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Testing Partners

Florida herd helped shape today's medication rules

BY FRANK ANGST
 PHOTOS BY JOE DiORIO

WHILE TO OBSERVERS they may look like any other horses enjoying the day in a paddock near Gainesville, Fla., the eight horses currently in the University of Florida's Performance Lab represent a program that has helped shape today's racing regulations.

As the industry moves toward uniform medication rules that will allow 24 therapeutic medications while providing guidance on withdrawal times for each of these drugs, it owes gratitude to Thoroughbreds and other horses in the University of Florida's Equine Performance Lab.

In studies funded by the industry's Racing Medication and Testing Consortium, the University of Florida Equine Performance Lab helped shape many of the policies now adopted as model rules by the Association of Racing Commissioners International. Those model rules were used in selecting the therapeutic medications allowed in the uniform medication rules that have been adopted, or are in the process of being adopted, by 15 states.

Because the Florida herd receives regular, controlled exercise on a high-speed treadmill, it was considered an excellent group of horses to work with to determine withdrawal times for therapeutic drugs as well as performance-enhancing effects of medications. Withdrawal



A Thoroughbred works on the treadmill at the University of Florida Equine Performance Lab

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Dr. Patrick Colahan served as the lab's director for 35 years

times are the number of hours or days a medication needs either to clear from a horse's system completely or at least reach a level at which it will have no effect on performance.

Withdrawal times are set with the goal of clearing a horse's system, or reaching a negligible level, by race day.

With funding set aside by Florida lawmakers, the lab launched in 1995 to study the sedative acepromazine for the Florida Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering. The lab would go on to develop withdrawal times and test limits for 40 different medications for the Florida DPMW.

The first test results for the RMTC rolled out in 2007. Besides tests on therapeutic

substances, the herd was relied on heavily when the industry revised its policies on anabolic steroids in 2008 and 2009. During that time, most states moved anabolic steroids from the therapeutic category to banning them in racing. Anabolic steroids can be used outside of racing, but a long withdrawal time—a time that testing on the Florida herd helped determine—is required before horses are allowed to return to training.

The Florida herd also has been used to determine how completely banned substances such as dermorphin, referred to as frog juice, or sildenafil (Viagra), affect a horse's system.

RMTC executive director Dr. Dionne

Benson said the Florida herd has been used to develop information—withdrawal times, performance effects, and testing procedures—on 30 different substances. She said its work on anabolic steroids was critical in shaping industry policy.

The RMTC currently is not funding any studies with the University of Florida herd, but the program continues with eight horses in training for use in studies by the Florida DPMW, the state's racing regulator that helped establish the herd; as well as other studies. In the completed RMTC studies, about two dozen horses were used and when the National Institutes of Health also turned to the program, the herd reached as many as five dozen horses for all of the studies.

From the start the herd has been an attractive option because it offers relatively fit horses for study. Researchers quickly learned that when developing medication protocols for racehorses, comparisons with sedentary horses would not suffice.

"It's one of the requirements our board has put on our research that we have horses who are as close as possible to being fit horses that would metabolize medications similarly to horses in training," Benson said.

Dr. Patrick Colahan, who served as director of the Equine Performance Lab and recently retired after 35 years at the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine, said it didn't take long for researchers to realize fit horses were needed for accurate study.

"Withdrawal times prior to our starting that program were done on horses that were just out in the pasture or something. There's a considerable difference in withdrawal times, sometimes even by breed, but most certainly by level of physical fitness," Colahan said. "Horses that are sedentary generally have much longer elimination times. Horses that are fit, generally, eliminate drugs much more quickly. Exercise itself, intense exercise, will increase the elimination time for drugs as well. You can get a very false appreciation if you use fat, lazy horses that are 20 years old. Their metabolism isn't anywhere near what we see in a fit 3-year-old horse."

Besides shaping policies in Florida and the U.S., the lab has contributed on an international level.

