

White Markings in Friesians

What Do They Mean?

By Allison Thomas

To the general public, the word "Friesian" brings to mind a big black horse with lots of flowing hair. The image of a big black warhorse is what made many people fall in love with the Friesian breed in the first place. Books and movies about "Black Stallions" and "Black Beauty©" have imprinted the picture of the perfect black horse for many people. What happens, then, when that perfect black horse has a white mark?

In the Friesian world, white marks are frowned upon as a defect. A foal born with a white mark - particularly a "non-allowable" white mark, is a disappointment for most breeders. We research and plan each breeding with the utmost of care, investing a huge amount of both time and money, hoping for the foal to be exactly what we dreamed of. After 11 long months of waiting, sometimes despite all of our precautions, the foal that arrives is not quite as expected.

In a breed that is prized for its beautiful black hair, one that has been bred exclusively for solid black horses for many decades, some people wonder how white marks can still show up.

The genetics of white marks in horses is complicated and still only marginally understood by researchers. A study published in 2013 made some ground in locating the genetic markers for white marks in the Franches-Montagnes breed of horse and may eventually help in identifying the markers for white marks in other breeds, but currently there is no way to know for certain when or where a horse may pass on a white mark to a foal. The KFPS does track data regarding white marks in Friesians, and the percentage of white marks that each approved stallion has produced is included in the KFPS Stallion Information document made available by the registry each year. Some bloodlines certainly produce white more often than others, but the reality is that any Friesian could produce a foal with a white mark.

Before getting in to the ramifications of white marks in Friesians, first we must establish what is an allowable white mark versus what is a non allowable white mark. The KFPS rules state that the rules for white markings on mares and geldings are as follows.

ALLOWED WHITE MARKINGS

- White markings on the face (star) if above the eye line and with a maximum diameter of no more than 3.2cm. Some scattered white hairs above the eye line are also allowed
- For mares: White (spots) on the soles of the feet

For mares and geldings, an allowable white mark means that they follow all the same rules as a KFPS Friesian with no

white. They may be presented as adults for entry into the main studbook, they can be evaluated for and awarded premiums, earn their Star status, and for mares they have the potential to be considered for Crown or Model if they are good enough. A KFPS Friesian with a small white star is not penalized for it.

UNALLOWED WHITE MARKINGS

- White markings on the face below the eye line
- White markings on the face larger than a diameter of 3.2cm
- White markings on the body (roan)
- White markings on the legs, including the hoof wall

WHAT DO UNALLOWED MARKINGS MEAN?

White marks anywhere on the body, or on the face but larger than a small white star, are considered "not allowed". However, this does not mean that the horse cannot be registered. A KFPS Friesian with non-allowable white marks can still be registered in the Foalbook. They are not eligible for premiums or for entry into the main Studbook - they will stay in the Foalbook for their entire life.

WHITE MARKS FOR APPROVED STALLIONS

Only in exceptional cases (i.e. outstanding quality regarding selection criteria) can stallions with acceptable markings be admitted to the Second Viewing. If such a stallion is accepted into the Studbook the marking(s) will be listed on the assessment report. More so for stallion candidates than for mares or geldings, white marks of any kind are judged very harshly. Only once in recent memory has a stallion been selected for approval that had a white mark.

WHITE MARKINGS FROM INJURIES/EXTERNAL FACTORS

In the event that unacceptable markings are the result of external factors which can be confirmed and substantiated by (veterinary) statement, these will not stand in the way of premiums and Studbook entry. It is at the discretion of the KFPS to weigh and assess each case.

In short, if your Friesian has a white mark that is the result of an injury, follicle damage, or some other external factor, be certain to document it extensively. Veterinary documentation may be required, but in general, if the horse was not born with the white mark, it will not impact their ability to earn premiums, Studbook status, or higher predicates.

EXAMPLES

With these rules in mind, presented here are a few examples of Friesians with white, and how that white may impact them.

