



# op/ed

by barry irwin

Ogden Mills (Dinny) Phipps, in his position at The Jockey Club, has a degree of power, but what he really has is influence. Because of that, a lot of people take what he says seriously. But in the last few weeks I have ceased to take him seriously at all.

The man is to be admired as a breeder carrying on a long family tradition of excellence on the turf, as exemplified most recently by his GI Kentucky Derby winner from last year Orb (Malibu Moon) and by his long-time stance against allowing the use of Lasix in New York.

Mr. Phipps, however, was an influential board member when NYRA famously caved in to allow the use of Lasix when the New York Racing Association was the last major racing jurisdiction standing against it. And today--right now--at a time when the proponents of banning Lasix have their best window of opportunity yet to eliminate race day drugs, Mr. Phipps, as the leader of The Jockey Club, now looks set to back down from a another fight.

Because of the advent of the PETA video tape, most horsemen in our country are sufficiently beat up and vulnerable. If horsemen are ever going to listen to reason, the time is right this very second.

In the last couple of weeks, however, Mr. Phipps is doing his best imitation of a paper tiger. And, because powerful men fear him and others are just too uninformed to know the difference, Mr. Phipps has been posturing like a man that is dead-set against the use of drugs in racing and he is getting away with it in some circles. He is using his bully pulpit at The Jockey Club to inform trainers and owners that he has run out of patience, hot damn it!

Mr. Phipps announced last summer at The Jockey Club Round Table that he wanted every jurisdiction in racing to back a plan developed by Alan Foreman that seeks to have as many states as possible adopt his model for uniform medication rules in the United States.

As I have been pointing out since last August, the plan is a ruse, because it allows the use of Lasix on race day. Without banning Lasix there can be no clean horses on race day in our country. And until that is achieved, our industry will forever be labeled by PETA and countless potential fans as one that does not respect the Thoroughbred.

So a couple of weeks ago Mr. Phipps said that if states do not band together to agree to adopt the Foreman plan, he will have no choice but to back Federal legislation. Why does this remind me of Cleavon Little pointing a pistol at himself and threatening himself in Mel Brooks' movie "Blazing Saddles?"

Then this week, Mr. Phipps comes up with another initiative that calls for trainers and owners to voluntarily reveal any medications given to horses in the two weeks leading up to a graded stakes race. None of these things moves the ball. None of these things is designed to stop race-day medication. It is nothing but smoke and mirrors.

I, for one, have no intention of joining this latest initiative. I have no interest in jumping through another hoop for The Jockey Club or the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders' Association until such time as Mr. Phipps and The Jockey Club take a strong stance against the use of Lasix and back a plan to implement this notion.

Ironically, in real life, Mr. Phipps actually wants horses not to race on drugs. And I believe he is sincere in this. But his actions strongly indicate that Mr. Phipps believes just as strongly that he lacks the clout to get horsemen to give up the ghost on Lasix. I humbly suggest to him that he is dead wrong.

Right now Mr. Phipps is agreeing to make a deal with the devil to pass a half-measure in the name of showing the world that racing really is serious about putting its house in order. But he is selling us out instead of standing tall against trainers and owners that want to run horses on drugs.

Mr. Phipps, if you want to show true leadership and be true to your own high principles, let Alan Foreman know you want him to include a ban on Lasix in his Mid-Atlantic proposal. If you fail, nobody is going to hold it against you. But if you chicken out, I for one will never forgive you for letting the sport down.

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