

Insights from the Sport Horse Evaluation Clinic by Ekkehard Brysch

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On August 7, 2004, several of the members of our breeders group attended the Sport Horse Evaluation Clinic by Ekkehard Brysch sponsored by the Brazos Association for Classical Horsemanship ("BACH"). Although it took place during the dog days of summer here in South Texas, the weather cooperated and we had a beautiful, cool day for the clinic.

An enthusiastic group of about 40 breeders, riders and general horse lovers showed up to learn as much as we could from Ekkehard, who is an internationally respected horseman. He is also the Director and CEO of the International Sport Horse Registry and the Oldenburg North America, the Executive Director of the 100 Day Stallion Tests in the United States and one of the founders of the Federation of North American Sport Horse Registries, the International Academy for Equestrian Studies and the North American Breeders Futurity.

The clinic began with a very informative lecture with question and answer sessions and then moved into the evaluation of several horses generously brought to the clinic by local breeders. In this article, I shall attempt to give you a random listing of some of the more important nuggets of information I gleaned from this clinic.

1. It is important for every young horse to be trained in both dressage and jumping, no matter for which discipline he is eventually destined. The jumping will give him good natural balance and the dressage will give him responsiveness under saddle.
2. When you take a mare to a mare inspection, take the inspector's opinion and scores as a help to you in deciding which stallion to use. No horse is perfect and you should decide which faults to try to fix in choosing your stallion. Don't expect to fix everything in one generation. No stallion can do it all. Choose the faults you want to fix in each generation so that your mares keep improving.
3. Keep your best mares and move up that way instead of selling all the fillies you produce and buying "better" mares. In this way, you will know much more about your mares and can make better and better breeding decisions.
4. If you want to breed the modern type of warmblood, it does not work to cross a light TB onto a heavy, old style warmblood stallion. You need to breed like to like. Breed the light TB mare to a warmblood stallion that has a high percentage of TB or Arab blood in him already.
5. Different breed registries have different breeding policies, but what they are looking for in mares and stallions is getting closer and closer to the point that there will soon be little or no difference between them. In Europe the registries are mere local/regional *service* organizations for breeders in their regions. In the

U.S., we should choose a registry whose service we like and not worry about who has the better horses. The horses are much the same. The goal of all the registries is to breed good horses.

6. In the U.S. we don't have the advantage that they do in Europe to see hundreds of offspring of a stallion to determine if we like what he produces and if he will cross well with our mare. But there are a number of things we can do here to help us choose the right stallion:
 - a. Go as a spectator to the breed shows – especially Devon, where there are LOTS of young horses from many stallions;
 - b. Pay attention to the rankings and/or scores given by registries at their inspections. ISR/ONA publishes detailed statistics on all the horses it inspects each year. If a stallion is consistently producing foals that score an 8.0 or above, that will tell you something.
 - c. Look closely at the scores a stallion received at his 100 day testing.
 - d. Go to as many mare and foal inspections as you can to see the offspring along side the mares to get an idea of what faults in the mare that a particular stallion can correct.
7. Some of the U.S. registries are trying to establish breeding values for the stallions here. It will take some time, but the inspectors are gathering info on the foals produced by the stallions in hope of being able to give a good breeding value for jumping and dressage.
8. In response to a question about whether any registry would accept into its books Friesians or Andalusian mares (and if not, why not), Ekkehard said: In Europe, to add new bloodlines of unapproved types such as these to the warmblood books, there must first be a test breeding program with at least 150 mares. The test programs have proven that the TB and the Arabian are compatible and acceptable in the results they produce. Some years ago, a test program was held with Standardbred trotting mares. The results were not good and so the Standardbred was not approved as a cross. There has not been a test breeding program for Andalusians or Friesians and until there is, they will *not* be allowed into the books.
9. In response to a question as to why the mare's canter is not evaluated in the inspection process, we learned that there is a very high correlation between the quality of a horse's walk and the quality of a horse's canter. So, if the walk is good, the canter should also be good. Therefore, it is not necessary to turn the mares loose to see their canter.
10. In response to a question regarding why Americans continue to go to Europe to buy horses: The quality of the horses bred in the U.S. is just as high as that bred in Europe. The difference is that one can go to Europe and within a 30 minute drive, see over 100 young horses aged 4-5 years going well under saddle. The

U.S. is so huge that people have to travel all over at great expense to see one or two at a time.

11. Here in the U.S., we are not getting our young horses under saddle. We don't have many trainers here in the U.S. who know how to properly start a young horse and the training is very expensive. So, we often see very nice 3 and 4 year old horses that are still in the pasture and have not been started. We *need* to get these horses under saddle by three. If we lose the first year, you lose the chance to keep up with the other horses. It is similar to holding a child until he is 9 years old before sending him to first grade. He will likely *never* catch up with his peers.
12. The trainers in this country who are good enough to start young horses don't want to do so. They think they must be riding and competing at FEI. So, we are left with no one to start the horses. To encourage the good trainers to see an advantage to starting and riding the young horses, we have instituted the new *Materiale* classes and the futurities. When the trainers begin to see that the 5 year old FEI dressage class pays more than the Grand Prix jumping class, maybe it will get their attention and attract their interest.
13. Remember that when an inspector is looking at a mare for approval, they are looking at her as a breeding prospect and not as a sport horse competition prospect. They will be a bit more generous in some areas and more strict in others. For example, a mare with a short neck might get a 5 on her neck in a sport horse class, because a short neck makes it hard for a sport horse to balance itself. But in a mare inspection, that neck might get a 6, because the inspectors know that the length of neck is one of the easiest things to "fix" on a foal by choosing the right stallion.
14. Inspectors are *much* tougher in grading stallions than mares, because a stallion can have a much larger impact on the breed for many generations by virtue of being able to produce so many more offspring than a mare.

All in all, it was a fascinating clinic during which everyone learned a great deal. Should you get a chance to attend such a clinic, please do so.