

Holsteiner Mares and Their Stamms

Seeing the Grand Champion Holsteiner Mare in 1890, Count von Lehndorff removed his hat and said, "In front of such a beautiful mare, a gentleman should take off his hat."

Holsteiner mares have always held a very special place in the hearts of the German breeders, not only for their beauty and ability to replicate their quality in their foals, but also for the special genes that they pass on through their DNA. Science has confirmed that mitochondrial DNA can only be passed from a mare to her offspring; the stallion will never transmit this part of the breeding code.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century one particularly astute horseman from Holstein went about the task of listing each mare into a breeding register and assigning her a number. As the mare produced offspring this particular unique number was passed on to her offspring. Her daughters who in turn produced offspring passed on their dam's number, called a stamm in Germany or a stem in the U.S., to their offspring. This stamm number is listed under the horse's name on all registration papers of Holsteiners.

As generations of Holsteiners entered the breeding ranks and sporting arenas, it became apparent that certain stamms carried particularly noteworthy traits. These stamms flourished and in many cases were assigned additional identification letters to be used with the original number indicating a certain branch of a particular stamm (i.e. 104a & 104b). Since the original listing of approximately 10,000 mares, many of the stamms have died out, but those which produced well for the association flourished and became treasured members of the breeding program. Farmers took great care to perpetuate "their stamms" which had been assigned to their horses generations earlier.

Horses coming from highly successful stamms command a premium price in Holstein where breeders understand the value of these numbers and the quality that they represent. An example of this would be stamm 162 which has produced high numbers of international jumpers including three horses which participated in the Athens Olympics.