

# How Do We Test for Illegal Medication in Racehorses?

By Dr. Ron Jensen, CHRB Equine Medical Director

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Testing for drugs in racehorses has long been an important part of racing's regulations. It's an unfortunate necessity, as historically a few unscrupulous people have long tried to affect the outcome of a race via the administration of illegal substances.

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As the California Horse Racing Board's (CHRB) Equine Medical Director, part of my job is to help ensure that our system for detecting drugs and other illegal substances will catch those who don't play by the rules. I've laid the processes out here so that you can understand better the steps involved in our testing procedures.

## Drug Testing Dates Back to the Early 1900's

Testing for drugs in racehorses began in Europe in the early 1900's when tests were conducted on saliva samples that were collected after a race in a facility commonly referred to as the "spit box." The term "spit box" is still used today, although it now refers to the "test" or "detention" barn where horses are detained after a race for sample collection purposes.

Testing for drugs and other illegal substances in racehorses began in the United States in the 1940's, when widespread misuse of narcotics in race horses led to post race testing. Today, the CHRB employs a very sophisticated and sensitive drug-testing program to help ensure the fairness of a race. Post-race blood and urine samples are collected from the winner of every race, horses that finish second and third in most stakes races, and nine horses selected at random from each racing program.

The two laboratories contracted by

the CHRB to test these samples analyze over 30,000 blood and urine samples each year, at a cost of over \$1,000,000.

## The Sample Collection Process

The testing process begins with the collection of the samples. Each horse that is selected for testing is escorted to the detention barn after its race. There, under the control of the official CHRB veterinarian, the horse is identified, bathed, cooled out, and its blood and urine samples are collected in a sealed specimen container. All samples are collected, identified, sealed, and witnessed in a forensically sound manner, one that can withstand legal challenge. The owner, trainer, or their representative has the right, and in fact, are encouraged to observe the entire collection process.

Once collected, samples are divided into two portions at the test barn. One portion is sent to the official testing laboratory for analysis. The other portion is designated as the "horsemen's split sample," and is sent to the split sample custodian at the CHRB offices in Sacramento. The horseman's split sample affords horsemen an opportunity for a second opinion on any drug finding reported by the primary laboratories. These samples are always catalogued and stored in Sacramento.

Samples are sent to the laboratory and to the split sample custodian in sealed, cooled, tamper-proof containers, and are

identified by number only. The lab does not know any information concerning the horse, owner, trainer, or even the race number!

California's testing system is unique in that the CHRB uses two different laboratories to analyze samples. The majority (80-85%) of the samples are sent to Truesdail Labs in Tustin, California. The remainder of the samples are sent to the Racing Chemistry Lab at Iowa State University.

## Samples are Screened for Drugs - Then Confirmed if Drug is Suspected

Once at the lab, the samples are assigned a number and the testing process begins.

All samples are first subjected to a screening analysis, which is a broad examination of the sample for any indication that a drug, or class of drugs, may be present.

If the screening analysis does not give any evidence that a drug is present, the testing on the sample is complete. If, however, the screening analysis indicates that a drug may be present, the sample goes on to a second stage - confirmation testing.

Confirmation testing uses very sensitive and sophisticated analytical methods that can provide positive identification of

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# Q & A

## Ask the Owners' Circle

**Q** Reading through the condition book, I see some "optional" claiming races being written (listed as Allowance/Claiming). If I enter my Cal-bred horse for a tag into one of these open races, am I eligible for the Cal-bred incentive award listed?

**A** Yes, the owner of a Cal-bred who enters his or her horse into an "optional" claiming race is eligible for TOC's incentive award, which equals 20% of the purse earned. Although this incentive program is intended to reward Cal-bred horses competing in open company in allowance and overnight stakes races, TOC has agreed to award the owner of a horse who enters his horse for a "tag" (meaning that it can be claimed) in an optional claiming race. TOC considers such races to be of the allowance race calibre.

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the substance that was indicated by the screening analysis. Upon completion, the laboratory's director reviews the analyzed results. If he or she determines that the criteria required for calling a "positive" finding have been met, a positive finding is then reported to the CHRB. The labs have an obligation to complete the testing procedure within a specified period of time.

### Drug Findings, or "Positives" are Investigated and Legally Adjudicated

When a "positive" for a prohibited drug or an excessive amount of a permitted therapeutic medication is found in a sample, the CHRB's Executive Director and its Equine Medical Director review the lab's report and the drug is classified. (California categorizes drug substances into seven classifications based upon the drug's potential pharmacological effect on the horse.) The report is then relayed to the CHRB's field investigators who confidentially notify the owner and trainer of the horse involved that a prohibited substance has been detected. The owner or trainer has 72 hours to request that their split sample be sent to an approved split sample laboratory to be tested at their expense. If the split sample does not confirm the primary lab's findings, the matter is dropped. If the split sample confirms the primary lab's findings, the

investigation continues, and when completed, the matter is adjudicated.

The positive finding is often adjudicated by the stewards, but may be heard by an administrative law judge. When the adjudicating body has heard and weighed all of the facts surrounding a case, and a decision has been made that a violation of the CHRB rules regulating medication has occurred, penalties are assessed. The severity of the penalty depends upon the nature of the violation, the class of drug involved, the past record of the person involved, and other factors and extenuating circumstances presented. The ruling of the stewards or the administrative law judge may be appealed to the CHRB, or to the civil courts.

California's drug-testing system, via its two independent testing laboratories, split sample confirmation, and sensitive laboratory tests is one of the most sophisticated in racing. While we are always striving to improve it, we believe it is a fair and effective program. 🐾

*Dr. Ron Jensen has served as the CHRB's Equine Medical Director since 1997. Prior to relocating to California, Dr. Jensen worked for 30 years in Illinois racing, serving as the Senior Veterinarian for the Illinois Racing Board.*

## Pre-Race Testing Now Available for Clenbuterol

Thanks to the persistence of TOC Director Ed Friendly, and in cooperation with the CHRB and Truesdail Labs (where the majority of the CHRB post-race samples are sent) pre-race testing is now available for clenbuterol.

If your horse has been training on clenbuterol, and you want to ensure that the substance (which is illegal to race on) has cleared a horse's system before racing it, you may do so by submitting a urine sample to the lab prior to your

horse's race. Truesdail will now be able to notify you of the test results prior to the race.

Truesdail Labs require that the sample be submitted to them at least 36 hours prior to noon of race day. However, if the race will be run on a weekend or holiday, you must give the lab 24 hours notice that a sample will be submitted.

Test costs are \$40.00 if the sample is

submitted prior to entry day and \$80.00 if submitted on entry day.

Pre-race testing is currently available for other therapeutic medications; therefore it's important to note which substance you wish the sample to be tested for. 🐾

*For information on how to submit a sample, please contact Chris Natrass at Truesdail Laboratories, telephone 714-730-6239.*