

Use of the Whip

The saying goes, "spare the rod and spoil the child," but does using a whip on a racehorse actually encourage him to go faster? Not necessarily, according to researchers from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Sydney in Australia who recently completed a study on the topic: David Evans, BVSc (*Hons*), PhD, honorary associate professor; and Paul McGreevy, BVSc, PhD, MRCVS, MACVS (Animal Welfare), professor.

- "We expected that whip use might be associated with superior race outcomes because that is the rationale for their use," Evans explained. "We investigated whether or not whip use significantly influenced the likelihood of finishing in the first three placings."

The researchers analyzed whip use among 48 jockeys in five 1,200-1,500 meter (about three quarters of a mile to nine tenths of a mile) races at the Canterbury Race Track in New South Wales, concentrating their focus on the last 400 meters (about a quarter mile) of the races.

After analyzing their results, the team explained that regardless of their placing, all the horses they observed slowed over the last 400 meters of the race, likely because they were fatigued. Horses that were already ahead at the 400- and 200-meter positions from the finish line were more likely to finish in the first three spots regardless of how much their jockeys used the whip.

Additionally, they noted that **whip use did not appear to improve the horse's position in the results at the finish.** "We found that jockeys on horses in less advanced positions (i.e., further back in the field) at the 400- and 200-meter positions used the whip less frequently from those positions to the finish," McGreevy said. Conversely, they added, jockeys on horses in more advanced positions (i.e., in position to place) at the 400- and 200-meter positions used the whip more frequently.

McGreevy explained another interesting finding: "Whip use depended on how the horse had already performed in the first 800-850 meters of these races. That was a surprising finding--that jockey behavior with the whip in the last 400 meters was influenced by horse performance earlier in the race."

Evans and McGreevy could not suggest alternative ways to increase performance, except to make sure the horse is leading at the 800- and 1000-meter markers. Then, they suggested, concentrate on excellent riding, navigation, and avoiding interference with other horses, which they said was "more useful than frequent whipping."

Despite the findings, the researchers were not opposed to jockeys carrying a whip during the race "if he or she thinks it may be needed to contribute to horse or jockeys' safety before or during the race."