

International Women's Day 2026

Women in Racing

To mark International Women's Day 2026, Women in Racing invited women from across the British racing industry - representing a broad spectrum of roles, backgrounds and experiences - to share their reflections on a topic of their choice, or their hopes and ambitions for the year ahead.

The result is a collection of insightful and thought-provoking contributions that showcase both the diversity of subjects explored and the remarkable breadth of talent within our sport. We are sincerely grateful to everyone who generously gave their time and perspective, and we hope you find the comments engaging, informative and a fitting celebration of the outstanding women shaping British racing today.

Cheryl Caves, Chair Women in Racing



All of the major issues facing racing risk becoming a distraction from where our focus truly belongs. In times where leadership can feel fragmented, it is even more important that we double down on grassroots engagement, working practically and collaboratively through challenges to find solutions. There is a huge amount that can be achieved when we align around the fundamentals: producing quality horses, investing in people and safeguarding the long-term sustainability of British breeding.

And on that note of optimism, I have every confidence that Stradivarius's first runners will make a very exciting impression when they hit the track this year!



Anna Kerr, CEO National Stud



After what feels like a rather long, wet and challenging winter for many in the sport, I am really looking forward to enjoying some racedays in the sun! As warmth and colour return to this island, let's all get dressed up – but absolutely not in coats and sensible shoes – and soak up the best that racing has to offer on and off the track. With race-course attendances showing such a positive trend, let's encourage as many people as possible to join the fun. It's good for the soul and something I think we all need at the moment given the state of the world.

Susannah Gill, Communications & Corporate Affairs Director at the Tote

Sometimes the breadth and fragmentation of the racing industry can make it feel impossible to get things done. But I believe our diversity is actually our greatest strength. In my lifetime, women have gone from not being allowed to ride under rules to winning the Grand National. Now racing is the second most attended sport in the UK, where men and women compete on equal terms every day. Look at the Cheltenham crowds next week and you will see all parts of British society. Consensus can be hard to find precisely because everyone cares so much. A passionate, diverse and committed cross section of British society. Harnessing that diversity, that's our superpower.



Baroness Dido Harding, Senior Steward The Jockey Club



Whilst horses are the reason most of us come into racing and are always at the front of our minds, I came into racing because of the people, my interest in how and why people develop and their life journey.

While at times, racing is a dysfunctional family it is, nonetheless, a family and that is never more apparent than when there is a tragedy, or a threat from outside such as the COVID pandemic. At those times the way that our community comes together is awe inspiring. Working for Racing Welfare is a privilege and, whilst it is still a work in progress, we should be proud of and celebrate the support that is offered through several different charities and organisations. I am excited by recent developments around wellbeing from the Industry People Board and look forward to working with those organisations to deliver enhanced, holistic support services for all racing's people.

Whilst our responsibility for our beloved horses is paramount, we must never forget that we are nothing without our people.

Dawn Goodfellow, CEO Racing Welfare

Racing stands at an important juncture and I remain highly confident in its potential to thrive as a vital part of the rich fabric of British sport. While the sport faces governance and structural challenges, the growth in major festivals is an indication that racing remains both relevant and popular. Everything begins with delivering the highest-quality product both on the track and from a customer experience perspective. Focussing on the quality we deliver across the board will build brand equity and unlock new revenues to strengthen prize money investment.

Felicity Barnard, CEO Ascot Racecourse



This year's theme of Give to Gain reminds me of the most valuable thing we can offer each other: time. Returning to horseracing after 12 years, I've been struck by how generously colleagues have shared this precious resource. Their attention has helped me feel welcome, included, and able to perform at my best. Being truly listened to is powerful - it creates belonging, confidence, and clarity. Throughout my career in male-dominated industries, the generosity of female leaders who shared their time shaped my growth more than anything else. At JETS, we see every day how giving back through time, support, and proper listening can transform someone's path. So, my encouragement is simple: give someone your undistracted time. You'll lose nothing, and they'll gain more than you realise. A candle loses nothing by lighting another.

Rachel Jones, General Manager JETS

I'm lucky enough to have worked in the racing and breeding industry for over thirty years and have seen and experienced many changes. Of all those changes, it is the opportunities that are open to people of all walks of life at every level that is the most heartening. We now have to all work together to encourage and retain good people by highlighting the joys of racing and breeding, whether it's watching a mare greet her first foal or cheering on a runner in The Derby. Women are integral to the sports future, as owners, stewards, stud groom, farrier or jockey, there are no limits anymore.

