30 September 2025

**DECISION**

**HARNESS RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**DAVID VOZLIC**

**Date of Hearing:** 23 September 2025

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

**Appearances:** Ms Amy Wood, instructed by Mr Andrew Cusumano, appeared on behalf of the Stewards.

Mr Damian Sheales represented Ms David Vozlic.

**Charges:** Australian Harness Racing Rule (“AHRR”) 231(2) states:

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

AHRR 243 states:

A person employed, engaged or participating in the harness racing industry shall not behave in a way which is prejudicial or detrimental to the industry.

AHRR 231(1)(d) states:

A person shall not:-

(d) abuse

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

AHRR 187(2) states:

(2) A person shall not refuse to answer questions or to produce a horse, document, substance or piece of equipment, or give false or misleading evidence or information at an inquiry or investigation.

**Particulars of charges: Charge 1: AHRR 231(2)**

1. On 7 June 2024, you attended the Mildura harness racing meeting;

2. During the running of Race 3, and as an unlicensed person, you entered the male drivers’ room, approached licensed Grade A driver Jack Laugher and initiated and engaged in a physical altercation with him, which involved pushing and shoving;

3. By engaging in the conduct outlined in paragraph 2, you misconducted yourself.

**Charge 2: AHRR 243**

1. On 7 June 2024, you attended the Mildura harness racing meeting;

2. During the running of Race 3, and as an unlicensed person, you entered the male drivers’ room, approached licensed Grade A driver Jack Laugher and initiated and engaged in an altercation with him;

3. Your conduct was in the presence of other drivers and caused licensed Grade A driver Jordan Leedham to get in between you and Mr Laugher and attempt to get you out of the drivers’ room;

4. As a person engaged in the harness racing industry, by entering the male drivers’ room, approaching Mr Laugher and initiating and engaging in an altercation with him in the presence of other drivers, you behaved in a way which was prejudicial or detrimental to the industry.

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

1. On 7 June 2024, you attended the Mildura harness racing meeting;

2. Following the running of Race 3, and shortly after runners had come off the racetrack, you directed the comment “You’ll pay for that”, or words to that effect, towards licensed Grade A driver and Grade B trainer Michelle Phillips;

3. By directing the comment “You’ll pay for that”, or words to that effect, towards Ms Phillips, you have abused Ms Phillips, a person participating in the harness racing industry.

**Charge 4: AHRR 187(2**)

1. On 5 July 2024, you were interviewed by Brad Powell (HRV Integrity Compliance and Investigations Manager), Scott Gillespie (HRV Senior Steward), Wayne Smith (HRV Steward) and Stephen Phelan (HRV Assistant Steward/Starter) in relation to the Stewards’ investigation regarding your conduct at the Mildura harness racing meeting on 7 June 2024 (the Interview);

2. During the Interview, you gave evidence to the effect that you went to the (male) drivers’ room because licensed Grade B trainer Naomi Kerr asked you to look for licensed Grade A driver Ryan Backhouse, mainly because Ms Kerr had a horse in the next race and they were going out to the track late;

3. Mr Backhouse was driving a horse trained by Ms Kerr (namely ‘Corzan Drama’) in Race 3 at the time that you went to the male drivers’ room;

4. The evidence that you provided during the Interview (as noted in particular 2) was knowingly false and/or misleading, given that the reason you went to the male drivers’ room was to confront licensed Grade A driver Jack Laugher, and not because Ms Kerr asked you to look for Mr Backhouse.

**Charge 5: AHRR 231(1)(d)**

1. On 5 May 2025, you made a phone call to HRV Integrity Compliance and Investigations Manager Brad Powell;

2. During the phone call, you abused Mr Powell, a person employed in the harness racing industry, by repeatedly calling him a “fucking idiot”, or words to that effect.

**Pleas:** Guilty to Charges 1, 3, 4 and 5

Charge 2 withdrawn by the Stewards

**DECISION**

1. At all relevant times, Mr David Vozlic was not a licensed participant in the harness racing industry. Mr Vozlic was previously licensed as a trainer and driver for most of the time between 1988 and 2019. At all relevant times in this case, Mr Vozlic was the partner of Ms Naomi Kerr who was a licensed grade B trainer. She has since had her licence upgraded to a grade A trainer.
2. Mr Vozlic has pleaded guilty to four charges pursuant to Australian Harness Racing Rule (“AHRR”) 231(2), 231(1)(d) and 187(2). The charges pursuant to AHRR 187(2) and 231(1)(d) are defined as serious offences.
3. These charges arise out of conduct at the Mildura harness racing meeting held on 7 June 2024 and Mr Vozlic’s subsequent behaviour after that meeting on 5 July 2024 when he was before the Stewards. At that meeting on 5 July 2024, Mr Vozlic gave false and/or misleading statements. In addition, he subsequently abused HRV Integrity Compliance and Investigations Manager, Mr Brad Powell, during a telephone conversation on 5 May 2025.
4. On the evening of 7 June 2024, Mr Vozlic attended the Mildura harness race meeting with his partner, Ms Kerr, who had multiple runners competing that night. Shortly before 5.00 pm, Mr Vozlic was watching Race 1, in particular Mr Kerr’s horse, “Island Caesar”, the short price favourite and driven by licensed grade A driver, Mr Ryan Backhouse.
5. Island Caesar finished in fifth place and Mr Vozlic was critical of the driving of Ms Michelle Phillips, who was driving “Letsgo Matilda”. He believed this caused Island Caesar to finish fifth.
6. Mr Vozlic made a post on Facebook, which stated:

“How about Michelle Phillips gets 12 weeks for her drive in the first at Mildura”.

