Friesian horse in detail

The 'Koninklijk Friesch Paarden-Stamboek is the second largest horse studbook in the Netherlands. Many Dutchmen own a Friesian horse, which is also very popular abroad. Apparently many people are taken by their exterior and their character. How do you know what is and what isn't desired in a Friesian horse? And what makes a Friesian horse exactly? The 'Friesian horse in detail' series takes a close look at every part of the Friesian horse. When it comes to movement, the general requirements are flexibility, stroke, balance and correctness. Horses must use their backs, have plenty of 'go' and show elasticity. Trot is a symmetrical, two-beat gait with suspension.

Diagonal gait with suspension

Trot

Balance, suppleness and correctness are as important to transitions as they are to trot, as is space. The horse's hindquarters support its core, allowing it to rise in its front. The horse 'sits down', as it were. This makes the forehand move more freely, more spacious as the horse becomes lighter in your hands. A trotting horse must show lots of rhythm and mustn't be overhasty.

Text: Marja Teekens • Photography: Jacob Melissen

A horse's build is contributory to its movement possibilities. A good shoulder angle and correct leg stance allow the horse to make far-reaching movements from his forehand. The term 'shoulder freedom' refers to this process of freedom of movement.

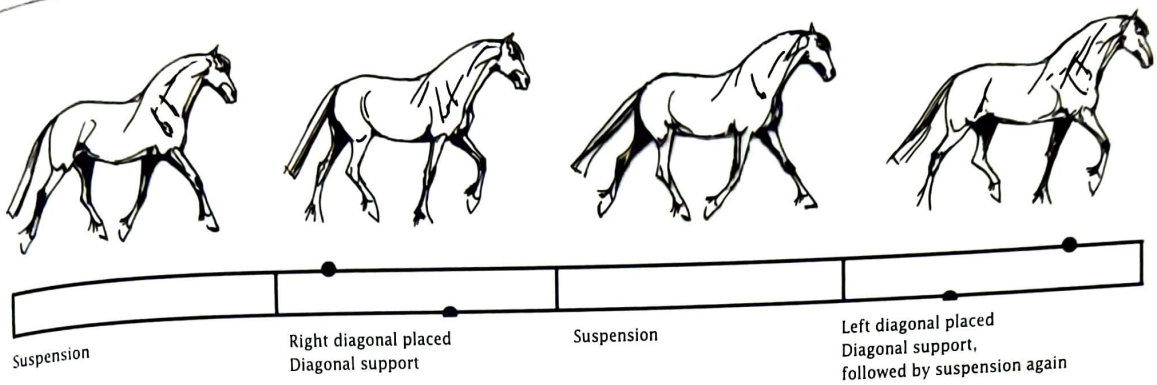
KFPS Breeding Standard

Trot is distinctively two-beat. The hind legs are placed powerfully and far beneath the horse's body and display a great deal of flexion at the hock. The forelegs display knee action and are extended far to the front. Trot is characterised by suppleness and a long moment of suspension. The horse also displays a high level of balance and a rise of the forehand accompanied with a lifting of the neck. When viewed from the back or the front, the legs must be parallel with one another.

Shoulder freedom

Shoulder freedom refers to the extend to which the horse covers ground when it advances its foreleg and not, as many people think, the extend to which the foreleg reaches forward in the air. The horse's build plays an important part. The shoulder's angle, foreleg stance and the length of the upper arm determine the freedom of the shoulder. What is more, the shoulder and the trunk are not static. Specific training can lead to more freedom of the shoulder compared to the chest. Then the foreleg strikes out more than the hind leg does (1). A sloping shoulder allows the horse to bring variation into its movements. Mechanically speaking a long sloping shoulder allows for more extension of stride in the foreleg than a short straight one. Studies show (Wim Back, Utrecht University, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine) that a sloping shoulder benefits the saddle position. A sloping shoulder keeps the saddle in the middle of the horse so the rider is not over the front legs too much. Also, long and pronounced withers prevent the saddle from being over the forelegs too much. This is a great advantage, as usually the horse's forelegs already carry three fifth of the horse's weight. If the rider's weight is added, the shoulder freedom is limited even more. If the saddle is positioned a bit further backwards due to a sloping shoulder and long withers, the horse's centre of gravity is positioned further backwards as well. The horse becomes relatively lighter in its forehand. It is now able

(1) Source:
Phryso May 2008, Instruction: 'Harnessing with Sybren Minkema', by Bart van der Hoek.



Trot sequence

Like the walk, featured elsewhere in this edition of Phryso International, trot is a symmetrical gait. Unlike walk it has a (fairly long) suspension. Trot is a diagonal gait. The left hind leg and the right foreleg form a couple, just as the right hind leg and the left foreleg do.

Trot is a two-beat gait. During a stride there are two relatively long contact moments with the ground. In a sufficiently spacious trot the hind feet prints cover the foreleg prints at the least.

to raise it and extend its forelegs. The shoulder position is contributory to the angle with the hardly visible upper arm and can therefore influence the stance of the forelegs. The angle must be open, approximately ninety degrees. The foreleg is then positioned as much forward as possible and can produce long-reaching strides.

The length of the upper arm is also vital. A long upper arm allows for longer muscles, thus more development of strength. The more a horse can bend its elbow, the better is finishes its strides. In short, extension of stride is a complicated matter. It has become clear that the extend to which the foreleg covers ground (shoulder freedom) depends on anatomical aspects such as shoulder position and length, the angle of the elbow and the length of the forearm.

Evaluation

In linear scoring trot is evaluated on the basis of four criteria:

length, impulsion, balance and suppleness. These are all maximum characteristics.

The length of stride is evaluated as 'long' or 'short', defined by the distance between the two prints of the hind feet. The horizontal movement matters here.

The trot impulsion is evaluated as 'powerful' or 'weak', defined by the impression of the hind leg and the power with which the horse places its hind leg under its body.

Trot balance is evaluated as 'balanced' or 'unbalanced'. Balance is defined by the extend to which the horse shows even strides and a carrying hind leg.

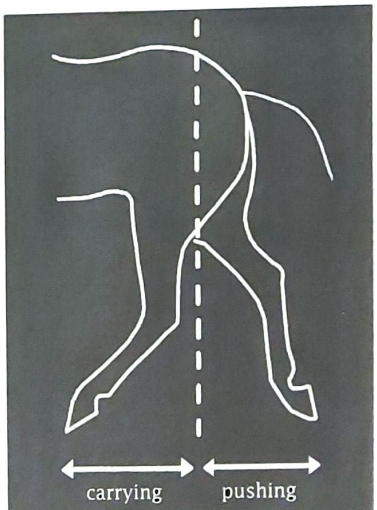
Trot suppleness is evaluated as 'supple' or 'not supple' and is defined by the extend to which the horse moves through its body.

Carrying or pushing

The Breeding Standard aims for a long-reaching hind leg placed under the horse's body powerfully and a raised forehand. To move upward, the horse must place its hind leg under its body as far as possible. The largest part of the body weight is over the forelegs, so the hind legs act as a sort of lever. The further the hind leg advances towards the withers (the centre of gravity), the more upward energy, allowing the horse to raise its front. This shows the prominence of a fast and long-reaching hind leg. Dressage calls for a longer carrying phase and a shorter pushing phase. The more stride a hind leg shows, the longer the carrying phase can last. Extending the carrying phase is an important element in training.

Optimal and maximum characteristics

In an optimal characteristic the average population score (25) or breeding value (100) is most desired. In a maximum characteristic a score above the population average (100) is desired, ideally the maximum score. The higher, the better.



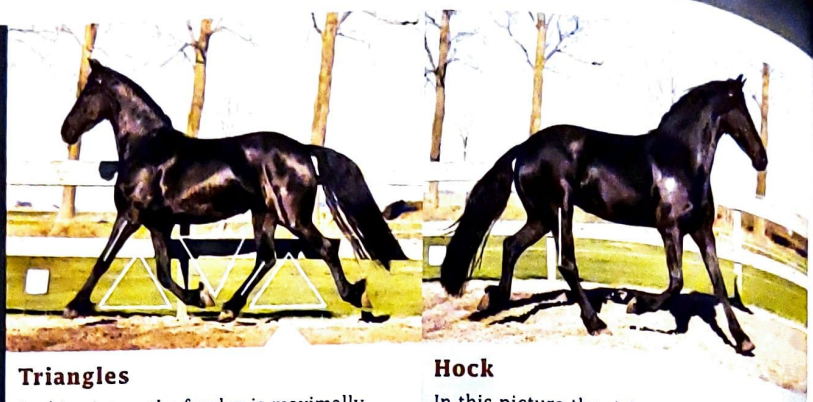
Carrying and pushing

This picture illustrates correct hind leg use. A carrying hind leg works as lever and increases the possibility of raising the forehand. A pushing hind leg stays behind too much. A horse with a pushing hind leg will not or hardly raise its forehand.

Pure trot

How do you recognise a pure trot and engaged hind legs?

- The hind leg must be placed under the horse's body optimally stretched with at least a vertical hock.
- When the foreleg is maximally stretched, the distance between the forelegs equals the distance between the hind legs. If the distance between the hind legs is smaller, the hindquarters are not sufficiently engaged.
- In a pure trot the upper arm of the foreleg advancing is parallel to the cannon bone of the diagonal hind leg.



Triangles

In this picture the foreleg is maximally stretched.

- The forearm of the foreleg advancing is almost parallel to the cannon bone of the diagonal hind leg (white lines).
- The distance between the forelegs all but equals the distance between the hind legs. As a memory aid you can draw three equal triangles in a pure trot (white triangles). Conclusion: this is a pure trot.

Hock

In this picture the right hind leg, carrying no weight, is optimally stretched. The hock must then at least be vertical. In this case the hock even crosses the vertical (white line).

Energetic hind leg

The horse starts trotting by placing the hind leg under its body energetically, with plenty of flexion of the hock. The horse uses its topline well. It raises its front end, allowing it to theoretically extend the foreleg. In this case it does not.

Suspension

Clear suspension in trot.

Foto's: Jacob Melissen

Incorrect trot

- No flexion: the horse advances the foreleg extremely without flexing it. You can almost look the horse in the hooves. Its neck and back are not engaged.
- Stamping trot: the movement are stiff and there is no freedom of the shoulder. Often the horse shows a lot of knee action. 'You can hear it go.'
- Falling apart: excessive strides, losing stroke and purity. The horse's back and hindquarters are not always engaged. The result is spectacular show trot, but undesired in a saddle horse.
- On the forehand: the horse does not move upward, but into the ground, as it were.

High croup

This horse has a high croup in trot and presses down its back. Instead of raising its forehand, it moves 'downward'. The hindquarters are insufficiently engaged.

No flexion

This horse advances the foreleg extremely without flexing it. You can almost look the horse in the hooves. Neck and back are not engaged in the movement.

Foto's: Bart van der Hoek