

FRIESIAN HORSE IN DETAIL



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. Walk is distinctively four-beat. The horse alternately raises and places one leg. Correctness, stride and expression are part of the linear scoring form.

Relaxation vital to assessment Walk

Their ability to move forward makes horses useful animals for humans. Therefore, the quality of the gaits is very important. The three basic gaits are walk, trot and canter. The Friesian horse's walk is assessed in-hand, under the saddle or in the harness. Correctness, stride and expression are keywords.

Text: Marja Teekens • Photography: Jacob Melissen

The gait requirements are related to the horse's purpose. Dressage riders want striking and elevated gaits, while to owners of trotters and thoroughbreds speed in respectively trot and gallop is essential. Apart from these specifics the horse must also show general requirements, such as flexibility, stroke, balance and correctness. It is required to use its back, have plenty of 'go' and show elasticity. The term 'over the back' is often used, but hard to define. In his book 'The Dressage Horse' (Dutch: 'Het dressuurpaard') Dirk Willem Rosie described the mechanism enabling a horse to move over its back. Rosie compares it to an Indian bow. The tendon keeps the bow on a base tension. He compares the tendon

to the horse's underline muscle groups, such as the pectoral and abdominal muscles. When the horse tightens these muscles, the back bulges slightly, allowing the horse to relax its topline muscle groups in the neck and back as well as its lumbar muscles. This loose topline allows the horse to easily lower its head, which further encourages a loose back.

Moreover, the loose and somewhat convex back allows maximum stride for the hind legs. 'Over the back' is not a breeding characteristic. It refers to the way the horse is trained and shows itself. 'Going over the back' is therefore desired in horses. The horse's 'go' is the extend to which it thinks forward and is willing to perform. The horse must use its body

well. In bending and extending, for example, the horse must show elasticity, stroke and balance. The movement consists of a stance phase and a swing phase. In the stance phase the leg touches the ground. In the swing phase it is moved thus not touching the ground.

Walk

Walk is a four-beat gait. The horse separately raises and places each leg. The order is left back, left front, right back, right front, left back et cetera. Walk is also a symmetrical gait. The left foreleg and hind leg mirror the right foreleg and hind leg. The feet touch the ground with regular intervals. There is no suspension. When the beat is off, the horse does not divide its steps equally. Ideally, the advancing hind hoof oversteps the spot where the previously advancing front hoof touched the ground. The hind leg propels the foreleg. This means the foreleg is lifted only when the hind leg is placed again. This way the hind leg can pass the fore foot's print. This timing is of essence for

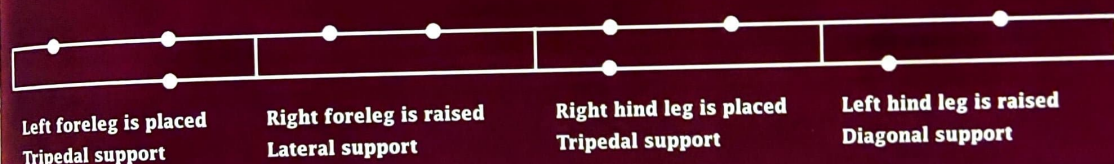
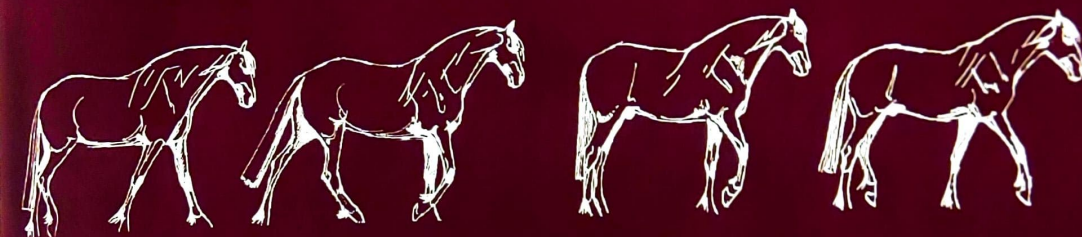
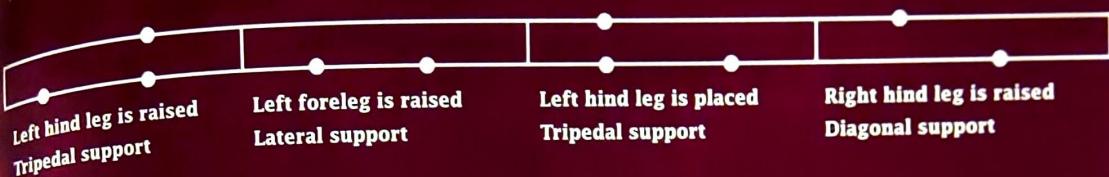
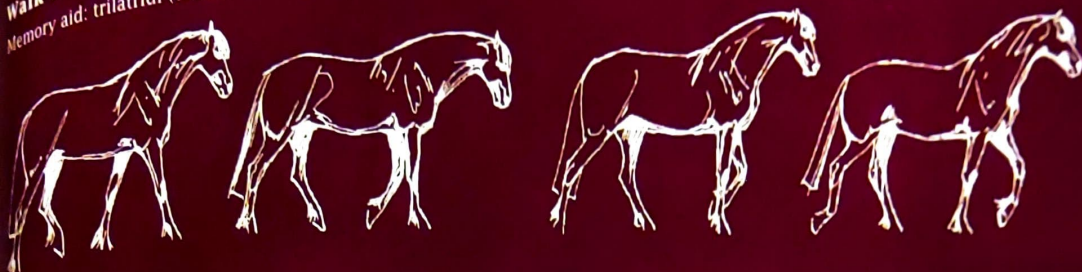
KFPS Breeding Standard

