

CHAMPIONING LIFE BEYOND THE FINISH LINE

By Ramzy Kalam



Dr. Eliot Forbes And Cody's Wish (Photo Supplied)

Dr. Eliot Forbes has dedicated much of his distinguished career to ensuring Thoroughbreds receive the care and consideration they deserve long after their racing days end. With over 30 years of experience spanning veterinary practice, racing administration, and welfare advocacy across three continents, Dr. Forbes brings both technical expertise and deep compassion to his role as Chairman of the International Forum for the Aftercare of Racehorses (IFAR). His journey from veterinary surgeon to leading Racing Queensland, Tasracing and the Racing Integrity Board of New Zealand, and now to chairing IFAR,

reflects a lifelong commitment to placing the horse at the centre of racing's future.

Since succeeding the founding chair, Di Arbuthnot, in September 2024, Dr. Forbes has been instrumental in steering IFAR through its tenth-anniversary year. This milestone comes as the organisation hosts its landmark conference in partnership with the Asian Racing Federation. As racing jurisdictions worldwide grapple with heightened welfare expectations and the need to demonstrate lifetime responsibility, Dr. Forbes's leadership arrives at a pivotal moment for both IFAR and the global Thoroughbred industry.



In this interview, Dr. Forbes shares his insights on a decade of progress in aftercare, the challenges that remain, and his vision for creating a racing industry where lifetime responsibility for the Thoroughbred is truly non-negotiable.

This is the tenth IFAR conference, which is an essential milestone for the organisation. What has changed in the aftercare space over that decade, and how has IFAR played a role?

Ten years ago, from a global perspective, aftercare was a marginal topic and not widely recognised as a core responsibility of the racing industry. Good practice existed in pockets, but there was no cohesive narrative or network to share knowledge. Today, aftercare is firmly embedded in industry thinking. It is discussed in boardrooms, reflected in policy and increasingly treated as a strategic asset that underpins racing's social licence.

IFAR has been the global catalyst for that change. At a time when lifetime responsibility was only occasionally mentioned, we started the conversation, asked hard questions about life after racing and created an annual forum for sharing best practices.

From our first forums in Washington, D.C. and Seoul through to Europe, Asia, Africa, and, most recently, the stand-alone event in Lexington, we have brought this community together to exchange ideas and practical solutions. Each gathering has prompted new jurisdictions

to build or strengthen aftercare structures, with concrete programmes now in place in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Ireland and France.

Our success rests on something straightforward and very powerful: we tap into the shared love and admiration for the Thoroughbred. Racing models, legal frameworks and cultures differ, and we respect those differences, but the horse connects us all. By keeping the horse at the centre of the conversation, IFAR helps jurisdictions to treat aftercare not as an afterthought but as part of their moral obligation and a key foundation of a compassionate and sustainable industry.

IFAR published the Aftercare Toolkit in 2019, which sets out a range of aftercare strategies and ideas for racing jurisdictions. What have been the most successful initiatives, and what barriers do racing nations face most frequently when trying to implement these foundational elements?

The Aftercare Toolkit is a practical guide grounded in a fundamental principle: responsibility for aftercare rests with everyone in the industry. It is directed at racing authorities, but the purpose is to encourage responsible decisions across the whole lifespan of the Thoroughbred.

The jurisdictions that make the most progress use several strategies from the toolkit. Horses leaving racing are not a single group. Some move into breeding or higher-level sport, others excel in amateur sport or pleasure homes, and a small number need a safety net. Each segment has different needs, and racing has a role in supporting them all.

Transition strategies must address both demand and supply, with a particular emphasis on creating demand for Thoroughbreds in equestrian markets. Effective demand-side measures include off-track show series, sponsored Thoroughbred-only classes, rider and coach education, and advocacy that showcases the Thoroughbred across disciplines.

On the supply-side, acknowledged retrainer networks are especially valuable. They give owners and regulators, the confidence about the standard of care and training horses receive after racing, and they also build communities where retrainers share knowledge, refine best practices and act as visible ambassadors for the breed.

Layering these strategies let jurisdictions support all horses leaving racing, aligning regulation and safety nets with market stimulation and advocacy, including sharing success stories in mainstream and social media. That is when, the toolkit works best.

The main barriers arise when people at any point in the chain of responsibility decide that aftercare is someone else's problem. That is when opportunities are lost, and horses fall through the gaps. Real progress begins with intent. Once a jurisdiction, governing body or group of committed

individuals decides that lifetime care is part of its obligation to the horse, they usually find ways to overcome the challenges of funding, data and capacity. Resolve comes first, solutions follow.

Traceability has been consistently emphasised as the backbone for demonstrating welfare claims and maintaining social license to operate. What are the barriers in achieving traceability, and what cultural shifts are necessary to achieve meaningful compliance?

Traceability is fundamental to providing credible assurances about animal welfare, a principle well-established in the livestock sector. Racing is a highly regulated industry with breeding records and performance histories stretching back over a century, and we can describe in detail what gear a horse wore in every race start. If we cannot also say, accurately and with confidence, where that horse is today and in whose care it is, then we will likely fall short of society's expectations.

