

The Breeding of Holsteiner Horses

By Wendy Webster

The area of Northern Germany known a Schleswig-Holstein is home to the central authority on Holsteiner breeding known as the Holsteiner Verband. They govern all aspects of breeding, registering and the grading of foals, mares and stallions. The Verband maintains two offices in Holstein, a breeding office in the northern city of Kiel and a marketing center in the city of Elmshorn near Hamburg. Elmshorn's facility also houses many of the stallions owned by the Verband. In the United States the American Holsteiner Horse Association (AHHA) performs the function of maintaining the breed records, registering foals and organizing horse inspection tours. The AHHA rules are largely patterned after those of the Verband, but the U.S. entity is not considered an arm of the German organization.

Stallions

In order to produce registered offspring, a stallion must first be inspected for quality and receive a breeding permit. In Germany, three times each year stallions may be presented to the judging committee. The largest and most widely attended of these inspections is the November körung held in the city of Neumunster. Approximately ninety of the two and a half year-old Holsteiner colts are selected for inclusion in the körung from a foal crop of roughly 3,000 born each year. Over a period of three days, the colts are scrutinized by a panel of judges as they are presented outside moving over a hard surface as well as on the triangle and free jumping. At the end of the three day test roughly 30 colts receive a breeding permit. At the other stallion inspections held in January and April, older colts as well as select individuals from other breeds can be presented.

The Verband recognizes the need for some outcross genetics and periodically approves outstanding individuals from other breeds. Historically the Thoroughbred and the Selle Français have crossed well with Holsteiner mares. The Holsteiner is still somewhat unique like the Trakehners in that as a rule they don't allow cross breeding from other Warmblood breeds. There have only been a few experimental exceptions made in Germany.

Once the young stallion in Germany has his initial permit he must still prove his talent in competitive sport under saddle. The stallion owners are allowed to choose between 30 or 70 day testing or private training and competing for Bundeschampionat qualification.

In America, the AHHA holds annual inspection tours with several sites devoted to stallion presentation. Stallions may be presented at two years of age and older. Stallions older than three are required to perform under saddle as well as be shown at liberty and free-jumped. Here again, any stallion receiving an initial

breeding permit also needs to achieve some success in sport (as described by the AHHA rules) in order to receive his permanent breeding license. Historically the stallions have been evaluated by multiple judges at these sites, often including members of the Verband stallion commission. It is the intent of the AHHA to follow the rigorous standards set by the Verband in evaluating gaits, conformation, temperament, pedigree and the all-important jumping ability so as to maintain consistent quality with the Holsteiners bred in Germany. Any Holsteiner stallion having been licensed in Germany can breed and produce registerable offspring for the AHHA whether through imported frozen semen or by the stallion relocating to North America where fresh semen is used.

Mares

In Holstein, regional mare inspections are held each spring and comprise primarily three year old mares but may include older mares which for some reason were not inspected previously. As with the stallions, the mares are judged and scored on seven different criteria as they are presented on the triangle. The seven scores are always given in the same order: type, topline, front legs, back legs, walk, trot, canter. Mares scoring well in their regional presentations will then be invited to an overall championship held at the Elmshorn center each June.

In the United States mares are presented on the triangle and at liberty at each inspection site. Based on the total score received the mare may then enter the stud books with a special designation of Premium or Premium Select. The AHHA recognizes that there are quality mares of other breeds which would be an asset to the U.S. breeding program and therefore will inspect Thoroughbreds and other documented Warmbloods for inclusion in its studbook.

Foals

The Verband inspects foals annually during the summer months. Given the close proximity of farms, the judges can evaluate dozens of foals at multiple sites in just a few days. The best foals are invited to regional championships where a top colt and filly will each be awarded special designation. A foal must be presented along side its dam and once its identity is properly verified it receives the Heraldik "H" Holsteiner brand on its left hip. Special attention is paid to the foals from young stallions so the Verband can assess the attributes being passed on and better apprise the breeders of tendencies being transmitted.

American born foals are also inspected during the AHHA's autumn tour. They may be shown without their dams and have the option to be branded or not at the owner's discretion. They receive two scores only: a mark for type/conformation and a mark for gaits. A foal scoring a combined total of 15 or higher is designated as premium. Holsteiners can be either bay, brown, black, chestnut or gray. High white markings on the legs are frowned upon as are white spots anywhere on the body of the horse. The naming convention of U.S. bred foals follows the same rules as in Germany. Colts are named with the first letter of the

sire's name while fillies are named with the letter of the alphabet the Verband designates to represent a particular year. In 2010 filly names start with the letter C and in 2011 they will start with a D.

The AHHA provides additional service to its members in the form of a glossy magazine published several times per year as well as a comprehensive stallion roster which provides members with detailed information on approximately 100 stallions that stand with the association each year. There is also a yearly stallion service auction, a foal futurity and an awards program for Holsteiners which compete in recognized competitions. The AHHA maintains a website at www.holsteiner.com for additional details on these services.