"The samples that we used have been shipped to laboratories in Europe and Hong Kong for their use," Benson said. "We've not only used them here, but they've been used elsewhere throughout the world and, in fact, we're still using

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**2014 FEE:
\$7,500 LF**

2014 LEADING SECOND-CROP SIRES

Blood-Horse

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in North America (stallions that have died or been exported prior to the 2010 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through February 25, 2014. As supplied to The Blood-Horse by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled stakes winners worldwide and any S.H.-foaled horses that won a N.H. stakes. *Foil counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners includes all countries. Categorical leaders are in bold.

Current Rank	Previous Week's Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB, Sire), Where Stands	2014 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/Wns	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2014 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative Stks *A-E	*Comp Index	
1	1	PIONEER OF THE NILE , (06, Empire Maker), WinStar Farm, KY	\$20,000	22/7	2/2	(Cairo Prince, \$240,000)	\$553,472	*115	2	1.37	1.68
2	2	OLD FASHIONED , (06, Unbridled's Song), Taylor Made Stallions, KY	\$8,000	22/5	2/2	(Fashion Plate, \$180,000)	\$373,771	*107	3	0.98	1.45
3	3	NOONMARK , (03, Unbridled's Song), SC Stockfarm, PHI	N/A	13/4	1/1	(Exit Stage Left, \$60,000)	\$191,442	57	1	1.13	1.27
4	6	TWO STEP SALSA , (05, Peticionville), Get Away Farm, FL	\$7,500	21/6	0/0	(Dance With Fate, \$74,800)	\$190,978	75	0	1.37	1.08
5	4	DIXIE CHATTER , (05, Dixie Union), Ballena Vista Farm, CA	\$5,000	16/10	0/0	(Public Policy, \$38,600)	\$188,305	76	2	0.83	1.05
6	5	KODIAK KOWBOY , (05, Posse), WinStar Farm, KY	\$5,000	27/5	0/0	(Melatonin, \$40,320)	\$186,184	78	1	1.13	1.42
7	7	COLONEL JOHN , (05, Tiznow), WinStar Farm, KY	\$17,500	27/4	1/1	(Here's Johnny, \$60,000)	\$152,334	120	2	0.98	1.70
8	8	7FNATIONAL , (06, Unbridled's Song), Hill 'n' Dale Farms, KY	\$15,000	22/4	0/0	(Roberto Galo, \$48,832)	\$145,627	*184	1	0.78	1.65

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2014 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA



Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2014 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstret SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2014 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat), Journeyman Stud	\$10,000	102/27	4/4	0/4	(Wild Dude, \$156,000)	\$864,415	*454	25	1.47	1.53
2	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$7,500	87/23	0/0	0/0	(She's Spooky, \$48,325)	\$575,733	*386	9	1.15	1.21
3	GRAEME HALL (97, Dehere), Winding Oaks Farm	\$4,000	58/16	1/1	0/1	(Tanzanite Cat, \$99,000)	\$462,395	*428	23	1.46	1.25
4	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo), Ocala Stud Farm	Died	37/8	0/0	0/0	(Schivarelli, \$76,200)	\$268,754	*840	49	1.55	1.55
5	HARLINGTON (02, Unbridled), Winding Oaks Farm	\$1,500	32/11	0/0	0/0	(Run a Dubb Dubb, \$37,330)	\$249,421	*91	1	1.11	1.62
6	IMPERIALISM (01, Langfuhr), Get Away Farm	\$3,500	40/8	0/0	0/0	(Jan's Perfect Star, \$34,200)	\$227,591	186	3	0.83	0.98
7	CONCORDE'S TUNE (89, Concorde Bound)	Died, 2011	34/8	1/1	0/1	(Wicked Tune, \$65,850)	\$207,966	486	29	1.27	1.13
8	TWO STEP SALSA (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$7,500	21/6	0/0	0/0	(Dance With Fate, \$74,800)	\$190,978	75	0	1.37	1.08
9	STRONG CONTENDER (03, Maria's Mon), HallMarc Stallions at Stonewall Farm	\$3,000	20/4	1/1	1/1	(Grand Contender, \$50,000)	\$179,895	*138	5	0.98	1.13
10	CIRCULAR QUAY (04, Thunder Gulch), Journeyman Stud	\$2,500	34/8	0/0	0/0	(Countercyclical, \$24,000)	\$169,214	102	1	0.99	1.43
11	COWTOWN CAT (04, Distorted Humor), Journeyman Stud	\$2,500	24/8	0/0	0/0	(Dave the Usher, \$27,420)	\$165,923	90	1	1.17	1.32
12	VALUE PLUS (01, Unbridled's Song), HallMarc Stallions at Stonewall Farm	N/A	37/11	0/0	0/0	(Ultra Violet, \$18,915)	\$164,807	*324	3	1.00	1.20
13	CITY PLACE (00, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$5,000	29/10	0/0	0/0	(Talent N Passion, \$31,770)	\$162,214	217	10	1.36	1.04
14	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union), Ocala Stud Farm	\$7,500	31/6	0/0	0/0	(Princess Marcela, \$29,915)	\$156,196	*144	4	1.22	1.27
15	REPENT (99, Louis Quatorze), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$3,000	41/6	0/0	0/0	(Thecushmaker, \$24,902)	\$154,692	*466	24	1.14	1.21
16	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality), Journeyman Stud	\$2,500	45/6	0/0	0/0	(Red Brunette, \$21,757)	\$153,144	188	4	1.11	1.11
17	A. P. WARRIOR (03, A.P. Indy), HallMarc Stallions at Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$4,500	20/7	0/0	0/0	(Guyana Star, \$33,720)	\$133,331	*150	4	0.98	1.00
18	POLLARD'S VISION (01, Carson City), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$5,000	26/4	0/0	0/0	(Aqua Regia, \$39,000)	\$124,172	*403	15	1.54	1.31
19	SAINT ANDDAN (02, A.P. Indy), Journeyman Stud	\$2,000	25/6	0/0	0/0	(Gaining Ground, \$18,500)	\$111,007	*114	5	0.99	1.26
20	ROAR OF THE TIGER (99, Storm Cat)	Died, 2010	18/5	0/0	0/0	(Bear Tough Tiger, \$39,125)	\$102,669	*307	7	0.86	1.18

