

Friesians Are Making Their Mark In Working Equitation

By Julie Alonzo

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Ariën

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Working Equitation, a relative newcomer to the equestrian sports landscape, combines the precision of dressage, the partnership of trail classes, and the adrenaline rush of timed events, with cattle handling, reminiscent of team penning, added to the mix at some team events. The discipline is not just fun, it's also a great way to extend the partnership between horse and rider, as the versatility required helps encourage continued development and greater horsemanship over time.

In the sport, riders first ride a designated pattern in a 20 x 40 meter dressage court. Each level has its own dressage test, starting off in the Introductory level with simple movements such as walking and trotting straight lines and circles and culminating at the highest levels with lateral movements, extensions and collections at trot and canter, canter pirouettes, and flying lead changes.

After the dressage trial is over, competitors demonstrate their ability to successfully negotiate a variety of obstacles with finesse in the part of the competition called Ease of Handling. For Novice A levels and above, riders then move on to perform obstacles at speed. Finally, in some team competitions, riders may enter the timed Cow Trial in which they work with 3-4 teammates to cut a

designated cow from a herd and move it into a holding pen on the other side of the arena.

Each of the trials demands slightly different qualities from horses and riders, yet they are all connected by the overall goal of solid horsemanship.

In the Dressage trial, the movements are designed to illustrate the progressively greater expectations as horses and riders

move from rudimentary riding skills to those expected of the most advanced. The Introductory level is limited to walk and trot, offering a safe place for beginning riders and inexperienced horses to enter the sport and gain experience in the competition environment. Judges look for things such as the ability to maintain straightness down centerline; consistent and correct bending in circles; balance,



Kenton Miller and Zamfire

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Arjen and Cassandra

straightness and immobility in the halt; straight, smooth reinback; and correct shape and size of movements such as 20 meter circles and 10 meter half circles. They also look for impulsion and submission in the horse and the quality of the horse's gaits.

As riders move up to the Novice A level, canter circles are introduced and proper bend is evaluated not only in the circles but also in a shallow serpentine down the long side of the court, moving from the rail to the quarter line, then back to the rail, once in each direction. Novice B introduces some lateral movements in walk, lead changes through the trot, as well as a half turn on the haunches (ridden the same way as a walk pirouette, but with the back legs moving in a slightly larger circle during the movement).

Intermediate A continues to refine and elevate the expectations, with lateral movement at trot added and several simple lead changes through the walk, as well as a medium trot across the diagonal and transitions between collected and medium canter. The movement to Intermediate B is clearly marked by the advancement from simple changes of lead to flying lead changes in the canter as well as the change from a walk turn on the haunches to a proper walk pirouette.

The Advanced level ratchets up the difficulty by requiring these same advanced movements be completed entirely with only one hand on the reins, regardless of type of bit and bridle used. At the Master's level, one-handed riding is still required, but riders also add an artistic element as they ride the

dressage test to music of their choice and organize where in the dressage court they perform each movement (the Master's test specifies the movements that must be ridden and the order in which they must be completed, but the rider choreographs the actual placement and timing of each).

The expectations outlined in each level's Dressage tests carry over into the Ease of Handling trial. Introductory level competitors are prohibited from cantering, and the obstacles they may be presented with do not require lateral movement. However, judges still evaluate their performance based on the quality of bend and symmetry/geometry; the straightness, balance, and immobility at halt; the quality with which they perform reinback; and the horse's overall submission, impulsion, and quality of gaits. Novice A level riders are expected to trot through most of the obstacles but canter between obstacles, while those in Novice B and above are expected to canter both within and between most obstacles. Advanced and Master's level riders must maintain use of a single hand on the reins and may not touch their horse with their free hand (this includes using their free hand to balance on the horse's neck while jumping).

Unlike the Dressage and Ease of Handling trials, the Speed and Cow trials are timed rather than judged, per se. Many people just starting out in the sport are nervous about adding the element of speed. Pedro Torres, many times world champion in the sport offers some great advice to ensure that the introduction of the speed trial doesn't harm the overall training of the horse.

"It is important to maintain the quality and smoothness with which you



Bryan Ludens and Lark



Michael T. Photography

perform the obstacles. Do not rush your horse through the obstacles and risk the introduction of tension," Torres advised. "Instead, practice extending your canter between obstacles, returning to a relaxed, quality performance within the obstacle. In this way, the obstacle remains a place of relaxation for the horse, yet you can move quickly around the course if your horse is accustomed to extending and collecting the gaits."

"For example," he continued, "in the Parallel Post Slalom, I might usually have eight strides between each lead change. In Speed, I might instead ask

One of these purebreds, 2003 stallion Lark of Honor Bright (Wicher 334 x Jillis 301), finished the 2018 season as the #1 horse (of all breeds, 143 horses in all) competing at the Novice A level in the United States with his rider Bryan Ludens of Norco, California. Lark also earned the award for High Point Friesian competing in the sport in both 2017 and 2018.

Zamfire Peacountry Friesians (Onne 376 x Tjimme 275), a stallion born in 2007, was 4th in the nation last year at the Novice A level under the able guidance of his owner and rider Kenton Miller of Alberta, Canada. Another KFPS-



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About the Author: Julie Alonzo, President Elect of WE United, finished the 2018 season tied for #1 in the United States at the Intermediate A level with her homebred Andalusian mare CDC Memoria, above.



Kenton Miller and Zamfire

my horse to lengthen his stride a little bit, maybe seven strides instead of eight in between each flying change. It is also important to think about the lines between obstacles. By planning a more direct route, straighter lines, it is possible to cut many seconds off your ride while still maintaining the quiet quality in the obstacles."

Although many people associate the sport of Working Equitation with Iberian breeds, chiefly the Lusitano and Andalusian, the sport welcomes all breeds and all riding disciplines. Not surprisingly, Friesians are definitely making their mark. There are currently 13 purebred Friesians registered with the national governing body for the sport, WE United.

registered purebred, Yfke von Borstel (Goffert 369 x Sape 381), a mare born in 2007, took home the High Point Friesian award in 2016, accumulating points with both Cari Schwartz and Lizann Dunegan, of Oregon.

With the sport's attention to building strong horsemanship and developing a harmonious partnership between horse and rider, increasing their ability to "dance" as a team, it's no wonder that Working Equitation continues to grow in popularity.

For more information about Working Equitation, please visit www.WEUnited.us.



Top Working Equitation KFPS Friesians in 2018

NATIONAL TOP TEN

Arjen Fan 't Slyp (Feitse 293 x Reitse 272), #10 National, Intermediate B; #9 National (tie), Intermediate A

Lark of Honor Bright (Wicher 334 x Jillis 301), #1 National, Novice A

Zamfire Peacountry Friesians (Onne 376 x Tjimme 275), #4 National, Novice A

REGIONAL TOP TEN

Arjen Fan 't Slyp (Feitse 293 x Reitse 272), #5, Region 2, Intermediate B; #4, Region 2, Intermediate A

Lark of Honor Bright (Wicher 334 x Jillis 301), #1 Region 2, Novice A

Umada T.C.F. (Lolke 371 x Folkert 353), #8 Region 2, Introductory