7 July 2025

**DECISION**

**HARNESS RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**LISA HORTON**

**Date of hearing:** 24 June 2025

**Date of decision:** 24 June 2025

**Panel:** Judge Marilyn Harbison (Deputy Chairperson), Ms Maree Payne and Dr June Smith.

**Appearances:** Mr Andrew Cusumano appeared on behalf of the Stewards.

Ms Lisa Horton represented herself.

**Charges:** Australian Harness Racing Rule (“AHRR”) 231(1)(d) states:

(1) A person shall not:-

(d) abuse

anyone employed, engaged or participating in the harness racing industry or otherwise having a connection with it.

AHRR 231(2) states:

(2) A person shall not misconduct himself in any way.

AHRR 231(1)(a) states:

(1) A person shall not:-

(a) threaten

anyone employed, engaged or participating in the harness racing industry or otherwise having a connection with it.

**Particulars of charges:**  **Charge 1: AHRR 231(1)(d)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a licensed stablehand with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. On 28 August 2024, you attended the Lancefield Light Harness Club;

3. Upon arriving at the Lancefield Light Harness Club, you:

a. Drove your vehicle (with jogger attached) towards the tie-up stalls and asked licensed trainer and driver Mr Bradley Forge to move his vehicle that was parked in the vicinity of the area (to which Mr Forge refused); and

b. Parked and exited your vehicle and asked whether you could have one of the tie-up stalls (to which Mr Forge refused);

4. A verbal altercation between you and Mr Forge then occurred, during which you abused Mr Forge, a person participating in the harness racing industry, by calling him:

a. a “fuckhead”;

b. a “fucking sook”;

c. a “fucking idiot”; and

d. a “cunt of a thing”.

**Charge 2: AHRR 231(2)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a licensed stablehand with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. On 28 August 2024, you attended the Lancefield Light Harness Club;

3. Upon returning to the tie-up stalls after working your horse, you observed that your horse rug had fallen off the rail in the tie-up stalls and was on the ground underneath a horse that was owned by licensed stablehand Georgina Wood, the partner of licensed trainer and driver Bradley Forge;

4. In the process of retrieving the fallen horse rug, and in the presence of Ms Wood and Mr Forge, you misconducted yourself, in that you:

a. pushed the horse in an attempt to get it off the fallen horse rug, without the permission of Ms Wood or Mr Forge; and

b. used the following improper language:

i. “Get out of the fucking way”;

ii. “Fucking maggot”; and

iii. “Fucking has-been cunt of a thing.”

**Charge 3: AHRR 231(1)(d)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a licensed stablehand with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. On 28 August 2024, you attended the Lancefield Light Harness Club;

3. Upon returning to the tie-up stalls after working your horse, you observed that your horse rug had fallen off the rail in the tie-up stalls and was on the ground underneath a horse that was owned by licensed stablehand Georgina Wood, the partner of licensed trainer and driver Bradley Forge.

4. In the process of retrieving the fallen horse rug, a verbal altercation between you and Mr Forge occurred.

5. During the verbal altercation, and after retrieving the fallen horse rug, you abused Mr Forge, a person participating in the harness racing industry, by directing the following comment to him:

“Get fucked. You don’t own fucking everything, you fucking useless cunt”.

**Charge 4: AHRR 231(1)(a)**

1. You were, at all relevant times, a licensed stablehand with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. On 28 August 2024, you attended the Lancefield Light Harness Club;

3. Upon returning to the tie-up stalls after working your horse, you observed that your horse rug had fallen off the rail in the tie-up stalls and was on the ground underneath a horse that was owned by licensed stablehand Georgina Wood, the partner of licensed trainer and driver Bradley Forge.

4. In the process of retrieving the fallen horse rug, a verbal altercation between you and Mr Forge occurred.

5. During the verbal altercation, and after retrieving the fallen horse rug, you threatened Mr Forge, a person participating in the harness racing industry, by directing the following comment to him:

“You wanna watch yourself buddy, I know where you live”.

