

# *Historical Developments*

## 1879-2004 Royal Friesian Horse Studbook - 125 Years Old From The Stallion Next Door to Embryo Transplant

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**Together with the developments in the 125-year old history of the Studbook, the Stud farms also changed and adjusted to the ever-changing circumstances of an International Studbook. We're not talking about a few mares that are bred within a radius of 20 kilometers or so. Semen flies around the world, cooled or frozen, and the descendants of one stallion can be born at the end of the road, or at a breeder's farm thousands of miles away in Australia or Chili. And who can tell how long it will be before frozen embryos fly back and forth over the ocean, as we do with Holstein-Friesian cows.**

### **The Real Stuff**

A.I. (artificial insemination), Sperma Win Station (station where semen is collected), TNB (total number of sperm cells with normal form and good motility) are all familiar expressions to breeders, yet ten years ago few people knew what they meant.

In the beginning of the Studbook, a mare just went to the stallion when she was in heat, and she was bred in the old fashioned, natural way. The stallion would normally stand at stud with his owner and he serviced the mares that were within "walking distance." At the start of the 20th century, Approved stallions often belonged to a stallion association, and the stallions would stand at stud at a stud farm. Friesland, and for a short while, Groningen and Drenthe as well, had several stallion associations. In 1885 the "Stallion Association Doniawerstal" purchased the stallion Graaf Adolf 21 and put him at stud in Huisterheide, where Studfarm "De Oorsprong" (the Origin) was established not long afterwards. The number of stallion associations declined during World War I, yet the stallion keepers started to operate more independently, and even after World War II, new stallion associations were established. Stallion Association "Kollumerland and Surroundings" (established in 1947) was active far into the 1980's. Over the years, eighteen Friesian stallions have been put at stud in the region by this association.

### **Innkeeper**

Often a stallion keeper was also an innkeeper. The stud farm in Nijtap was also a cafe'. The Obscurant-son, Wouter 162, stood at stud at the stud farm/cafe' in downtown Akkrum and the influential stallions, Ritske perferent, Tsjalling and Wessel perferent, owned by Anne Jippes Bouma, were stabled behind the cafe' near the bridge in Oldeholtwolde for years. In later years stallion keepers also did business as horse traders.

After World War II most of the Friesian stallions stood at stud in Friesland. Farmers still used horses to work the fields. Breeding was often done in between work on the farm. Frits de Jong from Tjerkgaast, stallion keeper in the new era, remembers that as a young boy he had to take the mare to the stallion before work began for the day. Sometimes he would saddle the neighbor's mare and ride to the stallion. He would leave home at 8:00 a.m. and return at 3:00 p.m.

### **Rules and Regulations**

Today stallion keepers must comply with many requirements, from the layout of a laboratory and the quality of the sperm to the maximum allowed number of breedings and more. But don't think everything was done off the cuff in those first years of the Studbook! Stallion keepers were regulated even in those days. In 1901 the first "Horse Breeding Law" became effective. An Approved stallion couldn't be kept at the same location as a stallion that wasn't approved. This law was revised in 1918 and eventually led to the Horse Law in 1939 during World War II, which required owners to apply for a permit to keep a stallion. The implementation of the law became the responsibility of the various Studbooks. It was illegal to keep stallions of a different breed on the same cadastral plot of land. For convenience's sake, Friesians and Bovenlands (northern horses) were counted as the same breed (warmblood), but the Belgian was considered another breed (coldblood).

On the Studfarm of Wiebe van der Vlucht in Nijtap, the cold blood stallion had a stall in the streetcar shelter. It stood only ten meters from the main buildings, but happened to be a different cadastral plot. Maybe the law came into being to prevent the violation of another law - that is, the ban on crossbreeding.

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## From The Stallion Next Door, cont.

### Fifteen Kilometers

Another law came into place to protect the fair entrepreneurial position of the stallion keepers. It was illegal to put a stallion up for stud within a radius of 15 kilometers of a Studfarm. This led to animated discussions and heated differences of opinion. Did it mean 15 kilometers over the road, or did it mean a bird's eye view? Who could, or could not, use a stallion in a particular area was still an issue in 1976, when Frits de Jong wanted to put up his stallion, Franke 251, for stud at his home in Spannenburg (now called Tjerkgaast). At a meeting (which he was not allowed to attend) it was discussed whether a new stallion could be allowed in this area. Fortunately, the Holtrop Family from Scharsterbrug retired from breeding, and de Jong got the approval to keep his stallion at home.

