

Change of BIRTHDAYS

What you need to know!



On May 27th, 2021, a Special General Meeting of all clubs and kindred bodies of Harness Racing New Zealand unanimously approved the decision to change a standardbred horses' birthday from August 1st to January 1st each year.

Why have we changed the birthday for a Standardbred horse to January 1?

Harness Racing Australia changed the birthdate of their standardbred horses to be January 1 in the next but one calendar year in which it was foaled two years ago. This was done because it would:

- ensure more horses raced as 2YOs due to the scientific evidence that they have a longer racing career if they do so;
- improve animal welfare by changing the major races to later in the calendar year therefore horses older and stronger. Horses would also be better educated by then;
- improve wagering on key races as they would have fuller fields.



The impacts of the Australian change to January 1st were:

- a longer breeding season as mares still being bred throughout January;
- for the first time in 12 years an increase in the number of horses being bred;
- fuller fields in the major races;
- a significant increase of wagering on the Vic Bred and Breeders Crown races;
- an increase in fillies racing;
- an increase in 2YO racing.

There has been universal support for the change in Australia across all states now that they have seen the benefits.

The impact of the Australian change on New Zealand horses has been:

- Horses that would turn a year older on August 1st e.g. 2YO to a 3YO could still go to Australia and race as a 2YO over there until the end of December.
- Owners are sending their horses over to Australia for these age group races and the majority were unlikely to return to New Zealand racing therefore depleting our numbers.
 - A higher market for our age group horses for the Australian market.

The benefits of New Zealand moving to January 1 birthdate are:

- we would align with the Australian horse birthdate and other harness jurisdictions around the world;
- there is no longer a disincentive to breed beyond January 1st;
- there could be an increase in breeding numbers;
- stronger 2YO racing from an animal welfare point of view;
- a 2YO racing season extends from a 4 ½ month window to 11 months thereby a better return on investment for the owners;
- fuller age group racing towards the end of the calendar year;
- improved wagering on age group events;
- help keep our horse population in New Zealand.

The impacts of New Zealand moving to January 1 birthdate are:

- An initial one-off extension to the current season to make it 5 months longer i.e. August through December.
- No impact on budget as racing season and funding stay the same.
- A complete revamp of our programme of Group racing including but not limited to the Sires Stakes races and Harness Jewels.

When do horses get older?

In reviewing the change of birthdate for the horse, the rules have been designed to ensure horses born in the same breeding season turn a year older on the same day. So, for example, if you had an early January foal it would age on the same day as a December foal.

Example:

Date horse born	Date horse becomes 1YO
January 2020	January 2021
November 2020	January 2022
January 2021	January 2022
November 2021	January 2023

Why has the Racing Season not changed?

The Racing Season of 1 August through 31 July is embedded into the Racing Industry Act 2020 and therefore requires a legislation change by Parliament. This is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future due to other government priorities, however for our sport it was deemed necessary to make the birthday changes now for the reasons outlined above.

What happens to the breeding season?

The breeding season will not change i.e. in the Spring through to Summer. The good news is that if your mare is not in foal by early December you could still try again and not be disadvantaged by having a late foal turn 1YO when it is in fact only 6 or 7 months old. E.g. foals January 10th would have turned 1 on August 1st but now it will turn 1YO on January 1st the following year, so will be much nearer to its true age of 12 months.



What happens to our current 2 and 3YOs?

Every horse regardless of age will stay their current age until January 1st 2022, i.e. if already a 2YO they will be a 2YO through until January 1st, 2022. No horse will age on August 1st this year.

What will our racing programme look like?

The change in a horse's birthday presents an opportunity to reshape not only the pattern of racing but a chance to re-evaluate our approach to marketing to the benefit of all sectors of our sport.

We have a team of 9 people from diverse backgrounds involved in drawing up a proposed programme for the following year. This work has been going for several weeks now in anticipation of the decision to change the birthday. This programme covers age group racing, group, feature and listed races as well as the general rating races throughout the year.

We have recently began dialogue with clubs, sponsors, trainers, owners and breeders and other stakeholders, to review and give their feedback. We anticipate this process will be cyclical until we get a programme we are all comfortable with. We are looking at finalising the programme by the end of October this year and will publish the yearlong programme for everyone to work with.

What happens from August 1st to December 31st this year with programming?

We will be designing a race programme from January 1st through to December 31st to cover the age of the horse. Initially there is a transition period from August 1 2021 to December 31st 2021. In looking at this transition period we believe it will impact about 5 races (not race days, just races) otherwise it is business as usual for these months.

If you require further clarification contact

Catherine McDonald
General Manager Racing
Phone: 03 964 1192
Mobile: 027 241 0021