**Pleas:** Guilty to all Charges

**DECISION**

1. Ms Lisa Horton is a stablehand licensed by Harness Racing Victoria (“HRV”). She has been licensed for approximately 24 years. At the time of these events, she was working in that capacity with her domestic partner, Mr Leon Conway, who was a licenced trainer.
2. Ms Horton comes before us on four charges arising out of an altercation she had with other participants in the harness racing industry at the Lancefield Light Harness Club.
3. Three other trainers were involved in this altercation – Mr Bradley Forge, his partner, Ms Georgina Wood, and another licenced trainer, Mr Neil Rowley. Ms Horton had a history of conflict with these three, stretching over about six months, and culminating in the incident for which we are to sentence her today.
4. In short, it appears that Ms Horton approached these three people at the Lancefield Light Harness Club on the morning of 28 August 2024, after having parked her car inappropriately directly in front of the tie up stalls. She had become angry because there was no stall available for her horse, and she had a longstanding habit of using these particular stalls. She was annoyed that Mr Forge, whom she regarded as a relative newcomer, did not make way for her. She abused him.
5. She then left the area to exercise her horse. On returning, she noticed that a horse rug she had placed on a ledge had dropped to the ground under a horse owned by Ms Wood. The horse had defecated on the rug. She tried to retrieve the rug, and in doing so swore profusely at these other participants, who she thought should have helped her. At one point she pushed the horse aside whilst attempting to get to the rug.
6. She now faces four Charges arising out of this altercation.
7. The first is a charge of having abused Mr Forge, calling him a “fuckhead”, a “fucking sook”, a “fucking idiot”, and a “cunt of a thing”.
8. The second is a charge of misconduct, arising out of her pushing Ms Woods’ horse.
9. The third is a charge of having abused Mr Forge for a second time after having retrieved her rug, calling out to him “get fucked. You don't own fucking everything, you fucking useless cunt”.
10. The fourth charge arises out of her having then said to Mr Forge – “you wanna watch yourself Buddy, I know where you live”. This is a charge of having threatened another participant.
11. Ms Horton participated in a lengthy interview with the Stewards. During that interview she accepted that she had used the language described above, although she initially denied pushing the horse.
12. Mr Conway was also interviewed and explained to the Stewards Ms Horton’s background and psychological history. Her then partner, Mr Conway was, at the time of these events, ill with blood cancer, and he died in January of this year.
13. Clearly it is totally unacceptable for this type of behaviour to be exhibited by Harness racing participants. In sentencing Ms Horton, general deterrence is a paramount consideration.
14. Apart from the damage to the reputation of the sport caused by the use of aggressive and intimidatory language, it is particularly important to dissuade persons from uttering threats directed to other participants. Ms Horton’s threat, which is the subject matter of Charge 4, is to be deplored.
15. Ms Horton has had a very good record during the long period that she has been involved in harness racing. The only stain on that record is a charge of misconduct of which she was found guilty in November 2022. She was dealt with by the Stewards and received a $200 fine on that occasion.
16. The circumstances on that occasion were similar, in that she lost her temper and swore at other racing participants.
17. We note that, in sentencing her on that occasion, the Stewards described her as transparent and forthright in her dealings with them and described the offence as having been “at the low end” of offences of this nature.
18. Ms Horton is 60 years old. She has suffered from mental health issues all her life, and particularly over the last few years. She has been the victim of significant physical and sexual abuse. She has suffered greatly because of the decline in health and eventual death of her partner, who had supported her over the last 16 years. She has been left without any assets and survives on a disability pension. She has few social supports. Her only interest in life is her horses, and we accept that she would suffer greatly if a period of suspension from harness racing was imposed upon her.
19. Mr Rowley and Ms Wood attended this hearing by audio link, and we note that Ms Horton took the opportunity to make a full apology to them, and also to Mr Forge, for her actions towards them. We take this into account in her favour in setting a penalty. We also take into account in her favour that she has pleaded guilty to these offences.
20. We are satisfied that she is truly remorseful for her behaviour. However, we remain concerned that she may be prone to commit further outbursts, unless she learns effective strategies to cope with stress. She has been receiving counselling for six years, but appears not to have completed any anger management therapy. Her brother, who is a psychologist, attended the hearing to support her. He told us that he would ensure that she would be offered such a program. We regard this as an essential part of her rehabilitation and have told her so.
21. Having considered the submissions of the Stewards, and what we have been told of Ms Horton’s background, we impose the following penalties.
22. On Charge 1, which is a charge of having abused Mr Forge on 28 August 2024, we impose a penalty of a $500 fine.
23. On Charge 2, which is a charge of having pushed the horse whilst simultaneously swearing at the horse, we impose a penalty of a $500 fine.
24. On Charge 3, which is a charge of having abused Mr Forge for a second time on the same occasion, we impose a penalty of a $500 fine.
25. We order that the penalties on each of these three charges be fully suspended for a period of two years commencing from today.
26. On Charge 4, which is a charge of having threatened Mr Forge, we impose a penalty of a $750 fine.
27. We order that each of these penalties be served cumulatively. What this means is that Ms Horton must pay an immediate fine of $750 and that a further sum of $1,500 is suspended for two years. We have warned Ms Horton that if she commits any further offences within the next two years, she should expect to be required to pay this sum, and that she may well lose her licence.
28. The Stewards invited us to reactivate the fine of $300 imposed in respect of the 2022 offence. We have declined to do so, being of the view that the penalties we have imposed today are sufficient to address the gravity of her offending.

Paige Macdonald

Acting Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal