

A Tragic Ending For Americans' Pleasure Horses

Because of the stress and suffering endured by consignments of horses during shipboard transport from the United States to the slaughter markets of Europe, HSUS and the International Society for the Protection of Animals (ISPA) have urged the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) to ban the shipment of horses to foreign countries for slaughter.

Phyllis Wright of HSUS and John Walsh, ISPA field officer, met with senior USDA officials twice this fall to urge them to take action that would protect horses and ponies from death, injury, and sickness during the 13 to 17-day transatlantic crossings.

Since 1973, a total of 11,178 horses and ponies have been shipped by sea to France and Italy, in consignments numbering from 126 to 1,053 animals. Many of the animals shipped are former pleasure horses and ponies that have been purchased at auctions throughout the United States and transported to Richmond, Va., and other ports, where they are held until a shipload has been gathered. Although some of these animals are often selected to be used as pleasure mounts, large numbers of these animals end up in European slaughterhouses, according to Walsh.

Walsh has learned that pregnant mares and old, infirm animals that cannot stand the long and rough voyage are often included in the shipments. He has also concluded from personal inspections of the ships and the animals at the end of the voyages that many horses are injured by sharp ventilating ducts and structural steel protrusions during the voyages.

When he met a ship that docked at Le Treport, France, he found that 12 horses and 7 ponies out of a shipment of 837 had died. Some of the surviving animals were so sick and weary that dock workers used a forklift truck to get them on their feet.

Another ISPA representative met a shipment that arrived in Bari, Italy, last



Some former American pleasure horses are so weak after being shipped to Europe that they can hardly stand. An ISPA representative took this photo as horses were unloaded in France.

summer and found that 16 ponies, 10 of them pregnant mares, had died out of a shipment of 876 animals. In addition, 4 horses lost eyes, 2 had serious posterior injuries, 3 had surface head wounds, 50 bore miscellaneous wounds on the front and rear, and many had swollen fetlocks. Three other horses fell from the pier into the harbor during unloading and had to be retrieved from the water by small boats.

The Canadian government banned the export of horses by sea last year after the Ministry of Transport concluded that horses could not be carried on board ship in large numbers without undue suffering. HSUS and ISPA believe a close examination of the situation by the U. S. government will result in a similar conclusion.

HSUS believes, however, that the full responsibility for the welfare of the animals cannot be laid on either the government or the entrepreneurs who are buying and selling the animals.

"Let's start at the very beginning of the problem and put the finger on the horse owners that didn't know where their animals would end up when they sold them," Miss Wright said. "It goes right back to the age old problem of owner responsibility. If you buy an animal, you have a moral responsibility to care for it for life, not until your child is bored with horseback riding or until the feed bills get too high." □



These horses, awaiting transportation to slaughterhouses and elsewhere in France, were once the prize possessions of Americans. Photo courtesy of ISPA.