



HRNZ - Breeding update

Following the recent release of its funding and the Group and Feature Racing Calendar for the 2026-27 season, Harness Racing New Zealand has some important breeding-related updates. At this stage they are drafts and have yet to be officially confirmed by HRNZ.

The updates relate to the Harness 5000, the Silk Road and the Paddock to Podium and the Fillies and Mares Credit schemes.

At this stage the changes are :

HARNESS 5000:

The second ever Harness 5000 has been confirmed for Ashburton Raceway on Sunday, December 6, 2026, following its success last year.

Open to horses whose stallions stood for \$5000 or lower at the time of service, the Harness 5000 will again feature 12 finals for 3YO, 4YO, 5YO and older Pacers and Trotters, worth a total \$480,000. That's \$40,000 per final, down \$20,000 on last year.

Qualifying for the Harness 5000 goes from January 1 - November 22, 2026, with 3YOs required to start in at least eight races while 4YO and 5YO and older pacers and trotters must have started in at least 12 races.

THE SILK ROAD:

A key part of the Future Starts Now strategy launched in 2024, the Silk Road provides a pathway for everyday and emerging fillies and mares.

The Silk Road will continue in 2026/27 with funding set at \$250,000 and is likely to commence again in May 2027.

PADDOCK TO PODIUM:

Started in 2026, Paddock To Podium offers a 5% credit to the listed breeder of all prize money won by NZ-foaled 2YO - 6YO horses finishing 1st to 4th in all races in New Zealand, other than in Group and Listed races.

For Group and Listed races, \$1000 will be split among the breeders of horses finishing 1st - 5th.

These credits can be used directly against stallion service fees and semen transport costs, helping breeders to reinvest and grow the next generation of champions.

The total investment is estimated at \$1.4m annually.

By the end of July, the halfway point of the year, the figure stands at just over \$810,000.

Paddock To Podium will continue in its current form for 2026/27.



FILLIES AND MARES CREDIT SCHEME:

After allocating nearly \$2m in the past two years, the Fillies and Mares Credit Scheme will be paused from September 1, 2026.

All credits earned prior to that date remain claimable until the end of February 2028.

A \$750 breeding credit (not cash) is attached to the mare for every win. It is capped at \$6,000 and/or eight wins per horse.

Credits stay with the specific filly or mare and can reimburse direct breeding expenses like service fees, semen transport, veterinary packages and working fees.

The scheme came into effect in 2024 and so far the figure paid out is \$1,966,650.

The scheme has not been terminated. It goes on hold while HRNZ and the NZSBA work through the best strategies for fillies and mares racing and their transition to the breeding barn.

That work starts from a strong platform. Purpose built series such as the Silk Road and the Tasman Empress Series have been embraced by owners and trainers well ahead of expectation, and they have shown how quickly the right race, at the right point of the season, can lift participation among everyday fillies and mares. The intention is to carry those lessons directly into whatever follows.

CREDIT HOLDERS:

Over the coming weeks HRNZ will make direct contact with everyone holding credits under either the Paddock to Podium or Fillies and Mares schemes. Each will receive a statement of the credits earned to date, a plain explanation of what those credits can be put towards, and clear guidance on how to redeem them.

Credits only deliver value once they are used. With mating decisions being made now and Fillies and Mares credits claimable through to the end of February 2028, HRNZ encourages every credit holder to check their balance and factor it into their plans for this spring. Anyone who thinks they may hold credits does not need to wait for that contact and is welcome to enquire directly.

NZSBA COMMENT:

New Zealand Standardbred Breeders Association Executive Manager Brad Reid said the Association welcomed the certainty the announcement provides.

"HRNZ has invested consistently in this sector over a long period and that record deserves to be acknowledged, particularly in a year when every part of the industry is being asked to do more with less. Last season brought a genuine lift in the number of mares served and that momentum is worth protecting. The mares covered this spring become the racing population of the early 2030s, so signalling that Paddock to Podium, the Harness 5000 and the Silk Road will be funded and continue for 2026/27 matter a great deal to breeders weighing up their decisions over the coming weeks. We look forward to working alongside HRNZ on the fillies and mares review and to making sure what comes next continues to build a sustainable racing population for the future."

For more enquiries contact matthew.peden@hrnz.co.nz