

An example of a good Thoroughbred mare (Photo: Johann Theron)

The Thoroughbred as showjumper in South Africa

by Theresa Odendaal

The word Thoroughbred involuntarily brings images of racehorses to mind. If one however considers that a Thoroughbred's racing career rarely stretches beyond three to maybe four years, it places the horse in an entirely different light. Perhaps it is time to look at the Thoroughbred as a sport horse, and in this case particularly as a showjumper.

SA Horseman recently spoke to Dave Hayman, who has vast experience as a rider, trainer and dealer of showjumpers, about the role of the Thoroughbred in South Africa and indeed in the rest of the world.

According to Dave, the Thoroughbred is still one of the most popular horses used for show-

jumping in this country. The reason for this is simple. Through generations of careful and selective breeding, the Thoroughbred has emerged not only a supreme racehorse, but as a supreme athlete overall. His lightness, quickness, sharp intellect and incredible athletic ability make him the ideal horse for showjumping. This is confirmed by showjumping legend, Bill Johnson.

Many young Thoroughbreds come off the racetrack every year, available for general sale – usually quite affordably too. Between three and five years old, these horses are at an ideal age to start schooling for a new discipline. According to Dave, the “old hands” know exactly what they want.

Firstly, like a great number of the racehorse trainers, many prefer the horses that were bred and raised at some of the many stud farms in the

Karoo. It is generally known and accepted that the Karoo is the ideal raising ground for horses – promoting growth, creating strong bones and a generally hardier and healthier individual.

Secondly, there are the bloodlines. Three sires stand out as having played an enormously important role in producing A-grade jumpers over the last twenty odd years. They were Noble Chieftain, Jenez and Drum Beat. Of their progeny, Bahadur and Trocadero have been used extensively to breed Warmbloods. This is part of the kind of information that the knowledgeable showjumper looks for, apart from movement and conformation, and it just proves that bloodlines are as important to the Thoroughbred in racing, as it is when selecting a showjumper.

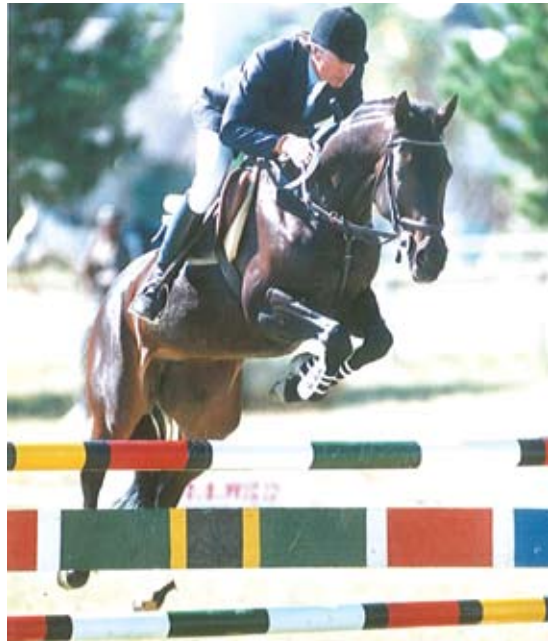
There is a general impression that the Thoroughbred tends to be fiery, nervous and generally difficult to deal with. Dave insists that this assumption is not correct. As with any breed, each individual is different. In fact, their sensitivity and intelligence, make the Thoroughbred rather easier to deal with. The famous Horse Chestnut, easily the best racehorse this country ever produced, was apparently so laid-back that a child could ride him.

It is also said by some that the Thoroughbred is more prone to disease and injury. Again not so, says Dave. Yes, it is true that the Thoroughbred is a stable horse and cannot compete with some of the indigenous breeds in the hardiness department, but as stable horse, if cared for properly, it is no more prone to anything than any other breed.

Many aspirant showjumpers believe that a large horse is needed to jump and that the Thoroughbred is simply not big enough. Firstly, size has nothing to do with ability – one only has to remember Marion Mould's famous pony Stroller (14,2 hh) that jumped in the Mexico Olympics for Great Britain. Furthermore, the South African Thoroughbred tends to be a larger horse than his overseas counterpart and although the usual height is between 15,3-16,3 hh, some have been known to measure up to almost 18 hh.

However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating and one just has to look at all the famous horse and rider combinations in South Africa over the last thirty years. These well-known horses were all Thoroughbreds:

- Gonda Beatrix – Honey Girl, Flaunt, All the Aces and Watchfire



Dave Hayman on the Thoroughbred, Smokey Topaz

- Ronnie Lawrence – Panache and Rovian
- Annelie Wucherpfenning – Storm Finch, Say Hello and Seville
- Gail Foxcroft – By and By and Time to dance
- Bill Johnson – Spun Gold and Moonlight Gambler
- Errol Wucherpfenning – Compass Line and Marble Hall
- Peter Götz – Gossiper and Noble Cut
- Rogan Asken – Eagle High and Warrior Brave
- Janie Myburgh – Dress Suit and Grey Mug
- Mickey Louw – Toreh Sign and Appraise
- Barry Taylor – Thirty Something and Sunday's Eagle

Finally, one of the features that makes the Thoroughbred even more ideal for the competitive arena, is the fact that mentally, he matures rather sooner than most breeds. In earlier years, it was more the norm than the exception to find horses as young as six, competing in A-grade. Take horses such as Storm Finch, Key Largo, Evenander, Marble Hall, Rovian, Preference and many more, who were jumping A-grade at age six. **SAH**