### The Beginning of A.I.

The approval for Frits de Jong was probably the last time such a problem occurred. Even as early as 1971, the University of Utrecht (officially the Veterinary Faculty, Veterinary Obstetrics Clinic, A.I. Department) began artificial insemination. This would increase the reach of the Friesian stallions tremendously in the following years. Drs. W. van der Holst, one of the board members of the Studbook, was in charge of the development of an A.I. program for Friesian horses. By this time, there were Friesian mares all over the Netherlands, but often no Friesian stallion available, especially in the southern provinces. Kasper 229 had bred at the Toonen family farm in 1969, but not to enough mares. The next stallion to arrive south of the big rivers didn't arrive until the end of the '70's.

### The Importance of Utrecht

Wybren 236 (Ritske x Meint) was the first stallion selected for the A.I. project in Utrecht, but he turned out to be sterile. Thanks to Anne Bouma, Wessel 237 immediately replaced Wybren, and the program could proceed.

During the first few years, Van der Horst travelled around the country himself. "Sometimes I drove 800 kilometers (almost 500 miles) per day. First, mainly in Overijssel and Gelderland, but the progressive breeders in Friesland wanted their mares inseminated by Wessel too," he remembers. Wessel stayed in Utrecht for three years. It was the beginning of a fantastic career, that eventually led to his preferent status. Since that time, there has been a Friesian stallion at stud in Utrecht every year; a total of 12 stallions in 34 seasons. When Falke 291 stayed at the Faculty in 1991, a beginning was made to send the semen to the stud farms via a courier service. The first "satellite station" of Utrecht in Friesland arrived on the scene at the home of Falke's owner, Rudy Rienstra.

### Opposition

All this took some pioneering, because many breeders had a problem with artificial insemination. Of course, a straw couldn't

compete with live coverage?!

Since 1992, when Reitse 272 Preferent, arrive in Utrecht, the use of A.I. has increased dramatically. Andries Zandee and his co-workers have trained stallion keepers and their assistants to inseminate properly. At the stud farms, the supervision of the mares got better and better. Slowly, the old-fashioned stallion stations were transformed into stud farms, where mares were bred only by A.I. In the beginning, they still kept ONE stallion for live coverage to satisfy those breeders who only accepted "the real stuff" for their mares. One of those stallions was the famous Hearke 254 Preferent. Sybren Bagma still likes to tell the story that, until his death in 1994, the famous show-driving horse and multiple Dutch Champion in the Sjees, absolutely refused to use the "phantom." It was only the old fashioned way for Hearke. At this moment, three of the 68 stallions that breed in the Netherlands do live coverage: Nykle 309, Rypke 321 and Olrik 383.

### To Freeze or Not to Freeze, That is the Question

The fact that we now can mail semen all over the world has greatly increased the accessibility of the stallions. One can order semen in the morning in the north, inseminate the mare in the afternoon in the south, and vice versa. However, fresh semen has a short shelf life. It was not suitable for sending overseas. The death of a stallion would automatically be the end of the available semen. But science didn't rest on their laurels.

The Universities of Utrecht and Holstud in Stroe, began freezing the semen of Friesian stallions. Not every stallion is suitable for this process, even if the quality of his fresh semen is excellent. Reitse didn't have a problem in this regard, and it didn't take long before his semen crossed the ocean, first to Harry Witteveen in Canada. Now, only ten years later, frozen semen of many stallions is available. This increased tremendously the possibilities for breeding with Approved stallions abroad. It also keeps the semen available after a stallion has passed away.

### Freezer Foal

If the mare came to the stallion (for live cover) or the stallion came to the mare (in a straw), the goal was always the birth of a healthy foal. Yet again, science made the next big leap. It became possible to inseminate a mare and then take the embryo out of the womb and transplant it into a surrogate mother. Just like semen, an embryo is very vulnerable as soon as it is taken out of its natural environment. If at all possible, the transplant into the surrogate mother must take place within a few hours. The surrogate mother must also be in the same cycle-phase as the donor mare. To achieve this, a donor mare often needs several potential surrogates, and in the end only ONE will be suitable to receive the embryo. This makes the whole procedure difficult and expensive, but yet again, the possibilities increase with the process of freezing.

continued on page 51

## **From Stallion to Embryo Transplant**

continued from page 26

A good embryo will be frozen, and then, with perfect timing, thawed and inserted in the surrogate mother.

In 1999 the first Friesian “freezer foal” was born. Her name is Yskâld Wûner ET (sire: Fêde) (Ice Cold Miracle). Her breeder is the current FPS Chairman Jaap van der Meulen. Here cold adventure didn’t do her any harm, because she became star in 2002 when she was 3 years old.

The possibilities are here, but it is so expensive, that we don’t expect it will become a common procedure any time soon.

But it gives us a picture of the developments during 125 years of Friesian breeding within the FPS.

