

Friesian Judging 101

The Relationship Between Conformation and Functional Use

By Angie DePuydt

Thanks to its willing and easy-going character, inquisitiveness, imposing and elegant appearance, the Friesian horse is an excellent all-around horse and therefore much in demand in various disciplines. In competition sports Friesians are used for dressage under saddle, show driving, driving and many other sports. Because of its gentle nature, willingness to work and reliability, Friesian horses are increasingly popular with amateur riders and families.

Within the range of the KFPS breeding goal, the objective for use is to improve the sport aptitude of the Friesian. This must be accomplished while preserving the easy, willing nature of the Friesian breed for recreational use. With consideration for a variety of disciplines the KFPS breeding goal is intended to offer sufficient room for specialization without leading to separate breeding programs.

In the past, the Friesian horse has been used for agriculture work, but as farming machinery and technology evolved, so did the use of the Friesian. Today the Friesian is a versatile horse used for pleasure riding and driving, breeding, sports or often a combination of use. The Friesian horse is often used for dressage and show driving and driving competitions. The three basic uses are:

Riding Under Saddle Show Driving Driving

Functional use and conformation are closely related. The Friesian that was once used for farm work had a much more compact build, was short-legged, standing under and had a wide chest. A wide chest enabled the Friesian to lean into the harness to develop greater pushing power. This is a common characteristic of a draft horse. For the modern riding, driving and show driving horse these exterior characteristics are decidedly much less functional. The heavier and short-legged type is still around due to many years of previous breeding practices and any change in breeding type takes many generations. For successful riding under saddle and in-harness sports a functional

build is a must. The horse must have an upward build of its body. An upward build will shift the distribution of weight during movement on to the hindquarters, making it easier for the horse to carry himself from behind.

All types must have the suppleness that enables them to swing through their bodies with a forward-moving movement that is generated in strong hindquarters so that the horse can then rise in the forehand. This capacity is important for both riding under saddle and in-harness work. In a show driving horse knee action is very desired but it must be combined with forward reach and a carrying hind leg. Too much knee action is not usually appreciated in riding and driving horses. Correct leg conformation is a must for all uses.

The Riding Horse

For a riding horse it is very important that it can effortlessly carry the weight of the rider. A horse's build is a very significant factor in how the horse moves. A correctly built riding horse uses its loins, is supple through the back and easily accepts contact.



Boaitsen I., owned by Tiffany Donnelly. Winslow Photography©.



Boatsen I., owned by Tiffany Donnelly. Winslow Photography©

The following characteristics are important for riding under saddle:

The body should have an uphill direction and should not be overbuilt. From tail to head we can observe an uphill line. For an uphill build the horse needs a long forearm, a sloping shoulder and correct conformation of the foreleg. Long pasterns are needed to provide elasticity and bounce; a light head and neck connection for easy flexing; and a sufficiently long neck with a slight vertical arch to move with sufficient elevation.

A long shoulder hugging a deep chest is important, with a flowing connection to the neck and back. The shoulder can be steep ($\pm 62^\circ$) to sloping ($\pm 45^\circ$). A horse with a steep shoulder will not have ample room for a free-moving and far-reaching trot from the forehand.

Well-developed muscles in the top line are needed to achieve rounding in the back during movement, with the horse swinging through the back with good contact and engaging the hindquarters. The muscling must have a flowing connection from the neck to the withers and advance over the back to the loins.

The withers should be well defined, long and smoothly run into the back. This improves the saddle fit and the rider's position in relation to the horse.

A rectangular shape to the body is important. The back should not be too long. A sloping shoulder combined with long flowing withers enables a relatively short-backed horse capable of ground-covering strides. The withers should have a flowing connection with the back. Well-connected loins are properly suited to transfer power from the hindquarters. Back and loins are crucial for a horse's suppleness and the capacity for self-carriage. The horse must be supple in the back.

A croup measuring $\frac{1}{3}$ of the body with an angle of 18° to 22° is desirable. In riding horses a slight slope of the croup is generally considered to be desirable. The horse should be sufficiently athletic and make good use of all joints in the

hindquarters. A short croup is decidedly undesirable. Length provides leverage, which is necessary for generating power.

When traveling relaxed, the horse should place the hind leg under its body so as to create maximum self-carriage. The conformation of the hind leg is largely defined by the angles in the hind leg. When the angle of the hock is too small (as is the case with sickle-hocks), it will reduce the supporting function of the hind leg. A wide angle and straight hind leg will raise the croup and is therefore undesirable. In the hind leg long pasterns are favored to provide elasticity and bounce.



Maxime Anne-Joke T., owned by Amberly Foster. Victoria Deemore Photography©

The Driving Horse

The main concern for a driving horse is the horse's ability to maintain its balance in front of the carriage. A correctly built driving horse uses its hindquarters and loins well, is supple and elastic in the back and easily gives to contact. All characteristics listed under the riding horse also apply equally to the driving horse.



Natasha, owned by Sally Lawing. Shoot that Horse Photography©



Natasha, owned by Sally Lawing. Kelly Butler Photography©



Rinse fan Meren-State, owned by Miley Friesians. Avalon Photography©

The Show Driving Horse

The breeding goal for show driving horses is a high-performance horse for competition. When compared to the riding horse or driving horse the show driving horse has the following characteristics:

The confirmation should demonstrate more elevation and self-carriage than in the riding or driving horse.

The neck is long and vertically built creating an elegant picture with a natural high-head carriage.

And long and sloping shoulder allows good use of the foreleg.

Show driving horses need a long foreleg with the forearm being considerably longer than the cannon bone (in proportion the cannon bone is permitted to be slightly shorter than in riding

or driving horses). Short-leggedness is highly undesirable. A long foreleg creates room for knee action and scope of movement.

The length of the back is short to medium.

The loins are the same as a riding horse, though often less developed.

The croup measures 1/3 of the body. The angle of the croup is allowed to be straighter than in a riding or driving horse.

The gaskin must be medium to long, especially in proportion to the cannon bone. From a mechanical point of view it is often more difficult to put a longer hind leg under the body. If the horse has no problems with this then the long hind leg will give some extra scope and leverage. The gaskin being longer than the cannon bone produces an increase in strength.



Rinse fan Meren-State, owned by Miley Friesians. Avalon Photography©



Uldrik 457, owned by Wes and Kylee Dunn. Johanna Faber Photography©

Reference: Judging the Friesian Horse, KFPS, 2013