28 July 2025

**DECISION**

**HARNESS RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**TED CARUANA**

**Date of hearing:** 9 July 2025

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**Panel:** Magistrate Peter Reardon (Deputy Chairperson), Ms Maree Payne and Mr Des Gleeson.

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

Mr Joeseph Caruana represented Mr Ted Caruana.

**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(1)(c) states:

(1) A person shall not: -

(c) intimidate

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

AHRR 187(5) states:

(5) A person shall not abuse, intimidate or be deliberately obstructive of the Stewards.

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.

AHRR 231(2) states:

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

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

 1. At all relevant times, you were a licensed trainer with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules.

2. On 14 October 2024, using your mobile phone, you sent a text message to the mobile phone of licensed trainer-driver Taylor Ford in which you called her a “lesbian junkie slut.”

3. By calling Ms Ford a “lesbian junkie slut” in the text message, you abused a person participating in the harness racing industry.

**Charge 2: AHRR 231(1)(c)**

1. At all relevant times, you were a licensed trainer with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules.

2. On 14 October 2024, using your mobile phone, you sent the following to the mobile phone of licensed trainer-driver Taylor Ford:

a. an image of licensed trainer-driver Jason Grimson and registered owner Justin Downey; and

b. a text message which read:

*Remember this face you*

*lesbian junkie slut ..*

*Shut your mouth .*

*Very soon your wishes will come true.*

*Tasmania is looking very nice …*

*Promise!!*

3. By sending the image and text message outlined in particular 2 to Ms Ford, you intimidated a person participating in the harness racing industry.

**Charge 3: AHRR 187(5)**

1. At all relevant times, you were a licensed trainer with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2.On 16 October 2024, HRV Stewards Daniel Caruana and Kassie Latimer attended your property and stable address in Rockbank, Victoria, for the purpose of conducting an interview with you.

3. While the HRV Stewards attended your property, you intimidated them, in that you:

a. behaved and spoke in an aggressive manner towards the HRV Stewards, including excessively raising your voice at them; and

b. aggressively confronted Mr Daniel Caruana on two occasions, putting your face in close proximity to his face while directing remarks at him.

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

1. At all relevant times, you were a licensed trainer with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. On 16 October 2024, HRV Stewards Daniel Caruana and Kassie Latimer attended your property and stable address in Rockbank, Victoria, for the purpose of conducting an interview with you.

3. While the HRV Stewards attended your property, you directed the following comment to them:

*“If youse come here again, it’ll be dangerous for ya”.*

4. By directing the comment outlined in particular 3 to the HRV Stewards, you did threaten people employed in the harness racing industry.

**Charge 5: AHRR 231(2)**

1. At all relevant times, you were a licensed trainer and registered owner with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. On 16 October 2024, HRV Stewards Daniel Caruana and Kassie Latimer attended your property and stable address in Rockbank, Victoria, for the purpose of conducting an interview with you.

3. While the HRV Stewards attended your property, you:

a. directed the comment *“give it to your mother”* to Mr Daniel Caruana while handing your HRV licence to him;

b. instructed your employee to lock the gate to the property in circumstances where the HRV Stewards were still on the property;

c. opened the driver’s door of the HRV Stewards’ unoccupied car and, in response to Mr Daniel Caruana telling you to get out of the car, you crossed your arms and put them on top of the car door and said *“No. What are you gunna do about it?”*;

d. mimicked Ms Latimer in a ridiculing manner; and

e. held open the driver’s door of the HRV Stewards’ car while they were preparing to depart the property and, amongst other things, directed the comment *“get yourselves a real job”* to them.

4. By engaging in the conduct outlined in particular 3, you misconducted yourself.

**Pleas:** Guilty to all Charges

**DECISION**

1. Mr Ted Caruana at all relevant times was a licensed trainer with Harness Racing Victoria (“HRV”) and is a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules (“AHRR”)
2. He has pleaded guilty to five charges of breaching the Rules. These occurred on 14 October 2024 and 16 October 2024.
3. Charges 1 and 2 relate to breaches of AHRR 231(1)(d) and 231(1)(c) – abuse and intimidation of licensed trainer and driver, Mr Taylor Ford, on 14 October 2024.
4. Charges 3 – 5 relate to breaches pursuant to AHRR 187(5), 231(1)(a) and 231(2), involving intimidation, threatening behaviour and misconduct towards HRV Investigative Stewards, Mr Daniel Caruana and Ms Kassie Latimer, on 16 October 2024 at his Rockbank property.
5. In summary, the offences arise out of the Victoria Cup Harness Race at Melton on 12 October 2024. Mr Caruana’s horse, “District Attorney”, ran last in a race, which was won by Mr Jason Grimson’s horse, “Swayzee”.
6. On that night, Ms Ford had congratulated Mr Grimson’s success and said “I’m glad that one won and not District Attorney”.
7. Ms Ford stated that, when she made that comment, Mr Ted Caruana was not in seeing or hearing range.
8. Ms Ford said that she had been previous associations with Mr Ted Caruana, in that she had one of his horses, “Eagle Watch”, in her name, but she no longer trained it. It had been taken away from her along with the horses of another trainer, Ms Jodi Quinlan, on the same night before these offences took place. Ms Quinlan had previously trained District Attorney and another horse for Mr Caruana. The relationship between Ms Quinlan and Mr Caruana had not ended well.
9. On the following Monday, being 14 October 2024, Ms Ford received a text message from Mr Ted Caruana stating:

*Remember this face you*

*lesbian junkie slut ..*

*Shut your mouth .*

*Very soon your wishes will come true.*

*Tasmania is looking very nice …*

*Promise!!*

1. The message contained a photo of Mr Grimson and a colleague holding the winning cup. Ms Ford felt threatened and intimidated by the message and the accompanying photo. Until then she had believed that there was no bad blood between herself and Mr Caruana. They had got along well.
2. The matter was reported to HRV Stewards and on Wednesday, 16 October 2024, Investigative Stewards, Mr Daniel Caruana and Ms Latimer attended Mr Ted Caruana’s property in Rockbank to speak with him about the text message that had been sent to Ms Ford. The visit to the property was recorded on the body camera footage of the Stewards.
3. In the attempted interview of Mr Ted Caruana, he was angry, aggressive, intimidating, threatening and obstructive towards the Stewards. His voice was raised, and he spoke in an aggressive manner. He approached on two occasions and confronted Mr Daniel Caruana, putting his face very close when speaking to him in an intimidating manner.
4. During this encounter with the Stewards, Mr Ted Caruana threatened them by saying:

*“If youse come here again, it’ll be dangerous for ya”.*

1. Mr Ted Caruana also proceeded to hand over his licence to Mr Daniel Caruana and, when doing so, was very aggressive and generally conducted himself in an inappropriate manner. The Stewards feared for their safety and ultimately decided to leave shortly after arriving at the property.
2. Mr Ted Caruana was further interviewed by HRV Stewards on the following day, 17 October 2024, and again on 7 November 2024. His licence was suspended on 17 October 2024 and has remained suspended since that date.
3. In the interview, Mr Ted Caruana was contrite and apologetic. He admitted that there was no excuse for his behaviour on 14 and 16 October 2024 and that he was ashamed of it.
4. He stated that he was 62 years of age. He has had mental health issues for which he has been treated for in the past. He has been admitted as an inpatient at Claremont Psychiatric Facility in Werribee. He has been prescribed Lexapro, an antidepressant, Valium at night and Propranolol for high blood pressure. His physical health had declined, and he has stents placed in his chest for a heart condition.
5. Mr Ted Caruana stated that his primary occupation was as a builder. He had many employees and was in a “pressure cooker” with the office situation, as well as an ongoing civil dispute over an amount of $700,000. This dispute originally was at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (“VCAT”), but had been transferred to the County Court of Victoria (“CCV”).
6. Mr Ted Caruana admitted sending the text message to Ms Ford. He claimed that, after the Victoria Cup was run, he was disappointed that District Attorney ran last and he went to the bar with colleagues for a post-race drink. He said that he only drank Diet Coke and congratulated the connections of Swayzee. He then went home to feed and water his horses. He further stated that Mr Grimson came to the stables with the Victoria Cup in his hands and commented that District Attorney did not have much luck in the race. Mr Caruana responded “there’s next time”. However, he was hurting inside. They were sitting around on buckets having a “boys talk” and then Ms Ford came in and walked up to him and said:

*“Congratulations on Swayzee. Congratulations on District Attorney for running last, that was good to see”.*

1. Mr Ted Caruana puts that down to a falling out he had in the past with Ms Quinlan and Ms Ford. However, the comment he claimed Ms Ford said hurt him and he stewed over the comment through the weekend. In the spur of the moment, and in frustration, he sent the text message and photo attachment to her.
2. He admitted that Ms Ford being a young trainer would have been scared and traumatised by the message. He agreed he acted inappropriately by sending that text message to her.
3. Mr Ted Caruana also admitted that the Stewards who attended his property on 16 October 2024 would have felt intimidated and scared by his conduct.
4. Even if the Tribunal were to accept Mr Ted Caruana’s version of events, it does not excuse his behaviour toward Ms Ford. It was a deliberate action to send such an intimidating text message designed to scare her.
5. The behaviour towards the Stewards who attended his property could only be described as frightening, aggressive, intimidating and totally inappropriate. The Stewards had every right to attend the property and carry out their investigative duties.
6. Mr Ted Caruana has pleaded guilty to all five charges. He is 62 years of age and has held a Grade B trainer license on and off since 1992, with the latest time he was relicensed being in 2016.
7. As stated previously, he has mental health issues, namely, anxiety and depression, as well as multiple health issues. He has a significant building business which he runs with many employees. This has placed him under considerable pressure because of the state of the building industry. He also is dealing with the ongoing CCV civil litigation involving a large sum of money.
8. Given the plea of guilty to each charge, Mr Ted Caruana is entitled to a penalty discount. The Tribunal also takes into account that his licence has been suspended since 17 October 2024.
9. Overall, apart from one similar prior offence in March 2020, he has a good record and has been involved on and off in the industry for approximately 30 years. In 2020, he received a $500 fine for misconduct pursuant to AHRR 231(2) for swearing at a female sale attendant at Melton for refusing him entry without a pass.
10. The offences which he now faces are serious, striking at the heart of the administration of the industry and the work performed by the Stewards. Their work is vital to protect the integrity of the industry without having to endure repeated acts of aggression and abuse when simply carrying out their lawful duty. Such behaviour warrants denunciation and specific and general deterrence.
11. The Tribunal has reduced the overall penalty after taking into the mitigating factors outlined above, including his remorse, his family and his community support.
12. The penalties imposed by the Tribunal are as follows:

Charge 1: three months disqualification.

Charge 2: three months disqualification to be served concurrently with the penalty imposed on Charge 1.

Charge 3: 12 months disqualification to be served cumulatively upon the penalty imposed on Charge 1.

Charge 4: 12 months disqualification to served concurrently with the penalty imposed on Charge 3.

Charge 5: 12 months disqualification to served concurrently with the penalty imposed on Charge 3.

1. Thus, the total effective penalty imposed is 15 months disqualification, backdated to commence on 17 October 2024.

Kathleen Scully

Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal