



A Guide to Judging the Friesian Horse

Introduction

Judging the Friesian is in essence considering the same elements of the breed as for any other horse breed. The main concept to remember is that a Friesian is a purebred horse, not a type. The world-wide studbook managed by the KFPS, is a closed book, which means a horse can only be registered if both parents are registered purebreds. The Friesian is not a performance breed but part of the classification system used by the studbook uses performance as a measure of quality. It is important for judging the Friesian to understand their history and the breeding goals.

The Breeding Goal

- A functionally and harmoniously built, usable horse that has the Friesian breed characteristics, is healthy and vital, and has aptitude to perform in sport.
- The breeding goal consists of various sub components that can be grouped as follows
 - ❖ exterior and movement,
 - ❖ use
 - ❖ vitality and health.

The subcomponents are reflected in the breeding programs by selection criteria used. The criteria are used in the linear scoring system and can be found in the table below.

History

The history of the Friesian horse is believed to trace back to the Roman Empire, about 60 A.D. where the horses of the “northern tribes” showed much resemblance with the Friesian horse as we now know it. They were used by Friesian soldiers serving in the Roman Army. A tombstone with a Friesian soldier on horseback was found near the Hadrian Wall in Northern England.

The best visual portrait of a horse of Friesian type existing in the 16th century is that in a painting from Don Juan of Austria riding an unmistakable Friesian horse called “Phryso” in the year 1568.

One of the reasons that little changed over 450 years is the passion and stubbornness of a select group of Friesian breeders.

The History of the Friesian breed is quite varied over the 2000 years of its existence. They have been influenced by the Arabian and Andalusian but not by thoroughbreds. The breed in turn has influenced many other breeds. It is a classical breed, not a modern Warmblood and this needs to be considered in judging. The breed was originally a war horse, and a knight’s horse able to carry a fully armoured knight and its battle weapons. When warfare changed the Friesian became the aristocrats’ riding horse, often depicted in paintings. It then became the rich farmer’s horse, used under saddle and in harness and for a short period used for trotting races under saddle (325 metres) and in harness. When horses were used less in transport, they were bred for work on the land, and subsequently became nearly extinct when tractors started to be used on the farms. The breed has been re-discovered, as in 1960 there were only 600 registered horses, but now numbers have reached 60,000 and they are found around the globe with about 600 in Australia and New Zealand.

Characteristic are its high headset, vertical neck and extravagant knee and hock action with an excellent extension and suspension in all gaits. It is always black, has a long mane and tail and may show feathering along the lower leg and coronet.

While its movement, which makes up 60% of its classification judging, is flamboyant, the nature of the breed is to be gentle and intelligent.

The shaping of the breed using strict rules

The Friesian breed has faced near extinction a couple of times, but has managed to bounce back strong, maintaining the ideals, loved and admired by many and meanwhile developing a sound breed for many horse owners to enjoy.

The tool that the Friesian Studbook has used for the past 130 years is the individual inspection and classification of a horse prior to entry into the Studbook Register. As like any studbook, improvement of the breed is the primary goal.

The inspections and classifications determine what each horse can contribute to the breeding standard that is maintained by the Studbook.

This inspection and classification process is called "The Keuring" and is conducted by approved inspectors and judges of the KPFS, known in English as the Royal Society "The Friesian Horse Studbook" located in Drachten, NL.

To determine whether a horse is eligible for registration in the adult register, a system called linear scoring is used. This process also indicates the quality of the horse by allocating a 1st, 2nd or 3rd premium or no premium. If the horse has a conformation fault, it might not be eligible for registration in the adult book.

The strict process of selecting and classifying has cemented a place for the Friesian in modern equestrian pursuits. Some of the approved stallions now also compete at Grand Prix level in Europe and the US. In Australia, two stallions compete currently at Grand Prix and one at Prix St George Level.

The Breed standard.

Below is given the table that is used to describe the points of a Friesian in judging and linear scoring. The standard is maintained by the KPFS (Royal Society, The Friesian Horse studbook).

More information can be obtained from the ANZFHS which is the representative of the KPFS in Australia and New Zealand. The inspections by the KPFS judging team are held every two years.

There are currently 3 members of the ANZFHS that have undergone extensive official training in judging the Friesian by the KPFS in the Netherlands.

Clinics for judges can be organised on request.

For more information, please contact the President of the ANZFHS, Hans Maes. Phone +61 267620943, e-mail fryske@ceinternet.com.au.

