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I am writing to advise you of one of the most significant developments in rider safety in recent times.

A new helmet which provides a 40-50% increase in safety is now available. The helmet is a result of several years of research which resulted in the strongest helmet standard in the world: ARB HS 2012.

Racing NSW and Racing Australia commissioned research at the University of NSW into improving the safety and performance of helmets between 2007 and 2012. The research was led by Dr Andrew McIntosh who has over 20 years of academic, research and professional experience in biomechanics and ergonomics.

Dr McIntosh found that current helmet standards and helmets did not fully meet the specialist needs of the racing industry, where speeds are high, head impacts potentially severe, and there is a possibility of impacts from following horses. The research showed that changes to the standard could be made that would lead to helmets better capable of meeting the needs of jockeys and reducing the incidence of head injury.

Since 2012, Racing Australia has worked with helmet suppliers willing to meet the challenge of making the world's best jockey helmet. Only one manufacturer has managed to produce a helmet compliant with ARB HS 2012 - Allen McMillan of Rider Safety Pty Ltd.

Allen has produced two helmets - Aussie Track and New Derby - which are designed for track work and race riding, respectively.

Throughout 2014 and 2015 jockeys around Australia were invited to provide feedback on Allen's prototypes of the helmets. The response was constructive. Based on the feedback, improvements were made in the final helmet design.

Following extensive scientific testing, the Aussie Track and New Derby helmets are now available. Both provide unparalleled safety improvements.

Racing Australia will shortly introduce new rules making it compulsory from early 2016 that only helmets compliant with ARB HS 2012 can be worn by jockeys and track riders. Our legal obligations mean that we must make wearing of the safest helmet compulsory. Riders don't have the option of deciding if they prefer their current helmets or the new ones.

I understand that this is a major change for riders. We all get used to our familiar equipment and don't always see the need to change. In this case, however, the new helmets are much safer than the helmet you are currently wearing. It's worth the effort to get used to the Aussie Track or New Derby helmet. I have no doubt other countries will follow Australia's lead before long.

Helmets are now available in saddlery stores. I know there is a cost to buying a new helmet especially when things are tough. But this is amongst the best investments you could ever make in your own safety. Some - but not all - Principal Racing Authorities are looking at a form of assistance to riders in this regard. But that is a matter for each individual Principal Racing Authority to decide.

Racing Australia will announce in coming days the date by which all jockeys and track riders must transition to the new helmets. Again, legal obligations mean that we cannot allow too long a period before making it compulsory that only the Aussie Track or New Derby helmet can be worn in races and track work.

As a racing administrator, I don't believe I could be associated with anything more important and significant than this - the introduction of the safest helmet in the history of racing. I hope you will support its introduction and help us through the transition stage which I know won't be easy for everyone.

Further details on the helmets can be found on the Racing Australia website, including a series of videos with jockeys and information on saddlery. (www.racingaustralia.horse)

Yours sincerely,

Peter McGauran
Chief Executive Officer
Racing Australia

