

REFLECTIONS

By NELSON DUNSTAN



NEW YORK, N. Y., Jan. 10.—On the first day each year this newspaper prints an item reminding readers that it is the birthday of all horses in this country. Regardless of their foaling date, every horse automatically becomes one year older, yearlings becoming two-year-olds and two-year-olds advancing to three. That practice always creates curiosity, and we often are asked, "Why isn't a horse's age reckoned the same as that of a human?" and "why do some countries figure thoroughbreds' ages differently than we?" It must be realized that in the early days of racing all events were run in four-mile heats and the weights carried were often as high as 200, or even 250 pounds. Most of the horses were at least four years old before they were raced. But as time went on and a racing breed was established, owners took pride in their colts and fillies and were anxious to race them. As there was very little racing in the spring and none in the winter, it was decided in the first known publication of the rules of racing, in 1751, that "horses take their ages from May-day."

This rule remained in force throughout England until 1834. Then, owing to the rise of colt racing and the great advantage that a two- or three-year-old might possess, according to its precise date of foaling, The Jockey Club, with its headquarters at Newmarket, decreed that the ages of all horses raced there, under its jurisdiction, would have to be reckoned from January 1. At that time there were two sets of racing men in England. One conformed to "Newmarket rules" in conducting its meetings, while the other declined to do so and followed those set up by its own officials. However, as the general necessity for uniformity kept increasing, all parties at length agreed that uniform rules should prevail at recognized meetings. So, in 1858, a new and revised general code was promulgated. It included the January 1 provision,

*Birthday of Horses Confusing to Fans
Why Not Use Actual Date of Birth?
It All Started in the Long, Long Ago
Why Some Countries Designate July 1*

which from that time forward was official in all English turf affairs. When racing was established in America, this country was a colonial dependency of England and so remained until the beginning of the Revolutionary War. It was, therefore, natural that English turf laws should be adopted. When the revolution brought independence to the United States, its turfmen continued to adhere to the British models and, while there was no central governing body and the different racing associations adopted such rules as they chose, usually they were either those of England, or of some leading American track where modified English rules prevailed.

When, in 1834, England's Newmarket adopted the January 1 age date, there was some agitation in America about following suit. For some time nothing was done about it. Then a sharp division of opinion took place. The North, being in much closer touch with England than the South, decided to adopt the January 1 rule. The South refused to do so and declared for the old May 1 date. Thus there were two different sets of ages for horses in this country, as was the case in England until 1858, when the uniform code was adopted. However, the United States did not follow suit at that time. The South again declared against it and continued to adhere to the May 1 rule. This continued until after the Civil War. When it ended, the racing primacy of the South was a thing of the past and the control of the sport passed to the North, especially New York. One of the first results was that all horses the country over had their ages com-

puted under the January 1 rule, which has ever since been the case.

This rule undoubtedly would be world-wide today, but for exceptions forced by climatic conditions. All North American and all European countries follow it. But in others, such as Australia, New Zealand, South America, etc., the difference in climate makes it inoperative. This will be best understood when it is stated that "summer" meetings are now in progress "Down Under," and that which corresponds to our "regular" season in those parts of the world, instead of falling within a calendar year, begins, as a rule, in the fall (that is, our fall) of one year and lasts until into the spring of the next. This makes the dating of ages from January 1 not practical and, as a consequence, August 1 is the one usually followed. As a result, horses racing as two-year-olds in Australia up to August 1 would be classified as three-year-olds in this country.

During the past year, Al Luke, president of the California Owners' and Trainers' Association, advocated that the date of our equine birthdays be changed from January 1 to April 1. When we commented on Luke's suggestion, we received letters from quite a few of the leading breeders in this country endorsing the idea. Others were against any change and said they could not see where it would be of much advantage. Some were firmly against the suggestion, frankly stating it would cause too much disorder and confusion in our racing schedule. Undoubtedly, it would react against two-year-olds racing in the early months of the year. But for that reason alone some people favor it. As matters stand today, the January 1 date has been handed down from our forefathers and, in all probability, will continue for generations to come. While it is a handicap to some foreign invaders, it is doubtful if those countries will ever change their rules to conform with ours.