Component	Sub component	Ideal	Undesirable
Breed type	General	A horse that by its characteristic front, abundance of hair, black colour, and roomy, elevated gaits (knee action) makes a luxurious and proud impression.	
	Head	A small, expressive, noble head, in which the eyes are placed far apart. The nose bone is preferably a bit dished. Large nostrils. The jaws are light and the length of the opening of the mouth long. The eyes are large and clear. The small, attentive ears point lightly towards	Head too long, dull glazed eyes, convex nasal bone, Roman Nose or Arab head. Over or under-bite, heavy jaws, crude head and lacking expression. Short mouth
	Hair	The Friesian horse has an abundance of hair in the form of mane, tail, and feathers. The color of all hair is black. White marking are allowed on the face if they do not exceed 3.2 cm in diameter and are not located below the eye line.	White markings elsewhere on the body of the horse are not allowed.
	Neck	The long neck and pole together form a lightly upwardly bent line. The neck shows much elevation.	Straight or horizontal
Built	General	A harmoniously, functionally, evenly, and upwardly built horse with a long forearm and not too heavy in the body. The horse is placed in a rectangle with a ratio between front end, middle section, and hind end is 1:1:1.	
	Head/Neck	A long pole (the width of a hand) with a flowing transition to the neck. The Poll/neck connection has enough room at the throat	Short Poll Heavy Poll-neck connection No room at the throat
	Neck	The neck is long with well-developed upper muscles, which creates a light curvature. The neck comes high out of the chest and has a flowing connection with the withers.	Straight or horizontal neck. Heavy or poor-muscled neck Short and rises deep from the chest
	Shoulder	The shoulder is long and sloping (an angle with a horizontal line between 45 and 50 degrees). The angle of the chest has to be minimally 90 degrees.	Short shoulder Steep or straight shoulder "Hollow" behind the withers
	Ribs	The ribs are long and curved.	Barrel chested. Too short or too long
	Withers	The high withers flow into the back.	Poorly developed and with an insufficiently flowing connection. Too flat.
	Back	The back is strong and muscled (not tight or weak). The back has a flowing connection with the withers and loins. The length of the back is proportionate to the length of the front end and hindquarters.	Weak (sway-back) or too tight (roach backed) No flowing connections, 3 part – build
	Loins	The loins are strong (not tight or sunken), wide and muscled. They have a flowing connection to the back	Narrow Raised, poor muscled, sunken No flowing connection to the croup
	Croup	The croup is long (measured between the vertical lines of the point of the hip and seat bone). It is lightly sloping and muscled.	Short Too much slope or too straight Roof-shaped, poor muscling High tail set, too high in the croup and rounded (seen from behind) Croup with a groove running down the middle
	Gluteal	The gaskin muscle is long and	Too short and little muscling

		developed.	
Legs	Front legs	The front legs are as seen from the front placed perpendicularly with a hoof width in between. As seen from the side the front leg is perpendicular through the fetlock joints. The forearm and the cannon are long. The fetlock joints are oval and dry as seen from the side.	Knock Kneed Base narrow or wide Standing under or over Back at the knee (calf kneed) Swellings/galls at the fetlock Over at the knee Short fore-arm, short cannon bone Toeing in/toeing out
	Hind Legs	The hind legs are straight (parallel) as seen from behind. As seen from the side the angle of the hock is between 145 and 150 degrees. The gaskin is well muscled. The hock is dry, hard, and well developed (broad and deep). The fetlock joints are oval and dry as seen from the side.	Cow hocked, base narrow or wide Straight hind leg or sickle hocked (<145) Connection hock-cannon bone too abrupt, fluid in the legs, wind galls, capped hocks, curbs
	Pasterns	The pasterns are long and flexible. The front pasterns have an angle with the ground from 45 to 50 degrees. The hind pasterns have an angle with the ground of 50 to 55 degrees.	Too short or too long Upright pastern Weak, sloping pastern
	Feet	The feet are of good size and well formed, even, and befitting the horse. The feet are wider in front than behind.	Wide or narrow small feet Flat feet, low heels, wrong proportion heel to toe. Length heel 2:1 at the front, 1 ½ :1 at the back
Movement	Walk	The walk is roomy and a pure 4-beat. The legs are straight in walk as seen from the front and behind. The hind leg shows bend in the hock and is powerfully and well placed under the body. The hind leg moves the foreleg, which is moved forward with room and lots of freedom in the shoulder.	Irregular, lateral gaits Hind legs insufficiently strong Short (front leg) Going wide, dishing Insufficient flexion in the hind-leg, stiff Cocked ankles (forward bending of the pastern) Steps insufficiently under the body Base narrow or wide
	Trot	The trot is a pure 2-beat. The hind leg is powerfully and well placed under the body and shows with that much bend in the hock. The front leg shows knee action and is well placed forward. The trot is characterized by suppleness and a long moment of suspension. The horse shows with that much balance and rises in the front with an elevated neck. As seen from the front and the back the legs need to be straight.	Short and rushing foreleg. Insufficient freedom in the shoulder Loss of regularity or lack of regularity of rhythm. Pushing, slow hind-leg, on the forehand No self-carriage due to lack of impulsion Insufficient balance and elevation Sluggish movements Base narrow or wide, winging in Fast, single rhythm Stiff, no elasticity and bounce Not enough power of impulsion
	Canter	The canter is a pure 3-beat. The canter is roomy with a front leg that reaches forward and the inside leg carrying. The canter is upward and shows a long moment of suspension, lots of suppleness, and balance.	Insufficient forward going No bounding canter Cantering on the forehand Insufficient reach in front Falls on the inside leg