

Preparing Your Adult Friesian for the Inspection



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The most important item to remember when you decide to take your horse to the Inspection is that no matter the results in the end, you will still be bringing home the same horse that you loved and cherished from the very beginning. Don't let a judge's critical eye, and don't forget we pay them for their opinion, diminish the grace and beauty that made you fall in love with the Friesian horse in the first place. The inspection is merely a medium to tell you what your horse is showing in conformation, which can't be changed, and movement *in that very moment*. The judges can only judge on what is put in front of them for those 8-10 very short minutes. We first have to remember that they are living, breathing animals with flight instincts and they're horses...anything can happen. Here are a few helpful hints on how to prepare your horse for the big day.

Should your horse go this year or wait a year?

We all know that the three-year-old year gives our horse the first shot at the coveted "Star" predicate. However, not all three-year-olds are ready to be inspected in the fall of that year. Friesians seem to need a lot more time to mature physically and it is ALWAYS okay to wait. Of course, there are the instances of wanting to sell the horse, in which case having

"Star" on their papers is always a plus, so that may play into your decision. There are some requirements that may prevent your horse from being judged:

- Height at the withers minimum 1.56m (mares),
1.58m (stallions and geldings)
- Disqualifying white
- Lameness

In either case, stand your horse up where you can really see the whole horse. Hopefully, the horse has been out with pasture mates for most of its life, not only for the social aspect, but also for the benefit of physical exercise (not being restricted to a stall), learning coordination and gaining natural muscle growth. You may have some superficial cleaning up to do before you can start your evaluation. Critique the legs; are they defined/tight/dry around the joints and tendons with no abnormal bumps or growths? Good quality hooves? Is the butt/hip much higher than the withers; is there a growth spurt happening? Does the body have a lot of angles and sunken in spots along the neck and back? Does the horse look more like a young adolescent or mature adult? All of those factors need to be taken into consideration before starting the physical training of the horse. The body may not be able to handle the stress of forced exercise.



Turnout and playing with pasture mates improves conditioning and coordination. (Photo credit: Jamie Van Linn)

When is an ideal time to start training or conditioning your horse?



Is he ready? Who knows, but the conditioning and preparation has already begun. (Photo credit: Scott Kelnhofer)

In terms of behavior and respect for the handler, it is never too early. While you want the horse to be lively in the ring and strut their stuff, the runners really appreciate a well-behaved horse. A horse that stands still for the inspection is much easier

to judge than one that is trying to nibble on the lead, won't stand still or kicks at the judge. Not to mention, if the horse is scared it will affect the movement in a negative way. Taking your horse on field trips is a good way to get them not only used to the trailer, but also comfortable going to different places. We all know how a horse can act completely different when they are away from home. Going out ahead of the inspection is a good way to see how your horse will react and trouble shoot some ground manner issues. Another important factor in preparing your horse is to fit them in a bridle with a bit. The bit will take some getting used to and you want your horse to have the time to be comfortable with the new tack.



An appropriately fit headstall that is also comfortable for the stallion. (Photo credit: Franke Photo)

Practice hand walking your horse with the bridle; halt and walk and put some pressure on their mouth with the bit to get them used to the feeling. While your horse should be responsive to your commands, it is not necessary for you to practice running/trotting with your horse. There is a reason professional runners are hired. They know what they're doing and do the best job possible.

How much physical training and when to start?

Especially when dealing with a young horse that has had very little forced exercise, two to three months with three to four days a week seems to be sufficient. Damage can be done to

Conditioning and Training Aids

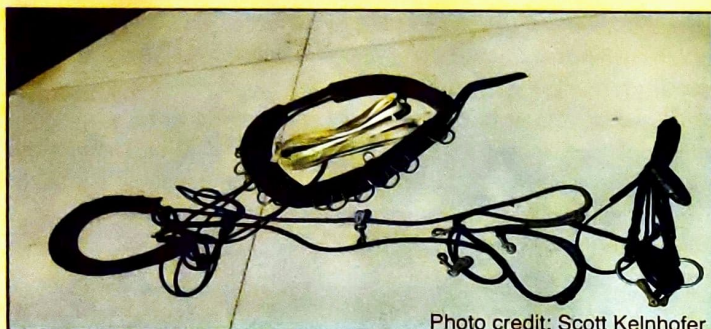


Photo credit: Scott Kelnhofer



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There are a variety of training aids available to condition and train Friesians or any breed of horse. Some are extremely effective, some not so much. In nearly all situations, these training aids are most effective in the hands of professionals. Misused, some systems can potentially do more damage than good. One such system that we have found to be effective is the Pessoa system. Again this system is most effective when placed in the hands of a professional. What is appealing to this system? The Pessoa system engages the "motor" of the horse, their hindquarters. Yes, that's what drives the horse, the hindquarters and while the front is flashy, the power comes from behind. Included are photos of a Pessoa system, surcingle and headstall, both off and on the horse. As the collection lays on the ground it looks complicated and yes when properly placed/fit on the horse, it is that complicated. Bottom line, there are aids that can potentially improve your horse's condition and performance, just be advised that some aids, in the right hands, are more user friendly and effective than others. Good luck!!

the tendons, joints and growth plates with too much, too quickly and it will have lasting negative effects on the horse for the rest of their life. If you are not comfortable introducing tack and lunging your horse, please consider hiring a professional. The money spent will be well worth it in the long run as a good foundation on a young horse is invaluable. Lunging free of tack (Pessoa system, side reins) is a good way for the horse to gain confidence in "finding their feet." While we know they walk, trot and canter in the fields, it is much different while going around in a circle and having a line attached. Once they have the hang of all three gaits, you can introduce a surcingle and a bit...again, I highly suggest having someone who is familiar with starting young horses be present until you and your horse are acquainted with these new circumstances.

There are many ways to "fit" a horse for the inspection, but having a horse that is willing to go forward in the walk and trot is your best bet for success. Use transitions within those two gaits, similar to pushing in the clutch on a car where the horse slows, but doesn't break and then accelerates to really push off the hind end and gain the strength to move "up-hill." The triangle used in the inspection provides "corners" that give the horse the opportunity to "push off," therefore allowing the judges to really see the horse trot. The horse gets two laps around the triangle at a trot giving the judges plenty of opportunity to see the gait at a trot. The judges will always score the best trot that they see.

What is the judge looking for?

In a very condensed summary, they are looking for a black coat, substantial hair (the forelock should be long enough to reach between the eyes), upright neck, uphill build, a proportionate body (three equal parts), long forelegs and a hoof that will support the body of the horse. After looking over the conformation, they go to the walk. The horse should be relaxed, but still have activity in the gait and the hind hoof should at least step into the front hoof print. It should look like the hind hoof is going to bump the front hoof out of the way. An "overstep," where the hind hoof surpasses the front hoof print, is always higher scoring. Then onto the trot - they look for the horse's body to be relaxed and swinging, while engaging the hind end, which gives them the uphill look. The hind end is where the energy comes from, and allows the front end to lift and the front legs to naturally extend. A horse with conformation and movement above average will earn the "Star" predicate.

Bottom line!

No matter the results everyone involved in this experience hopes for a positive outcome for you and your beloved horse! The real bottom line:

Enjoy your horse no matter what the papers say!!