

The **Tölt.Knoten** guest commentary for the World Championships for Icelandic Horses 2011

By Dr. med. vet. Gerd Heuschmann

FEIF had invited the renowned veterinarian and author of one of the most discussed books in recent years “Finger in der Wunde“(Tug of War: Classical Versus Modern Dressage), Dr. Gerd Heuschmann, as a speaker at a seminar for judges and riders in April 2010. Tölt.Knoten asked him to give his impressions of the world championships.



Thanks to my comrade-in-arms and ally of many years when it comes to training with the horse's nature in mind, Andrea Jänisch, I visited the World Championships for Icelandic horses in St. Radegund for a day.

We spent the Saturday together on the grounds of the world championships. It was my first visit to a high ranking event for gaited horses. As far as I could tell from what was happening and looking at the facilities, I have to say that the tracks for the horses as well as the stands for the spectators made a good and solid impression, from an organizational point of view.

The few classes I managed to watch – because of a variety of discussions and talks – reminded me a lot of events in the warmblood sport (FN) and western sport scene.

There were a few very impressive rides with horses that went well, but I noticed a large number of horses that moved under great tension. Even here horses with tense backs and ‘impressively’ severe bits were honoured with excellent scores. It seems obvious that the movement to praise spectacular instead of good riding is gaining ground in all disciplines of the equine sport.

A supple back that works without tension has been considered the centre of good riding since B.H. von Holleuffer in 1896. Even accepting the hypothesis that a gaited horse cannot be schooled and ridden in the same bio-mechanical balance as it is laid out in the HDV 12 for e.g.

warmbloods, a supple back should be seen as the main criterion for a well ridden horse. This also applies to Icelandic horses.

We should maybe start by analyzing the traditional and historical background of Icelandic horse riding and understanding it bio-mechanically. We can then deduce a system to school the horses consequently that would put the horses' wellbeing first and their ability and willingness to perform second.

During the many and good talks at the edge of this event, I got the impression that when it comes to questions about training their beautiful little athletes, there is a certain amount of insecurity. I believe that many riders of Icelandic horses are more or less without guidance and don't know what tradition, philosophy, school or system they should follow when it comes to the training of their horses.

Best regards

Gerd Heuschmann

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