

We are now at the end of a year like no other, the way we live our lives has been affected, some more than others. Sport has not been exempt from the effects of Covid-19, governing bodies have jumped through hoops in order to get their activities on the road, obviously there was a heavy focus in government quarters on elite sport, so it wasn't necessarily plain sailing for British Harness racing. However, using our business card, the four hard tracks worked tirelessly in hosting collectively 46 race meetings, this was a real feather in the cap for the venues, for the group who put our Covid protocols in place and all licence holders for providing the product.

Covid-19 racing came at a price with no grass racing and the majority of meetings being held behind closed doors, this resulted in track promoters investing in live streaming.

As time went on harness fans were treated to excellent coverage, so innovative and impressive that the sport of point to pointing have gone down the same avenue, even using York's production company.

Opportunities arose for our sport to be viewed and bet on off course, this included Australia where Ladbrokes promoted our product.

We may be talking small fry in terms of turnover at this stage but could we ever have imagined British harness racing being beamed and punted on the other side of the world? Hopefully this can be built on.

Recently many changes were made at the BHRC, with some directors choosing to step down and ten new individuals voted to the board of directors.

The BHRC would like to thank Roy Sheedy, Jackie Maguire, Bob Lee, Fred Hay, Bret Strickland and Jim McNally for their services to harness racing over the years, assisting in the governance and promotion, ensuring we had a sport with global credibility. We owe a debt of gratitude to them all.

We offer a warm welcome to the new members of the board of directors - our Vice Chairman Huw Evans, Ryan O'Neil, Julie Park, John Towe, Viv Gill, Gareth Bevan, Kayleigh Evans, Will Evans, George Button and Carol Jenkins. They will join two extremely experienced directors Jason Podmore and Barry Delaney in working for a stronger healthier sport.

We should highlight to licence holders the BHRC directors can no longer obtain director liability insurance, this means the directors are putting themselves on the line working for the sport. Let's remember, no governing body, no sport.

Over the past 3 years the BHRC has been subject to legal proceedings by license holders, this has resulted in legal fees amounting to Circa £250k, fortunately this has been covered by insurances however, the result of this is insurance premiums in excess of £50k. Whilst increasing license fees is something we'd rather not do, unfortunately the BHRC can't continue without the relevant insurances, and sadly license fees must increase across the board.

We apologise for having to add to your costs but this is unavoidable. The BHRC directors have worked on the price structure for licences and theses will be released shortly.

The BHRC have a social media policy and licence holders are reminded to adhere to this, there have been instances recently where some individuals have been in breach of the policy. To protect the credibility of the sport we ask members to stop and think before they post on social media.

Thank you to Joseph Ripley for drawing attention to the fact that British Trotters have been seriously overlooked in the past few years, the new board are committed to rejuvenating a BHRC sponsored classic race for trotters in the future, in January the directors will be reviewing this and the management of the Prakas fund.

In recent months a working party was formed to review our current handicap system and look at proposing alternatives. The New Zealand ratings-based system was the one favoured by those on the panel, work has been carried out on the system to adapt it to the needs of British racing.

There are still considerations to be made such as the costing of the product and Committee members will be asked to vote on the system in late January.

The BHRC is the governing body of all harness racing, pacing and trotting alike, it is our responsibility to see both gaits thrive, and the hope is we can work with Trot Britain and Le Trot for a brighter future.

Another aim in 2021 is to enter into dialogue with Wales and Borders, exploring a working relationship.

Rules and stewarding are hot topics, in January we hope to organise a stewarding forum to discuss race day procedures and rules. We hope all race day stewards in Great Britain will take part in this as we look to improve the policing of the sport, making it stronger and consistent. The whip rules will also be examined rigorously in the close season.

Our Regional Stewards Craig Stevenson and Andrea Barker are set to be joined by Alun Lewis who will cover the welsh area - we welcome Alun to the team and look forward to working with all three officials.

The one person one vote structure will be revisited in 2021, we realise there is disquiet among licence holders about their lack of voice on matters which directly affect them and their sport and, in some cases, livelihood.

2020 saw the recruitment of Heulwen Bulman as Company Secretary, an extremely popular addition to the governing body. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Heulwen who works tirelessly for our sport and has done an amazing job fixing the broken pieces of the BHRC this year.

We also send our best wishes to Hollie Sutcliffe our Office Administrator who is leaving us as her family expands.

On the subject of the office, we can confirm notice has been given to the landlord in Goole and our Welsh office will become the registered office in the new year.

We hope to recruit a new assistant in 2021 and work on improving our procedures. We would like to remind licence holders that they can aid the day to day running of the sport by ensuring they do everything in a timely manner.

Summing up, the board of directors will be working to strengthen the sport you love, to do this we need your support.

We would like to thank you for your continued cooperation
and wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

