

Changes to Junior Driver criteria

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New criteria have been approved to increase opportunities for the country's junior drivers.

Harness Racing New Zealand has agreed on the changes following extensive consultation between junior drivers, owners, trainers and other key industry personnel.

Under the old rules - in broad terms - junior drivers had to be aged between 17 and under 30yrs and have driven less than 100 wins with a guarantee of 6 seasons regardless of the number of winners driven if under 25yrs. For drivers 25yrs and older the maximum number of seasons they could be licensed as a Junior was 6 before having to graduate to Graduation or Open ranks.

Now that's all been tweaked.

The 30 year old cut-off is now gone for drivers as long as they are licensed as a Junior before turning 30yrs, haven't driven 100 winners or been a junior for six years.

"So someone who was a late bloomer for instance could be a junior driver well into their thirties, as long as they haven't had those 100 winners," says HRNZ's General Manager - Racing, Catherine McDonald.

And those who have been driving for six seasons will no longer have to hand in their junior drivers' licence. They can continue driving as a junior until they have 100 career wins or they turn 30.

"So if you started at say 20 you could theoretically be a junior driver for 10 years."

If you are under 30 you will still have six years as a junior regardless of the number of wins.

HRNZ has also confirmed that every junior driver who was finishing up on Dec 31, 2022 will now go through to July 31 2023.

Another initiative to encourage trainers to use junior drivers has also been confirmed.

Previously a 4YO and older horse in a ratings race (not MR) would only receive half points for winning if it was driven by a junior who had won 10 races or less, as long as it was not a penalty free win.

The limit has now been increased to 50 wins by a junior driver.

"Everything is all about keeping juniors in the sport," says McDonald, "we need to ensure they get enough opportunities to establish themselves."

The Junior Drivers also submitted on a range of programming / handicapping options and these will be considered in a wider programming review next year.

To view the criteria please click [here](#).

3. Junior Driver

The applicant must:

- (a) Be at least 17 years of age as at 1 August and shall have either held a trials driver's licence for at least 12 months or, in the opinion of the Area Licensing Committee, reached a standard of driving at trials or official workouts which is consistently of a standard to be granted an extension to Junior Driver.
- (b) Have had a minimum of 25 satisfactory drives as a trials driver, or be certified by a recognised driving master approved by Harness Racing New Zealand (who shall sign his or her driving record card for each drive) as having completed no less than 10 satisfactory drives at workouts and have had a minimum of 15 satisfactory drives as a trials driver.

North Island and Otago/Southland workouts are recognised as qualifying experience for an extension to Junior or Graduation driver, provided a stipendiary steward or Senior Driver witnesses the drive.

The satisfactory drives as a trials driver shall be endorsed by a stipendiary steward. A minimum of four horses must participate to qualify as a workout drive.

- (c) Be employed in a stable either full or part time or hold a trainer's licence.
- (d) Be graduated from or enrolled in, and actively attending, the New Zealand Harness Horse Cadet Scheme.

A Junior driver who has graduated from the Cadet Scheme must attend HRNZ education seminars if directed to by HRNZ or the RIB.

Any Junior driver who fails to attend meetings or is behind with completing their assignments, will have their licence reviewed and put on hold by the Area Licensing Committee and will be unable to drive on race day until they are up to date and actively attending.

- (e) Be under 30 years of age.
- (f) Have driven less than 100 winners in races held at totalisator meetings provided that –

Subject to clause (e) a Junior driver shall be entitled to six seasons as a Junior driver regardless of the number of wins achieved.

A Junior driver who has been licensed for 6 seasons or more and subsequently drives 100 wins becomes ineligible and will be re-licensed as an Open driver the following day.

- (g) Upon obtaining the age of 30 years a Junior driver shall be entitled to either six seasons as a Junior driver or 100 winners in races held at totalisator meetings provided they were licensed as a Junior driver prior to turning 30 years of age.

No driver shall be permitted to be licensed as a Junior driver after the age of 30yrs if they have been licensed as a driver in any race day category for 6 seasons or more regardless of whether they have had 6 seasons as a junior driver or not.

For the purposes of clauses 5(e), (f) or (g) the applicant's age shall be as at 1 August in the year of the application.

In their final season, subject to renewing their licence, a Junior Driver is able to continue driving as a Junior Driver until 31 December, at which time they will be automatically licenced as either a Graduation or Open driver.

Any person licensed as a Junior driver shall be entitled to drive in any race restricted to junior drivers and at all types of race meetings providing they qualify under the criteria applicable to those meetings.

Any person who is licensed as a Junior driver and subsequently wishes to change their licence type to Amateur (or any other driver licence category) will be unable to be re-licensed as a Junior driver again in the future.

When any junior or trials driver changes his employment, both he/she and the former employer shall notify in writing to the licensing officer of Harness Racing New Zealand within 21 days that the licence holder has left that employment. In his advice the licence holder shall also state the name of his/her new employer.

At the declaration time for notification of drivers, if there is any horse or horses entered in a race restricted to Junior driver for which a Junior driver cannot be engaged, the owner or trainer may with the permission of the Stipendiary Steward in charge of the meeting, engage a trials driver to drive their horse. The Stipendiary Steward shall before granting such permission, be satisfied that no Junior driver could reasonably have been engaged.