Traceability is best understood as the reliable matching of a unique identifier for a horse with a unique identifier for a location, kept current over time. Horse identification systems are strong, but the use of property identifiers and timely movement notifications is less consistent. In a genuine traceability framework, routine changes such as a horse going to spell for eight weeks would be recorded with the same discipline as its next race start.

Traditionally, many jurisdictions saw their responsibility as ending at the horse's first exit from racing. So, once a Thoroughbred moved into the wider equestrian sector, it sat outside racing's regulatory reach. In an era of heightened welfare expectations and scrutiny, that approach is unlikely to be sufficient.

Some countries are now considering traceability obligations for the whole equine population, although few have fully developed systems. This points to the need for a cultural shift in racing. Even where formal powers are limited, racing can still play a constructive role through influence and partnership. Examples include offering incentives for traceability check-ins in off-the-track communities, working with acknowledged retrainers, encouraging new owners to keep horses recorded in racing databases, and engaging



IFAR Conference 2025 Demo (Photo Supplied)

with policymakers so that any national, multi-breed system reflects the realities of Thoroughbred movement.

With growing awareness of the versatility of the Thoroughbred in equestrian disciplines, where do you see the most significant opportunities for creating sustainable demand?

The most significant opportunity is in grassroots equestrian sport, including pony clubs, riding schools, and local competitions. The key is to use demand strategies that keep the Thoroughbred as a breed of choice.

That starts with understanding what riders and coaches need; horses that are sound, manageable and ready for a new life. Racing can help by retiring horses while they are still physically suitable for a second career and getting the basics right at transition, with teeth and feet in good condition, vaccinations up to date and manners that make it safe to introduce them to new disciplines.

Demand is then built through programmes that connect these horses with riders. Off-the-track series, Thoroughbred-only classes, clinics and visible role models competing on former racehorses, all strengthen confidence in the breed. When people see Thoroughbreds thriving in these settings, they are more likely to choose one themselves.

Equine therapy and community programmes provide additional pathways, especially for horses unsuited to higher-level sport, with equine-assisted service programmes for veterans, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged young people, showing how much Thoroughbreds can contribute beyond the track.



Dr. Eliot Forbes At The IFAR Conference Discussion (Photo Supplied)

If you could witness one fundamental shift adopted universally across all racing jurisdictions tomorrow, what would create the most meaningful long-term impact for Thoroughbred welfare beyond racing careers?

The shift that would create the most meaningful long-term impact for Thoroughbreds would be for racing to recognise that its future depends on demonstrating the sport is conducted on an ethical basis. That means embracing contemporary animal welfare science, technology, and behavioural insights to prove that horses are raced responsibly and compassionately. Within that framework, aftercare is a key tenet of an ethical industry and is non-negotiable. Lifetime care is not

peripheral; it is part of the evidence that the industry can be trusted.

Such a shift does not require every country to adopt the same model. Racing systems and cultures differ, but the sport is interconnected, and the shared love of the Thoroughbred is what unites us all. Lifetime care provides a common ethical foundation that can be expressed in ways that suit local contexts.

IFAR's role is to keep building that foundation. We have been able to do that because of strong backing from our founding organisations, support from the Asian Racing Federation and through the generous sponsorship of the Japan Racing Association. As we evolve, our recently announced partnership with Thoroughbred Charities of America will strengthen IFAR's capacity to provide leadership, connection and support across jurisdictions.

You can join this effort. Become an IFAR member or supporter, follow IFAR on social media (@IFARnews) and share that commitment within your own networks. When we accept aftercare as a moral responsibility, it benefits horses and reflects our most profound love for the Thoroughbred.

As IFAR enters its second decade, the message from Dr. Forbes is clear that aftercare is no longer optional; it is foundational to racing's ethical credibility and social licence to operate. His vision for the future rests, not on prescriptive mandates but on a shared respect and commitment to the Thoroughbred. This commitment transcends borders, cultures, and racing models and invites every participant in the industry to play their part in ensuring these remarkable horses thrive throughout their lives.

IFAR's role is to highlight these demand-led approaches and help jurisdictions adapt them to their own markets, always with lifetime care at the centre.

Looking at jurisdictions that have embedded aftercare structurally into their racing business models, what has been a key benefit or outcome that these programmes have delivered back to the racing industry itself?

The most crucial benefit is credibility and the trust that follows from it. When aftercare is built into the business model with clear funding arrangements, traceability frameworks and recognised programmes, it shows that racing is prepared to put the horse first across its whole life, not only during its racing career. It signals that welfare is a core expression of our industry ethos, and it gives racing a stronger platform when it is asked to explain how it operates and how it is evolving.

This credibility sits at the heart of social licence. Contemporary animal welfare is not just about preventing harm, but about enabling animals to thrive. Aftercare is one of the clearest ways racing can show that it understands this shift, in practical ways rather than as an abstract principle. When the public can see structured, accountable aftercare in place, confidence in the sport is more likely to follow.

Aftercare also brings to the forefront something that has always existed within racing: genuine care and affection for the horse. By formalising and resourcing what many people have long done quietly, jurisdictions bring that compassion into view. Aftercare frameworks are therefore, more than a welfare initiative. They are a visible manifestation of racing's underlying values and a key part of the foundation on which a secure and sustainable future for the industry rests.