



The American Association of Equine Practitioners Convention was meant for vets, but had a lot to offer a layperson.

article & photos by Kim F. Miller

We greatly enjoyed being among the 5,100 plus to attend the 2018 American Association of Equine Practitioners Convention held in San Francisco in early December. I am not an equine practitioner and could only spend one day there, but as a proactive horseman it was a day well spent and much enjoyed.

The meeting offered 127.5 hours of continuing education across all aspects of equine medicine, including dentistry, complementary medicine, reproduction and more. I was sorry to miss a keynote session by esteemed physician and best-selling novelist Abraham Verghese, MD, MACP. His topic was the importance of hands-on medicine and contemplation in an era of increased technology, a tip-off to the caliber of thought that went into the educational agenda and a reflection of veterinarians' views of their patients and clients.

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A ginorous ballroom at the Moscone Center was standing-room-only for a talk by acclaimed equine cardiologist and ultrasonographer Virginia B. Reef, DVM, DACVIM, DACVSMR. She provided a blueprint for interpreting the audio and visual clues of equine heart diseases along with the ramifications for performance, life expectancy, and horse and rider safety.



Okay, that was a little over my head, but a later afternoon session of short talks on diagnosing various conditions in performance horses was fascinating and accessible, even as a layperson. My favorite session was Shannon Reed, DVM's presentation on the results of an extensive survey of owners of Off-The-Track Thoroughbreds after their first year of ownership. Dr. Reed noted the proliferation of programs for finding second careers for racehorses that corresponds with a need for mid-price show horses. "I was tired of only anecdotal evidence and I wanted a real sense of what happened," she explained of her motivation for the survey involving 1,179 OTTBs, 212 "control" subjects, and 35,000 data points.

Not surprisingly, the majority of OTTBs wound up in the hunter/jumper world, followed by trail riding and western pleasure. Health-wise, gastrointestinal issues were the only category in which the OTTBs had a higher incidence of problems than their control counterparts. And that was just a 4.3% increase over the control group: 75% of the 4.3% had ulcers and 61% were reported to have trouble maintaining their weight. Vets working with clients that have taken on OTTBs were encouraged to test for GI issues early in the vetting process.



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Additional take-aways stood out: Only 30% of the re-homed horses underwent a pre-purchase exam; the majority were adopted directly off the track rather than through programs that help both the horse and the new owner through the transition. Vets were encouraged to nudge clients toward the latter route, for the horses' and the owner's sake.

The most encouraging news was that the vast majority of survey participants said they would "do it again" if the opportunity arose.

The second half of my day I spent wandering the exhibition floor where 340 companies were demo-ing their equipment, products and services. I've included a few photo highlights of products the especially caught my attention.

Even though the convention is not meant for regular horse owners, I recommend it highly as a horse person always interested in the breath of advances in caring for our horses.



The AAEP's 65th Annual Convention will be held in Denver, CO, Dec. 7-11, 2019.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners, headquartered in Lexington, KY, was founded in 1954 as a non-profit organization dedicated to the health and welfare of the horse. Currently, AAEP reaches more than 5 million horse owners through its over 9,000 members worldwide and is actively involved in ethics issues, practice management, research and continuing education in the equine veterinary profession and horse industry.