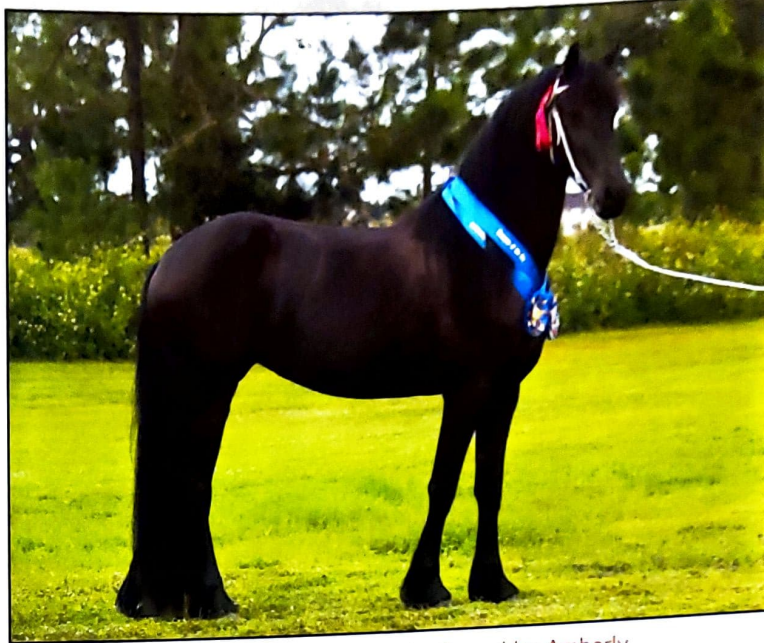
A Friesian With a Small White Star

A small white star may not be what everyone wants in a Friesian, but a KFPS Friesian with a small star will find that it does not change the horse's future in any meaningful way. A mare with a small star can go on to do anything a solid black mare can do. She can earn premiums, become Star, Crown, or even Model. Her foals will be fully registerable with no impact on their papers. While it may be wise to consider stallion matches for her with a lower than average rate of white marks, the fact that she has white does not mean she will pass this on to her foals. A gelding with an allowable star is also a non-issue. In short, these Friesians can achieve any predicate within the KFPS that a Friesian with no white can achieve. For a stallion with a small white star, it will make it harder for him to be selected for stallion approval. This can be a disappointment for a breeder. However, considering how rare it is for a stallion to be selected for testing, the likelihood of any colt being approved is incredibly low, whether they have a few white hairs or not. A stallion with an allowable star can still be evaluated at the keurings, and earn his Star status if he is good enough. Overall, a small white star will not impact the future - or the value - of a KFPS Friesian.

Kobi (Wicher x Ids), owned by Allyson Gagnon. Photo by Hanah Fields-Austin©



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Maxime Anne-Joke T. Star (Sake x Teunis). Owned by Amberly Foster.

A Gelding or Stallion with a Large White Star, Snip or White Foot/Feet

When a colt is born with non-allowable white, it can still be registered in the main Foalbook. He is not eligible for a premium, or to advance to the Gelding/Ruinbook as an adult, or to be considered for stallion approval. However, a colt with white can still be an excellent sport horse and have a positive impact on the KFPS Friesian. He can earn his Sport predicate via dressage or driving, which contributes to both his sire's and dam's offspring records. He can also perform ridden or driven IBOPs at a keuring, providing qualifying scores for his dam's Performance Mother (Prestatie) predicate and adding valuable information to the KFPS database.

Quintus OTH (Wybren x Anton), 78 IBOP. Owned by Marc and Erin DiLeo. Photo by Marc DiLeo Photography©.





Rykaard van Kelnhofer, Sport (Andries x Olof). Owned by Scott and Shelley Kelnhofer.

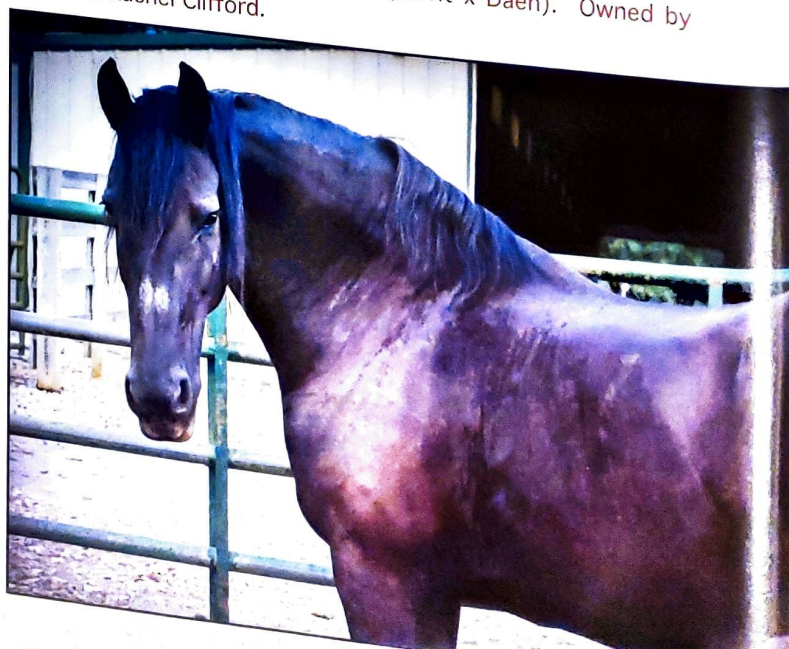


Ophelia P (Wybren x Wander). Owned by Amy Billings.

A Friesian with White Marks from Injury

It is devastating for any horse owner to see their horse injured, and with Friesians, an added stressor can be when white hairs grow in at the site of an injury. When hair follicles are damaged, be it from a cut, a rub, or something as simple as a bug bite, sometimes that hair will come back in white rather than its original black. In a case like this, it is important to document what caused the white mark. Veterinary documents are helpful to have to support your case. Each case will be judged by the KPFS on an individual basis - however, a white mark caused by external forces will typically not prevent a horse from achieving predicates or advancement in the Studbook.

Jada f/t Friesian Connection, Star (Jorrit x Daen). Owned by John and Rachel Clifford.



A Mare with a Large White Star, Snip, or White Foot/Feet

A Friesian filly, born with non-allowable white, can be registered in the main Foalbook, the same as if she had been born with no white. Where things differ for her is that she will remain in the Foalbook for her entire life. She is not eligible to receive a premium at keurings, to advance to the main Studbook, or to earn Star, Crown or Model premiums. This does not mean that she has no value! A good mare is a good mare, regardless of white marks. If bred to an approved stallion, her foals will be in the main book just like she is. If her foals have no white or allowable white, they can advance to the main Studbook and earn premiums and predicates. If her foals do exceptionally well at keurings, a mare who is Foalbook because of white can still earn her Preferent predicate, and if her foals compete and do well in sport, she can earn the Performance Mother (Prestatie) predicate. And much like a gelding or stallion, a mare with non-allowable white can still perform a ridden or driven IBOP test at the keuring. She can also go on to excel in sport, and has the ability to earn the Sport predicate based on her own merits.