them. We have some stored samples still available where we're able to refer to them in order to get more information as we revise testing capability."

The program

With achieving that fitness level in mind, Florida Equine Performance Lab horses train on a high-speed treadmill three days a week. Sometimes the treadmill is flat; other times it features a 10-de-

gree elevation. Horses typically trot for four minutes, canter for four minutes, gallop for two minutes, and then cool down for two minutes.

Twice a year horses receive more intense exercise.

Colahan said initially horses were exercised five days a week, but weekly weigh-ins and monthly body score evaluations revealed they were losing too much weight at that frequency of exercise. The routine

was cut to three days a week and a balance was reached.

"The fitness goal is for them to run a two-minute mile and recover their standing heart rate in 30 minutes or so," Colahan said.

Outside the treadmill training, horses in the herd spend their time in paddocks. The program does not include stall space—a feature Colahan believes, if added, would double the program's expense—but the paddocks include shelter and shade.

"They're in the paddock with anywhere from two or three horses to six or eight, depending on the size of the paddock," Colahan said. "It's a much more natural environment, and it helps us avoid problems like gastric ulcers and stuff like that."

Feed includes free choice hay with some supplementation of concentrates. Given the performance lab's mission, care is given to control what the horses take into their systems.

"We do monitor their serum and urine intermittently to make sure they're not getting any contaminants," Colahan said. "Part of our contract with the state is for the racing lab to provide serum and urine without any drugs in it to develop tests; so we provide that as well."

Colahan said it's fascinating to watch the herd at work, and see a "pecking order" develop. The lab tries to work within the



The lab was launched in 1995 by the Florida Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in North America (stallions exported prior to the 2010 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. All available statistics listed for the Northern Hemisphere through February 24, 2014. As supplied to *The Blood-Horse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled stakes winners worldwide and any S.H.-foaled horses that won a N.H. stakes. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners includes all countries. (A ♀ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race.)

*AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX AND COMPARABLE INDEX: Lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned in relation to the average earnings of all runners in the same years; average earnings of all runners in any year is represented by an index of 1.00; COMPARABLE INDEX indicates the average earnings of progeny produced from mares bred to one sire, when these same mares were bred to other sires. Only 32% of all sires have a lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX higher than their mares' COMPARABLE INDEX.

