

Endoscopy of foals at public auction | AUGUST 2019

Potential purchasers of foals at public auction are increasingly requesting endoscopic examination of foals prior to sale. Foals sold at public auction in the UK and Ireland are not returnable under Conditions of Sale for wind infirmities, but yearlings and horses in training are returnable if they are whistlers or roarers, or have been operated on for the correction of whistling or roaring or has any of a number of congenital/acquired conditions (cleft palate, chondroma, branchial arch anomaly, permanent epiglottic entrapment or sub-epiglottic cysts). It is therefore understandable that someone considering purchasing a foal for racing or re-sale would seek reassurance that it is free of these conditions at the time of purchase. Dr Scott Pierce's extensive experience reports that 92% of foals are normal on scope and do not deteriorate from foal to yearling. Happily, the approximate return rate for yearlings due to wind problems at public auction in the UK is less than 1%.

As a result of this, some foals have been endoscoped repeatedly prior to sale and this can be distressing, sub-optimal in terms of infection and can occasionally lead to a mishap to foal or its handler. In addition, it has been known that the larynx and pharynx of young immature foals can appear to have some degree of laryngeal hemiplegia which improves during its yearling life (the reverse being also true) so it is well known that endoscopy as a late yearling gives a more accurate picture. Because of this, nowadays, potential purchasers are not asking vet to grade a foal's larynx as long as they can declare it free of congenital defects and a 'pass' (above grade 3 on the Lane Scale).

Vendors may find it difficult to refuse multiple requests and may naturally be anxious about these procedures on behalf of their foals, but ultimately permission has to be requested by potential purchasers (often via their Vets) before endoscopy can be undertaken.

There are ways in which vendors can reduce the impact of the requirement to endoscope foals, as follows:

- Refuse/limit permission to purchasers to endoscope foals.
- Arrange to have the foal endoscoped with a video endoscope by vendor's own vet shortly before sale,

recording the identification of the foal and ensuring good quality imaging of the larynx and pharynx using preferably the right nostril (to reduce bias of the normally left-sided hemiplegia). Ideally, this video should be left at the Repository, if there is one.

BEST PRACTICE! Any video endoscope must be of good quality to prevent purchasers wishing to have the foal 'scoped separately and must not be edited to only show the "best" portion.

- Allow the foal to be endoscoped simultaneously by one or more respected vets who can provide a certificate of absence of acquired/congenital defects, and that it is a grade 3 or better.

When endoscopy is undertaken pre-Sale, these guidelines should be followed:

- 1 The welfare of foal and handler is paramount. Injuries to both can occur and the procedure is an ideal method of transmission of disease.
- 2 The procedure must be done sympathetically without unreasonable restraint.
- 3 Some foals may have mild upper respiratory disease, which must be borne in mind.
- 4 The foal should not be sedated.
- 5 The endoscope used should be small in diameter and cleaned between examinations.
- 6 The right nostril should be used first and the left one used secondarily only if the right side of the larynx appears abnormal.
- 7 Number of scopings should be restricted to an absolute minimum – no more than one examination per veterinary practice.

The ITBA, Tattersalls, Tattersalls Ireland, Goffs UK, and Goffs have expressed their support for these guidelines for use at the forthcoming foal sales. Sales companies may also have their own comprehensive guidelines on endoscopy of foals.

J. Crowhurst, August 2019