Kerry Murphy, CEO European Breeders Fund





International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the remarkable diversity that exists across British racing, from leadership and administration to horsemanship, ownership and breeding.

Whilst there is often a focus on the fragmentation within, the appeal and relevance of British Racing across all areas must be of the highest importance to us all. Recognising the passion for the sport and capturing the ability to tell a united story that converts the external audience to be involved, whether working within, betting, attending or owning and breeding - we must all work together and unite behind a strong and accountable vision to protect our beloved sport and the inspirational equine stars for the next 10 years, 20 years and beyond.

When this sport unites against challenge or controversy it is a formidable force that ensures we protect our sport, what we must ensure is that behaviour continues every day and we unite to support growth, innovation and opportunity - the future is for now in our hands and as custodians we are accountable, for which we must commit to leaving this sport in a far stronger position than when we started.

The culture and behaviour from within must change, as a collective we are reliant on each other, and most importantly we are responsible to our audiences for this sports longer term success.

Louise Norman, ROA Chief Executive

Much of my time is spent focusing on how British racing is governed and regulated, which is of course vital to the long-term success of our sport, people and horses.

But like my BHA colleagues, we are involved with racing because we love it. And no more so than in the run up to Cheltenham and Aintree.

There's been renewed optimism this year in the chances of the British contingent, not least due to the recent successes of horses like the Jukebox Man and Haiti Couleurs.

The signs hopefully point towards a British rejuvenation. So my sincere hope is that Britain bounces back and puts up a bold showing at the spring Jump Festivals.

A clean sweep of the Classics would be nice too.

Catherine Beloff, General Counsel BHA



Reflecting on the past year I am proud of all of the women in our sport, and everything that has been achieved. A personal standout moment for me was the release of my documentary 'A Racing Mind' on Amazon Prime, to speak out openly about my ADHD felt amazing, and I hope i have made others feel seen and understood. Within the coming year I am looking forward to continuing my racing career to the best of my ability as well as exploring new ventures, including the release of my own clothing brand! Racing is such a unique sport, and I hope to continue to inspire those in and out of racing.

Lilly Pinchin, Jockey

Beginning my career in British Horseracing feels fulfilling. At a time when conversations about sustaining the sport are gaining momentum, I'm especially conscious of what it means to take my place within an institution shaped by history - and of the role my generation plays in its future. I see new voices not as a departure from heritage, but as part of how it is carried forward. My own path, from racecourse hospitality to corporate HR, has shown me just how much this industry depends on people at every level. That interdependence across roles and departments reflects an interconnectedness between individuals. This is something I've felt personally, as this industry quickly begins to feel like home. I'm excited to contribute to Horseracing's next chapter, and optimistic about where it'll lead me.



Precious Ojo, BHA HR Department



The Racing Foundation recognises the importance of developing cross-industry strategies and encouraging collaboration between stakeholders to deliver against the objectives of each. During 2026, I very much look forward to working with stakeholders and delivery partners, especially via the Industry Programme Group, to ensure we build on the great progress that has already been made by the industry's horse welfare; workforce; social impact and environmental sustainability strategies. I believe that delivering the priority activities as part of the implementation phase of the strategies will increase the impact of the projects we support and help build a sustainable future for racing.

Tansy Challis, CEO The Racing Foundation

To anyone who steps into the breeding and bloodstock world, it becomes rapidly evident that our community's greatest strength lies in its collective wisdom. When experienced women mentor newcomers, or small-scale operations share best practices with larger farms, or when we celebrate each other's achievements rather than viewing them as competition, we all become stronger. This collaborative spirit, which is highly evident throughout the UK's bloodstock community, offers genuine cause for optimism. Together, we're not just breeding and nurturing horses: we're building a sustainable future for British bloodstock that values expertise at every scale.

Women now play a key role in this and will continue to do so.

Naomi Mellor, CEO Thoroughbred Breeders Association



Following on from my nerve-racking debut as part of the BBC Radio 5 Live Grand National commentary team, this year will see me take the mic once again to describe the action as it unfolds from Valentines through to the Melling Road. Despite coming dangerously close to boiling over in the paddock, getting through that 1 minute and 30 seconds of fast and furious airtime was by far the biggest buzz of my career to date and a stark reminder that stepping outside your comfort zone paves the way for progress. This year, once the multiple different variations of the JP McManus silks are committed to memory, I aim to enjoy every second of it.