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CONFORMATION PHOTOS BY SERITA HULT ©



The lab's herd spends its spare time in paddocks; there are no stalls

herd dynamics to keep equine stress levels low. Besides making things easier for horse and human, maintaining low stress levels also is important for the testing.

"It never happens that we bring up just one horse at a time from the herd (for exercise). We always bring up two, one with their buddy," Colahan said. "That makes it much less stressful for them; you don't

have a stress response when you're working with one horse trying to do something with them. You get a more accurate situation as far as their physiology because they're not undergoing a "fight or flight" response when you're trying to measure just what the effect of the drug is."

Lab horses include females and geldings. It initially included stallions, but Colahan said that while they would settle in quickly, they would soon become difficult to work with.

The research

The lab typically is working with established therapeutic drugs when it gathers information on performance-enhancing effects and withdrawal times. When the lab does venture into tests for a banned substance with more unknowns, for instance dermorphin or sildenafil, it proceeds with added caution.

For those banned substances Colahan said the lab starts with very low doses that have no effect, increasing the levels until an effect is observed. While no one knows the doses of such substances being used by cheating horsemen, Colahan said the lab starts with the nominal doses to avoid shocking the system of a participating horse.

"Those sorts of situations we have to approach very carefully," Colahan said.

In testing of withdrawal times, blood and urine samples are collected. In testing for performance-enhancing effects, the lab has the capability to draw blood samples during exercise, collect breath samples, and note the horse's actual performance. In general though, the blood and air samples tell the story, measuring

the effects on the horse during intense exercise.

"Generally speaking, it's very difficult to identify in a stress test whether you're improving the horse's ability to undergo that stress test for a longer period of time. The horse's performance one day as compared to 10 or 15 days later may vary more than you'll find from administering any reasonable dose of drug," Colahan said. "But you can identify different physiological parameters that will be affected by the drug, and it could lead to an explanation of why this is a performance-enhancing drug."

The lab is capable of collecting those samples even while the horse is exercising.

"When we do these stress tests and take blood samples and that sort of thing, we can take them from a horse that's working and galloping as fast as they can," Colahan said. "We take blood samples (arterial and venous), monitor their blood oxygenation, monitor their oxygen intake and CO₂ output by collecting their exhaled air; their ECGs. What you can monitor in the horse while they're on the treadmill is absolutely amazing."

The lab's herd includes horses that have raced and horses that never made it to the track. New arrivals receive extra attention to make sure they will be able to handle the demands of training.

"We will start them out slowly in a conditioning program because many of the horses that we get we have to improve their conditioning gradually and see if they're going to remain sound; make sure they can handle the exercise level we're putting them through," Colahan said, noting that probably about half the horses are able to handle the load. "These are not superlative, athletic animals—if they were that, they'd be in somebody's racing stable. We get horses coming back from injury, horses with bad conformation.

"We've had some brilliantly bred horses in our herd, but they were not going to make racehorses—some of them for conformation issues, some for injury. So we do take it slow with new horses to select those horses that will maintain and thrive in the program long-term."

Most horses participate in the program for about five years. Colahan said they naturally seem to take to the seemingly unnatural process of running on a treadmill while two or three people stand nearby conducting tests.

"It's an amazing thing to see," Colahan said. "Where else can you stand within a few feet of a horse at full gallop?" **BH**

2014 Florida Sires by Winners

Sire	Rnrs	Wnrs
Wildcat Heir	102	27
With Distinction	87	23
Graeme Hall	58	16
Value Plus	37	11
Harlington	32	11
City Place	29	10
Imperialism	40	8
Montbrook	37	8
Circular Quay	34	8
Concorde's Tune	34	8
Cowtown Cat	24	8
A. P. Warrior	20	7
Exclusive Quality	45	6
Repent	41	6
Double Honor	31	6
High Cotton	31	6
Saint Anddan	25	6
Two Step Salsa	21	6
Black Mambo	17	6
Roar of the Tiger	18	5
Leading the Parade	26	4
Pollard's Vision	26	4
Strong Contender	20	4
In Summation	19	4
Gulf Storm	11	4
The Green Monkey	11	4
It's No Joke	14	3
Unbridled Time	9	3
Silver Tree	6	3

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