1. Licensed grade A driver, Mr Jack Laugher, was not at the meeting but used his Facebook account to comment on the post with a “sad face with teat” emoji.
2. During the running of Race 3, starting at approximately 5.58pm, Mr Vozlic entered the male drivers’ room, a restricted area, where Mr Laugher and other grade A drivers were. Mr Vozlic approached Mr Laugher in an aggressive manner, initiated and engaged in a physical altercation which involved pushing and shoving. Another driver got between them to put a stop to it and Mr Vozlic had to be physically pushed towards the door to get him out. Fortunately, no one was injured as a result of the commotion. This conduct constitutes Charge 1.
3. Charge 2 was withdrawn by the Stewards.
4. Charge 3 relates to Mr Vozlic leaving the male drivers room and going to the parade ring, where horses who had competed in Race 3 were returning. Mr Vozlic then walked alongside Ms Kerr’s horse, “Corzan Drama”. In close proximity was Ms Phillips who was returning with the horse “Just Burnforu”, who she had just driven in the race. Mr Vozlic then, in an angry manner, said to Ms Phillips, “You’ll pay for that”, referring to her drive in Race 1. At that time, Ms Phillips was unaware of the meaning and context of that comment. A short time later, she was sent a copy of Mr Vozlic’s Facebook post which brought his comment into context. She was, understandably, unsettled and upset by his comment.
5. Harness Racing Victoria (“HRV”) Stewards opened an investigation into Mr Vozlic’s conduct. On 11 June 2024, they interviewed a number of licensed participants who were at the Mildura meeting and witnessed his conduct.
6. HRV Stewards endeavoured to interview Mr Vozlic however, he refused to co-operate and participate in an interview. As a result, Mr Vozlic was excluded from attending all Victorian harness racetracks pursuant to AHRR 15(1)(d).
7. Charge 4 relates to Mr Vozlic providing false and/or misleading evidence during an investigation or inquiry. On 5 July 2024, Mr Vozlic was interviewed by HRV Stewards. During that interview, Mr Vozlic denied making any abusive comments to Ms Phillips following Race 3. He then proceeded to mislead Stewards and gave false reasons as to why he went into the male drivers’ room. Mr Vozlic claimed he went into that room because Ms Kerr asked him to look for driver, Mr Ryan Backhouse, as she had a horse in the next race and that they were going out to the track late.
8. This statement was false. Mr Backhouse was driving Corzan Drama for Ms Kerr at that time and was not in the drivers’ room. Mr Vozlic claimed when he looked into the room, he saw Jack Laugher in there and said to him:

“Oh, here he is, the tough guy”.

Mr Vozlic then went on to say Mr Laugher stood up, grabbed his jumper with both hands, shook him and that there were words between them. The reality and truth of the matter was that Mr Vozlic was the aggressor and went there to confront Mr Laugher.

1. Mr Vozlic stated that the emoji comment made him approach and speak to Mr Laugher, but that was not the reason for him going into the drivers’ room.
2. Charge 5 arises out of conduct during a phone call Mr Vozlic made on 5 May 2025 at approximately 4.30pm to Mr Powell. Mr Vozlic asked him for an update on this matter. While Mr Powell was attempting to respond, Mr Vozlic became angry and aggressive. He raised his voice and abused Mr Powell, stating “you’re a fucking idiot” and repeatedly referring to him as “Brad Power from HRV integrity”. When Mr Powell asked Mr Vozlic to repeat himself, Mr Vozlic abruptly terminated the call.
3. Ms Vozlic has pleaded guilty to these offences and is therefore, entitled to a discount on penalty. Mr Vozlic’s behaviour towards all involved was completely inappropriate. Participants and employees in the industry are entitled to carry out their duties and work without this type of aggressive and angry behaviour being directed to them.
4. As previously mentioned, Mr Vozlic has been involved in the harness racing industry as a driver and trainer from 1988 – 2019. He is no longer a licensed participant. The Tribunal has been informed that, as a result of his behaviour, Mr Vozlic has been excluded from attending all Victorian harness racetracks.
5. During Mr Vozlic’s time in the industry, he had what could only be described as a chequered history before the Stewards. Penalties handed down ranged from cautions to disqualifications over a range of offences. Further, it is not his first offence in relation to providing false information and/or giving misleading evidence at an inquiry or during an investigation.
6. Therefore, in this case, the Tribunal is of the view both general and specific deterrence are applicable. The integrity and image of the industry needs to be maintained and that all participants involved need to be honest, transparent and respectful towards others involved in the industry. All should be able to carry out their work in a safe environment.
7. The Tribunal accepts that Mr Vozlic has effectively already been punished since 11 June 2024 by being excluded from all Victorian harness racetrack. There has been no explanation by the Stewards as to why there was such a delay in the laying of charges. An allowance for penalties imposed should be made and any warning off should be backdated to commence from the date of exclusion.
8. The Tribunal does not accept that there was any provocation involved in these offences. Mr Vozlic sought out Mr Laugher and Ms Phillips and confronted them aggressively in their place of work. This behaviour is not to be tolerated in the industry and must be condemned.
9. The Tribunal takes the view that, as Mr Vozlic was not licensed at the time of the offending, a warning off is more appropriate than a disqualification.
10. In all the circumstances, the Tribunal imposes the following penalties:

Charge 1: four month warning off period.

Charge 3: four month warning off period.

Charge 4: $1,000 fine.

Charge 5: four month warning off period.

1. Thus, the total penalty is a 12 month warning off period, backdated to commence from 11 June 2024 and a $1,000 fine.

Kathleen Scully

Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal