

## How Can Adopters Judge an OTTB to be the Best Horse for the Job?

### Q & A with Dr. Yanik Gasiorowski Mid Atlantic Equine Hospital, Ringoes, NJ



Dr. Gasiorowski graduated cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in 2007. Following graduation he completed an internship at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital, followed by a 3 year surgical residency at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center. Dr. Gasiorowski's clinical interests include lameness diagnosis, nuclear scintigraphy, orthopedic and upper respiratory surgery. More recently, he has been focusing on the development of surgical techniques in the standing (not anesthetized) horse.

On a more personal note, he has a growing interest in the transitioning of Thoroughbred racehorses to second careers. He recently helped Rockisland Express, a TFH retiree, overcome a serious bone infection which could have cost the gelding his life.

He, Dr. Pete Bousum, and the Mid A staff are a major part of the success stories of Turning For Home. Program Administrator Barbara Luna recently corralled the ultra-busy Dr. G. to talk about Off-Track-Thoroughbreds.

How did you become interested in the transitioning of OTTBs to new careers?

The Thoroughbred itself! The breed is versatile and supremely athletic. The horses' inherently competitive nature lends itself perfectly to performance arenas of all kinds. If, instead of seeing the product of a failed racing career, people could see the huge potential of these athletes in other lines of work, it would directly benefit these horses. They can run, they can jump, they can perform, and to throw some subjectivity in there, they look damn good doing it!

What is the biggest misconception that people have about former racehorses?



I hear it said that the breed is misunderstood, and it may be, but I think the biggest misconception is about the racing industry. Most adopters are non-racetrackers and form their opinions of the industry from fodder provided by the media, which is usually blown way out of proportion.

A Thoroughbred in race training can be an intimidating sight. They are extremely fit creatures with boundless energy and a defined purpose: they want to run. A patient adopter can harness this force and direct it quite effectively toward a new goal.

Thoroughbreds are extremely adaptable. With time, care, consistency and a new environment, they change. If you'll permit an analogy: a Division 1 college athlete does not mellow into the maturity and dependability of "real life" on the day of graduation.

How can an adopter begin to evaluate a horse's racetrack injuries for his new career in another discipline?

This is tough ground to cover in generalizations. The same issue that would be a non-issue for an event horse may be damning for a dressage prospect. It's not just the level in which they are to perform, it is how they use their bodies. This is a hugely important topic, so here are some insights:

- Any metal that appears on a radiograph tends to freak adopters out, when in fact, most of it should not. (photo at right shows 2 screws to repair a condylar fracture)
- Small issues with high motion joints (like knees) seem like small problems, but are not.
- Massive issues with low motion joints look awful, but in fact good solutions exist.
- Upper airways can end a racing career but either become non-issues or can be satisfactorily treated for a non-racing athlete. Consult a surgeon before passing the horse up.
- Tendon and ligament injuries must be assessed on a case by case basis.
- There are few things that enough time cannot heal.



What can we do to better educate potential adopters about Thoroughbred aftercare? One idea we had was to bring small groups of potential adopters to the track during morning hours to see what the horses do on a daily basis. What do you think?

If it flies with the trainers, I'd love to be involved!