

Scoring a Perfect '10' for the Horses

By Bo Derek

Like most Americans, I have always had a real love for horses. Actually I was born one of those horse crazy little girls, who for no logical reason has an unexplainable affinity for these beautiful creatures. I often joke that someday science will discover a genetic code that I am sure I share with so many other equestrians. Today I am blessed to live on a ranch in California with my Spanish and Portuguese horses living just outside my kitchen window. I try to ride my mare Gaiata every day and my challenge is always to try and connect with her in some meaningful way when I ask her to leave her equine world and join mine. And if I am successful, if I am a very good horsewoman, she will be happy that I pulled her away from her green grass, her other mare companions and everything that makes her life content and secure. My horses are my passion. They give me so much joy and in my crazy, hectic life I sometimes think that they are responsible for whatever is left of my sanity.

So it was with absolute horror that I recently learned that American horses are being slaughtered and their meat sold for human consumption in Europe and Asia. To add insult to injury, it is foreign-owned compa-

nies operating in America that profit from this cruel business. In fact, more than 50,000 horses were slaughtered in the country last year at two European-owned slaughter plants—a 19% increase on the previous year—and a third plant just opened in June. Tens of thousands more of our horses went to Canada for slaughter there.

The cruelty of horse slaughter isn't confined to the actual slaughter itself. Horses going to slaughter often are transported for more than 24 hours at a time without food, water or rest. Horses can be shipped with broken limbs. Even heavily pregnant mares can be shipped to slaughter. They often are transported on double-deck trucks designed for shorter species, such as pigs and cattle. The government recognizes this form of transport is inhumane, but allows the practice to continue.



Photo by: John Derek



Photo by: Focused Images Photography, inc.

Top: Bo Derek relaxes at her ranch with two of her beloved animal companions. Below: At the Congressional reception calling for an end to horse slaughter: Tony Curtis, Bo Derek, Representative John E. Sweeney, Jill Curtis, Representative John Spratt and Representative Edward Whitfield.

Although some sick and old horses end up in slaughter, most are relatively young and healthy, and nearly all have known human companionship. Americans simply don't raise horses for food, so almost every horse ending up in slaughter has been used for pleasure riding, in shows, as a work horse, or in some other capacity that brought that animal into daily contact with humans. That we would betray their service and loyalty by sending these beautiful animals to a terrifying death in a slaughterhouse is unconscionable.

I write that almost every horse ending up in slaughter has known human companionship, because there is an exception to this general rule. Despite a federal law prohibiting the practice, America's wild horses continue to be sold into slaughter for human consumption. Not only are thousands of these amazingly beautiful animals, symbols of the pioneer spirit of the American West, rounded up and removed from their homeland every year to make way for livestock grazing on our public lands, but hundreds end up in slaughter.

That I am a lifelong equestrian and only just learned of the horrors of horse slaughter speaks to the secrecy in which the industry operates. But once I learned the ugly truth about what happens to so many of our beautiful horses, I had to take action. Within days I had joined the National Horse Protection Coalition (of which the Doris Day Animal League is an original member) as the group's national spokeswoman, and was on a plane to Washington, D.C., where I would lobby Congress to pass the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act.

Introduced by U.S. Representatives John E. Sweeney (R-NY) and John Spratt (D-SC) in the House of Representatives and by U.S. Senators John Ensign (R-NV) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA) in the Senate, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act will end the slaughter of our horses for human consumption abroad. This comprehensive legislation not only has enormous bipartisan support in Congress (the House bill, H.R. 857 had 224 co-sponsors as we went to print), but the endorsement of every major humane and horse protection organization, as well as top industry groups including the National Thoroughbred Racing Association and Churchill Downs, Inc.

The groups who most vociferously oppose our legislation are the American Veterinary Medical

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Association and the American Equine Practitioners Association. Erroneously, they contend that ending horse slaughter will lead to an increase in animal suffering. With nowhere to go, they argue that unwanted horses will suffer from abuse and neglect. Fortunately, this isn't true. The fact is that there are alternatives to slaughter for sick, old and "unwanted" horses, such as humane euthanasia. Even better, there are a number of groups, such as the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, that offer sanctuary to horses destined for slaughter. Other organizations are dedicated to rehabilitating and rehoming horses who otherwise would have ended up on a dinner plate in Europe.

Most Americans are enormously supportive of these efforts, and of the National Horse Protection Coalition's work in Washington. Recent polls conducted in Kentucky, Virginia, Texas and Utah show that 82%, 75%, 72% and 69%, respectively, of those questioned oppose horse slaughter.

As word spreads, support for our effort only continues to grow.

Horses have always done what we've asked. They've carried us into the Wild West, and at our command they have charged fearlessly into battle. On the racetrack, they've reached into their own hearts and into the depths of their courage to fulfill our own dreams. We can't turn our backs on what we know so plainly

now, that American horses are suffering to satisfy the culinary desires of consumers in Europe and Asia. Horses have a spirit, a place in our lives, our history, our culture and our hearts. By outlawing their slaughter for human consumption, insuring they are treated humanely, and by giving to them when they need us, we nurture ourselves, and we do something fundamentally right. 🐾

Bo Derek, perhaps best known for her starring role in the movie "10," is also an able horsewoman and keen proponent of efforts to end the slaughter of America's horses.

A Strong Coalition

The National Horse Protection Coalition was established in 2003 to ensure swift passage of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act. Members include the Doris Day Animal League, the Society for Animal Protective Legislation, The Humane Society of the United States, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, numerous industry groups and equine veterinarians.

What You Can Do

Please contact your elected officials in Washington, D.C., and ask them to support passage of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (H.R. 857/S. 2352). For further information, visit www.ddal.org/horseprotection or call Liz Clancy Ross at 202-546-1761 x 30.