Gina Bryce, Broadcaster



The Thoroughbred Industry Employee Awards changed everything for me. After 20+ years in the industry, 18 of which for my boss John O’Shea who nominated me in the leadership award.

Just hearing I was nominated and being able to represent all working mums and small yards was an honour. The whole experience we were looked after so well by the BHA communications team, and I made some amazing memories that I will keep with me forever. And I must say thank you also to Godolphin for sponsoring the awards. The final day up at York Racecourse was fantastic and I had the pleasure of taking the team from the yard to share it with, alongside my husband.

After winning the Leadership and overall Employee of the Year 2023, I’ve achieved some incredible things: from speaking at Senedd about education for racing staff in Wales, TV interviews with BBC Breakfast News and Sky Sports news, and now being a judge on the TIEA awards panel. The highlight would be speaking to Parliament on the Axe the Racing Tax campaign. This has taken me truly out of my comfort zone and shown me how much more I can give to the industry. I’ve grown so much with confidence and my passion is stronger than ever, all thanks to winning these amazing awards which do truly shine a light on the unsung heroes.

Sarah Guest, Assistant Trainer & TIEA Employee of the Year 2023



This International Women’s Day, I’m proud to celebrate the incredible women across racing whose skill, dedication and passion shape our sport at every level. As a jockey, I’m fortunate to be part of an industry that thrives on teamwork, expertise and resilience. In 2026, I’m aiming to better last season’s 69 winners and am especially excited about the opportunity to ride at major meetings like Ascot and York, with some very promising horses to look forward to. I’m also passionate about inspiring the next generation, encouraging young people to come racing, experience the atmosphere, and see just how special our sport truly is.

Joanna Mason, Jockey

Working in the sport of horseracing is a huge privilege. Now in my 16th year as a Clerk of the Course and 20th year working in the sport, what never fails to amaze me is the camaraderie and support that exists across the whole industry. From the people who supported me to help me into my first role, right through to the amazing people I work with now across all facets of racing, whenever someone is up against it, racing rallies round. That is something incredibly special and something we should treasure and herald.

Sulekha Varma, Head of Racing & Clerk of the Course Aintree Racecourse





When I first entered the brilliant world of racecourse management in 1995 as a very naive 22yr graduate and if my slightly dodgy memory holds up, there were only four other ladies in senior racecourse management/ clerking roles.

How different the sector looks now with fantastic females holding senior roles in every sector of the sport around the world.

We should be so proud that our sport has developed in this way, and it was timely to read a post from Sir Clive Woodward over the weekend who was flagging up that on Saturday Hollie Davidson became the first woman to referee a Men’s Six Nations Rugby Match. Sir Clive highlights that working at that level is not about labels; it is about earning trust through consistent performance.

He continues, “That progression is built on standards, behaviours, and consistency, not headlines” and I love that.

Lisa Hancock, CEO Injured Jockeys Fund

From a young age I was determined to build a career in racing, and that ambition grew into a lifelong commitment to becoming a trainer. To pursue my goals, I gathered valuable experience working in several respected yards. This hands-on learning laid the foundation for my future success and allowed me to develop the skills essential for training.

At the age of 24, I achieved a significant milestone by earning my full dual-purpose trainer’s licence. I started my operation with only five horses, gradually expanding each year until reaching the number of 29 licensed boxes we now have in use. To date, I have trained 142 winners in both codes.

Following a highly successful jumps campaign, I am approaching the upcoming Flat season with what I believe to be our strongest team yet.

Racing has profoundly influenced my life, presenting me with remarkable opportunities and creating cherished memories that will stay with me forever.

Grace Harris, Trainer



Without the Thoroughbred horse, there will be no horseracing. This truism has become alarmingly topical on a worldwide scale. I quote Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges, Chairman of the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) speaking at the Asian Racing Conference in Riyadh in February this year: “the future of horseracing is under threat and can only be secured by [all industry interests] working together to address the key challenges we face”.



Amongst the chief such challenges the issue of declining TB foal crops across most all countries takes centre stage. In twenty years, 2005–2025, the worldwide TB foal production has fallen from 125,000 to 80,000 – a reduction by 33%. Traditional main producers such as IRE/GB/FR/US and AUS have seen their production decrease by an even more alarming 38% in the same period.