Walk is long reaching and distinctively four-beat. Seen from the front and back, the legs are parallel with each other. The hind legs display flexion at the hock and are placed powerfully and far enough beneath the horse's body. The hind legs propel the forelegs, which are extended and display plenty of flexibility at the shoulder.

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Walk sequence

Memory aid: trilateral (twice) referring to the phases



this gait's purity. Furthermore, it is vital for the horse to use its head and neck freely.

Linear scoring

In linear scoring, in order of importance, correctness, length of stride and expression are scored. Walk correctness refers to the direction in which the horse places its feet. The extremities are 'toed in' and 'toed out'. It's an

optimal characteristic, as ideally the score is in the middle. The correctness is evaluated from the front. The stride is scored by looking at the foreleg in walk. It is described as 'short' or 'long'. It's a maximum characteristic, as ideally the stride is long. Stride is evaluated from the side. Does the horse's hind leg overstep the forefoot's print? The criterion is approximately one foot print behind the forefoot's print.

Expression describes the manner and the degree to which the horse extends its hind legs in walk. It is scored as 'weak' or 'powerful'. In a powerful walk the horse places its hind leg under its body energetically. 'Expression' is a maximum characteristic, as a powerful walk is desired. The flexion of the hock is evaluated from the side. A white line marks the flexion of the hock in the bottom picture of 'Walk in pictures'. •

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.

Incorrect walk

- When the hind leg advances almost simultaneously with the foreleg on the same side, it is called pacing. In gaited horses such as Icelandic horses pace is an accepted and even desired gait. In Friesian horses it isn't. This movement is often associated with extreme overstepping. Pace can sometimes be seen in horses with low muscular development, inadequately trained horses and strained riding.
- Too short as well as too long a distance between the horse's hoof prints in walk is undesired. A very stretched walk with a turning hind hand often indicates a lack of strength.

Walk in pictures

Tripedal support

This horse shows tripedal support (please refer to 'Walk sequence'). It has just placed its left hind leg and its left foreleg is in the swing phase. The walk appears to be a bit inflexible.



Diagonal support

The horse in diagonal support. The left foreleg swings forward, while the right hind leg has just been raised for the swing phase. The horse shows more back use than in the first picture.



Hind leg propels foreleg

The hind leg is raised and advanced. The hock flexion is clearly visible (the white line). The hind leg propels the foreleg that has just been raised to be advanced (the black arrow). The raised foreleg allows ample stride for the hind leg. It oversteps the forefoot's print. The horse shows ample flexion of the hock, but the strides seem short.

