



This is the showjumping type the KWPN inspectors are looking for

Dutch Warmblood selection: the latest developments (2)

by Izak Hofmeyr

In the previous edition of SA Horseman, the recently retired chairman of the Koninklike Warmbloed Paardenstamboek Nederland (KWPN) Stallion Selection Committee, Jaap Werners, explained the KWPN's general approach to selecting breeding stock.

In this, the second article on the latest developments in Dutch Warmblood selection, he explains the criteria and system of selection and grading of both stallions and mares.

Mare selection

Inspection of mares takes place at a central venue, where all the animals are presented to a jury of three inspectors as a group. After the jury has had a chance to inspect the group, the mares are then presented to them one by one. Marks

are given based on conformation, after which her movement is judged, either by free jumping in the case of a jumper broodmare, or free movement in the case of a dressage broodmare.

The jumping test is made up of a series of jumps to demonstrate the animal's ability to use its body. The jumps consist of an upright, then six metres to another upright and then seven metres to an oxer. This series of fences, Werners explained, should demonstrate if the horse can lengthen or shorten the stride effectively to negotiate the fences.

The minimum height of a mare to be eligible for entry into the Stud Book is 158 cm, while for a stallion it is 160 cm.

The horses are presented on a hard surface, so that the jury can see the hooves clearly. Hooves have to be even and not too small. Excessively flat soles are undesirable, especially if they are combined with low heels. The

hard flat surface makes it easier for the jury to establish the absence of toeing in or toeing out when the animal is walked.

“At the end of the judging, the president of the jury tells the audience what marks the animal has received and why. Initially this was a difficult thing, for many horse owners did not like their horses being criticised. It is therefore very important that everything is done consistently, transparently, but strictly,” he said.

The overall score consists of 50% for conformation and 50% for performance.

Stallion selection

The stallion selection process starts when the animal is two and a half years old. This, pointed out Werners, is a tradition in Europe, although many argue that it is too young. It has one advantage, though, and that is that by the time the animal is due to start covering mares, it has already been selected or rejected.

There are three groups – the two and a half year olds, then the Grand Prix stallions, and also a group of in-between horses, usually aged four to eight. These are the horses that have been given the chance to prove themselves in competition, but were denied approval at two and a half.

Grand Prix stallions have either not been presented at two and a half, or had been deemed not good enough on conformation or performance. They have, however, gone on and proven themselves afterwards by competing successfully at Grand Prix level. They have therefore demonstrated that they do fit into the breeding goals of the KWPN.

All stallions under selection are X-rayed and fertility tested.

The two and a half year olds are started in November when between 600 and 800 colts are judged over a period of ten days. Of these, about 200 qualify for the second inspection. This takes place over three days during the first week of February. During this inspection the colts demonstrate their ability by free jumping and free movement. Of the 200 candidates, about 100 go through to the third inspection on the last day. Here they are shown in hand and judged for the last time.

The question may be asked why they are shown in hand again, after the jury has had time to see them twice already. The answer, explained

Werners, has two sides. Firstly, a young horse can change very much from November to February during that stage of its life. Secondly, between November and February, the breeding of the colt had been studied in depth. An official has gone to visit their dams and has written reports on them. All the information on the performances of the dam, the great dam as well as the great-great dam and all their offspring, had by then been made available by the KWPN administration through the Equestrian Federation. The final decision to approve or reject a colt is therefore based on its own conformation and performance, as well as those of his relatives.

Werners pointed out that having all prospective Dutch Warmblood stallions X-rayed is crucial, for it is imperative that only sound horses are used to supply the breeders with breeding material that are destined to produce the best Olympic horses in the performance test.

The 100 successful colts from the third inspection are sent to the stallion performance test. This test is seventy days in duration for the two and a half year olds (who are getting closer to three now), 21 days for the in-betweeners and five days for the Grand Prix stallions.

“The only thing we want to know about the Grand Prix stallions is whether one can handle the horse and whether they display any stable vices or.”

During the performance test, which is conducted at the Centre of the Dutch Equestrian Federation, independent riders under a professional trainer are responsible for the training of the colts.

“We continually encounter strong opposition to this performance test from people maintaining that actual competition will show as clearly whether a horse has potential. The counter argument, as far as we are concerned, is that the rider influence is too big to make this a reliable criterion – the good rider with a weaker horse will do better than the weaker rider with



Jaap Werners

the better horse. We want to establish relative potential among the candidates."

The 70-day performance test is judged by the stallion licensing committee as well as by three jump and three dressage riders. They ride the horses and provide feedback on how the horses feel. The stallions that pass the performance test are registered as approved stallions. But this is not where it ends. The next step is to evaluate the offspring of the stallions. A total of 10% of the registered foals of every stallion has to be presented to the jury for evaluation.

Foal evaluation

During August the jury again travels around the country to inspect the foals with their dams. The criteria for the foals at this point are only to establish the absence of gross heritable problems, such as parrot mouths or curbs. The jury compiles a report of their impressions of the offspring of the young stallions and publishes it in their magazine. These comments go along the lines of "not well developed for their age", or "well developed and excellent movers", etc.

The next time the young stallions come under review is when the first of their offspring is three years old, when the fillies are eligible for studbook entry and the first stallions and geldings are entered for competitions for young horses and those results are sent to the selection committee. The young stallions' own performance records as showjumpers or dressage horses are also reviewed and based on all this data the stallions are either confirmed as breeding stallions or their licences are revoked based on their own and their offspring's performance.

Breeding index

When their oldest offspring are seven years old, the stallions come under review again. At this time most of their offspring should have been in competition for long enough to establish a breeding index, in conjunction with the equestrian federation.

The breeding index is based on a figure for an individual horse in relation to the average of the population. An individual horse gets its index figure based on its own performance test and the performance of its offspring as well as its parents. The average for the population is 100, so a horse with a breeding index of above 100 is

better than the average of the population. If the goal is to improve the average of the population, then only animals with an index higher than 100 should be used. The index system gives a basis of comparison and it has the advantage that a stallion used on weaker mares will not lose marks in comparison to a stallion used on good mares.

When the stallions are 15, and their oldest offspring are about 11, they come under review again as their offspring's performances are judged. Even at this age, stallions can be deemed not to be improving the general population standard.

The co-operation of veterinarians is crucial in the whole selection process of stallions, Werners emphasised. All in all a stallion is scrutinised by a vet three times, first when it is X-rayed at the second inspection, then again between second and third inspection for a clinical examination with special emphasis on the respiratory tract (to identify possible roarers). After the third inspection a genital inspection is conducted and semen analysed.

A report on all the successful candidates, together with a report on their dams, is published. This report enables mare owners to make informed decisions on which stallion to choose for their specific mares.

All approved stallions in the Netherlands have to compete for a minimum of two years, so that results and performances can be compared. SAH



Dressage type: A distinct difference between the showjumping and dressage types have emerged over the past 25 years