In GB the figures were 5,900 foals in 2005 and 4,200 foals in 2025; IRE’s figures were 12,400 to 8,700 – USA has more than halved its production from 35,000 foals to 17,000 foals in the relevant 20-year period, and even AUS has – surprisingly – decreased their production from 18,400 to 11,700.

Whilst the global race programme is now smaller than in 2005, it has not reduced by as much as the global foal crop has done. This makes for less competitive and thus less interesting racing; a fact often mirrored in audience figures.

Amazingly, the very existence of this existential challenge to racing has gone if not unnoticed, then at least in the main without comment from industry bodies until very recently. The worldwide racing and breeding industry urgently need to recognise and address this enormous and very threatening issue, as a matter of extreme urgency.

Kirsten Rausing, Chair International Thoroughbred Breeders Federation



I believe horse welfare has become one of the defining issues for the future sustainability of our sport. Recent industry discussions and external research underline that welfare is no longer viewed solely as a regulatory or operational matter, but as a core determinant of public trust, political support, and the sport's long-term social licence to operate.

Weatherbys enables welfare to be protected, evidenced and enforced through identification, traceability and data integrity across the horse's lifetime. Developing data systems that make welfare protection possible in practice is a key focus for us ensuring we continue empowering the sport and protecting the future sustainability of breeding and racing is vital.

Sharon O'Regan, CEO Weatherbys



One of the things exciting me about racing at the moment is the opportunity to grow the audience, particularly through the recommendations coming from Project Beacon. Change rarely comes from one big idea; in my experience it's the accumulation of many small improvements that gradually make the difference.

Alongside that, I've been thinking a lot about what a racecourse needs to be in the future, to drive income and support the sport beyond racedays. For me the two go together - they're what will allow racecourses, and the sport itself, to keep moving forward.

Louise Stewart, CEO Chester Racecourse



Horse safety and welfare is at the heart of racing, and I'm encouraged by the industry's focus on transparency, evidence-based practice, and support of welfare focused initiatives. In 2026, I'm particularly looking forward to the development of the industry's next equine welfare strategy, as the evolution of "A Life Well Lived", and the continuing work of the Horse Welfare Board across the breadth of our projects, working with industry partners as we drive ever enhanced partnerships across the sport in the driving up of safety and welfare standards. Racing thrives when our horses thrive, and I'm proud to be part of an industry that continues to evolve, listen, and consider welfare as a focus of its future.

Pip Kirkby, Interim Programme Director Horse Welfare Board



2026 is a tremendously exciting year for the British Thoroughbred Retraining Centre as the charity is celebrating its 35th anniversary. Established in 1991, BTRC was the first Thoroughbred charity in the UK, and our purpose remains unchanged: to rehabilitate, retrain and rehome retired racehorses so they can have an enjoyable life once their racing days have finished.

Joining us to celebrate this milestone will be our founder, Carrie Humble MBE. Reflecting on the current challenges in equine welfare, it is hard to imagine how much more difficult it would have been 35 years ago when few people thought about a racehorse's life once retired. However, in the predominantly male world of racing this one woman refused to accept these standards, asked difficult questions, and pushed boundaries.

Carrie's strength instigated change and launched a movement that has developed into Racehorse Aftercare. My ambition is to develop our centre as a lasting legacy to Carrie's work caring for vulnerable TBs while helping to educate the equestrian world about these amazing animals. I look forward to raising a glass with Carrie and toasting all the outspoken, unstoppable and passionate women in racing - who have, and will continue to, put the horse first!

Gillian Carlisle, CEO British Thoroughbred Retraining Centre

About Women in Racing

Women in Racing is a volunteer-led organisation, created to support and develop women working in the Thoroughbred industries. Since it was founded in 2009, it has served its members with an industry-leading mentoring scheme and expanded bursary programme, alongside a calendar of educational and social events. Membership starts from £15/year.

www.womeninracing.co.uk

About International Women's Day

International Women's Day (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender equality.

IWD has occurred for well over a century, with the first IWD gathering in 1911 supported by over a million people. Today, IWD belongs to all groups collectively everywhere. IWD is not country, group or organization specific. IWD is a movement, powered by the collective efforts of all.

