Racing club whacked with a feather for training breaches

Description

Two for one, no ID, no fluorescent vest : this photo from March 5 captured the lack of regard by some riders for the rules governing horse training at Lady Bay. In three years, no trainer has ever been banned. Image: Steve Hynes.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

The Warrnambool City Council has dragged out its big feather – the one reserved for Midfield Meats, the temporarily-permanent wire fence around the old Criterion Hotel site and other assorted special projects – and gently tapped the Warrnambool Racing Club for multiple breaches of racehorse training rules along Lady Bay.

You may recall the WCC held a meeting with the WRC last month after training resumed at Lady Bay on March 1 and saw just about every rule in the book being broken (#notalltrainers) including riding continually in the soft sand, riding in threes and fours, riding at speed past beach walkers, riding one horse while pulling another, riding without saddle cloth identification or fluorescent vests, on and on it went.

At this special meeting, the council did two things: reminded all of the trainers of their responsibilities (feather tap!) and issued written warnings to two unnamed trainers (feather tap, tap!).

And that was that.

> **The training rules for Lady Bay have been in place for three years and there have been too many breaches over that time to count and yet nobody, still, has ever been made accountable for breaking the rules, often multiple times.**

Again, this is not about being anti horse racing (#notalltrainers), but about a principle and ensuring training access to Lady Bay is seen as a rare privilege rather than a right.

Take that Warrnambool Racing Club! The council throws its best feather at errant trainers.

Can we ever imagine, by way of comparison, the council issuing little notes under windscreens when

people overstay their parking: “Sorry driver, you know this is a one hour zone, not a 90 minute zone, please don’t do it again or we will have to fine you.”

Um, no, I can’t imagine that.

> **For reasons which are yet to be fully explained, justified or proven, the local racing industry is treated like a special beast that is both enormously powerful and apparently terribly fragile all at the same time.**

This is why, despite the council pushing madly for user-pays, the racing industry pays virtually nothing to access Lady Bay seven days a week for nine months of the year. The cost is $225 a year per trainer (not per horse), then $6 per beach session and $2.50 per swim.

Of the $6, about half goes back to the WRC to pay for someone to monitor things and make sure trainers don’t break the rules. Given the flagrant breaches that have gone on, the council should be asking for a refund.

It is also why the council is about to hand over more public coastal land at Lady Bay – in exchange for large-scale racehorse training at Levy’s Beach – so the racing industry can build a $500,000 “bespoke” car park for its own use. Can Mayor Tony Herbert explain what part of *that* deal is good for the public?

According to another document that dropped to The Terrier recently, other permanent fixtures might also be added to Lady Bay to separate the public and horses more safely around the Pavilion carpark and promenade area.

Good grief, is this a public beach or a satellite facility of the WRC?

Lady Bay beach at its finest and how it should be: people enjoying an early morning walk on Easter Monday, with only a handful of racehorses coming and going.

Since the March madness, the errant trainers appear to have pulled their heads in and are sticking to the rules, apart from slowing down near walkers, but this is not because of the WCC flapping its feather.

It’s because the trainers know they are being photographed and videoed by a social-media connected public who, unfortunately, have had to step into the breach and become unwilling and unpaid enforcers to protect the beach.

> **Once upon a time, beach goers and racehorse trainers co-existed peacefully at Lady Bay because the horse numbers were small and the attitudes were different.**

Riders (#notallriders) didn’t tell beach walkers to, quote, “fuck off”. Small, local trainers used to arrive with double floats, not horse transport trucks. The beach was wide and flat, not torn up into thousands of divots.

To claim, as many do, that it has “always” been like this at Lady Bay is a lie. It hasn’t been and those of us who grew up on this beach know it.

Locals who ventured down to Lady Bay today on what was a perfect Easter Monday morning had a reminder of how things used to be: a handful of racehorses, a lot of walkers, a kid with a soccer ball, a few brave swimmers.

This is it how it was and how it should be. For the council to allow otherwise is incomprehensible.

If you would like to see The Terrier keep digging up, sniffing out and chewing on local issues, please consider throwing something in the tip jar.

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