

Tölt.Knoten Interjection

By Ulrike Amler



The first round of breeding show qualifications for the world championship in Radegund is over with the meetings of the South, Centre and North in May.

About 250 mostly young horses faced the international judges' team surrounding Barbara Frische, Marlise Grimm and Sigurbjörn Björnsson.

An amazing success for breeders and riders claims the official report on the IPZV homepage but looking at the pictures online one has to realize with disillusionment that the world championship year 2011 has started just as badly for breeding horses as the last one had ended. While FEIF made a step in the right direction by prohibiting the use of shank bits in combination with nose bands internationally for sport competitions most young breeding horses are still being presented with the entire arsenal the weapon's cabinet or tack room has to offer.

Shank bits in combination with nose bands only serve one purpose: to mask deficiencies in training or rideability problems. The first mustn't be criteria for judgement; the latter has got to be criteria for exclusion in breeding evaluations.

Breeding shows serve to judge the genetic potential of a horse. Conformation, gaits and cooperative behaviour are the result of deliberate breeding, attentive rearing and careful training. The fact that it is still allowed to tune and manipulate with technical equipment that has been prohibited for sport competitions to feign more than genetic potential and state of training actually offer is all the more appalling. At that point the purpose of breeding shows is reduced to absurdity.

Brutal riding methods, shank bits and tied up noses, saddles that are positioned too far back and sitting on the cantle are good for show. They are bad for breeding, however, because they make it impossible to objectively judge flowing and well separated gaits, the ability for relaxation, temperament in terms of joy of movement which all are pivotal for the majority of Icelandic horse riders.

Movement, rhythm and regularity, balance while going straight, a keen spirit, trust in the rider and a well regulated drive can be expected from a five or six year old horse. Of course it can be more for older horses according to their age. Instead, you can often already see frantic bolters among the five and six year old horses or those that dully perform their routines but only move mechanically, although spectacularly. The smooth, uncomplicated tolting horse that can be ridden by anybody! Scores poorly or, given the current evaluation system, won't be shown at all.

Hopefully the IPZV breeding department will vouch for more fairness towards the horses, especially the young ones and use all of its influence with FEIF in order to change regulations to be horse friendly. Breeders who expect their horses to go through the ordeal of FIZO training and tests are also responsible. Evaluation riders who travel from FIZO to FIZO like day labourers who chase their horses through the tests, who trick ride them to receive the highest scores possible cannot give an honest answer when asked about the breeding qualities of a horse.

Real progress in breeding is only possible when we accept the genetic potential of the animals unconditionally and make the appropriate selection after seeing them shown according to their age and with minimal equipment – simple snaffle bit, correctly positioned saddle, light weights, uniform shoeing, and light heel protection.

The adaptability of horses to the hard showing conditions with technical tricks and force cannot be the foundation for breeding decisions if we want to continue to market the Icelandic horse to the broad base of pleasure orientated all-round riders.

Hopefully the breeding board as well as breeders will recognize this soon because the number of Icelandic horse riders who scout other breeds and find a cooperative, versatile recreational partner is rising continuously.

Once the originally strong, convincing traits of the Icelandic horse are lost in favour of the seemingly spectacular sport and show tolters, it will be too late to change course.

Text: Ulrike Amler / Photo: private

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