this proposed rule change & a very large majority agree that this proposal will make for a more dangerous environment for both horse & driver.

While I respect the opinion of those that are proposing the one line in each hand rule change the vast majority of those people do not make their living driving horses. There has been some talk about making loose lining or having your hand too far back on the line a rules violation but do you really believe judges will be able to determine what a loose line or having your hand too far back on the line is?

I have read many complaints about judges not being able to determine what constitutes abusive use of the whip on a consistent basis & now we expect them to determine what a loose line is or if your hand is too far back on the line?

This same proposed rule was implemented at Hippodrome de Montreal & was quickly stopped because all parties realized it was causing a greater unsafe situation on the track. I hope nobody needs to get hurt to prove a point.

There are a lot of smart people in this business & I'm sure they can come up with a solution to the whipping issue without putting both horses & drivers at increased risk of injury.

Trevor Ritchie