Stallion Inspection – Trakehner Style

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from “The Warmblood Magazine” Vol 2/Issue 3 2001; all photos by Peter Richterich

The 200 champion stallion: King Arthur by Buddenbrock out of Konsula by EH Consul

The Trakehner breed has a special place amongst Germany’s warmblood registries. Since all other breeds are more or less restricted to a state and several of them still have state studs that are partially financed by the government, more stallions can be approved and sent to the performance tests in order to find a good crop at the end. But the Trakehner breed operates nationwide without federal funding and a tough and strong selection is the only way to ensure a consolidation of the top horses. The, with approving only a small number of stallions each year, the Verband helps to improve the breed to a large extend. The Trakehner population is relatively small. Some 4,500 mares are registered in either the main stud book or the studbook and another 350 stallions, Trakehners, Thoroughbreds, Arabians, and Anglo Arabians, make up the Verband. The Trakehner is the only warmblood breed worldwide with a “closed” book, only allowing quality TBS, Arabians and Anglo Arabians, but no other warmbloods into the breed. This is due to the century long history of the Trakehner breed.

Originated in the East Prussian stud farm Trakehnen, which was founded in 1732 by Friedrich Wilhelm I, this special breed always was the most refined and elegant of all warmbloods. In 1944, over 10,000 horses were living in Trakehnen and its surroundings with a strong and very successful private East Prussian breed in the local stud farms. By the end of the Second World War, Trakehnen lay deserted. It is hard to imagine what happened in the last days of the world’s most famous stud. Thousands of people, horses, cattle and belongings were gathered and sent on the legendary trek that was a last chance out of a sunken East Prussia. With the red army coming closer, there was seldom time to stop. Pregnant mares carried great loads and pulled the coaches.
Of the unbelievable number of horses that once lived in the “paradise of horses”, only a handful survived the most certainly hardest performance test in history. Trakehnen and its horses seemed to have been lost forever. It is only because of great personalities that were totally committed to saving this great treasure that the Trakehner horse survived. The most important stallions were lost during the trek, some shot by the army, several captured by the Russians and brought to Kirov, where they helped to establish one of today’s most powerful sport horse breeds.

Selection in Trakehnen had always been hard and without compromises. Over long distances in fox hunting and steeplechase races, the young Trakehner colts had to prove themselves. In the old days, stallion performance tests too one year to be completed. But by this very strict selection, the Trakehner breed established its world famous reputation as the hardest and most successful warmblood breed. The goal of the East Prussian breeders was to produce a great number of equally rideable and cooperative horses. The general East Prussian mare was more or less “tested” every day, in the fields of the farms, pulling large loads often times while in foal. No farmer had the money to own mares only for breeding purposes. Mares that were unable to live with these performance requirements were sooner or later removed from the farm. This is especially true for horses that had temperamental problems or were hard to feed. Therefore, only the most willing and able horses were used for breeding.

During the previous wars, the Trakehner had established its name was the most reliable cavalry mount. For many years the main purpose of Trakehnen was to produce good mounts for wartimes. However, in peace times, the Trakehner had great success in the competition world. The throne was reached at the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin. The ¾ brothers Kronos and Absinth won the gold and silver medals in the individual dressage test and, together with Gimpel, also the gold medal in the team competition. The Olympic three-day-event saw the East Prussian Nurmi as the winner, together with Fasan and the TB Kurfürst, this gold medal went to Germany as well.

Today, the selection of future Trakehner riding horses is based in rideability, outstanding temperament, and wonderful movement that enable the Trakehner to be a top performing mount for any equestrian discipline. Each year, about 250-300 two-year old colts are presented at central inspections all over Germany. The commission travels about 4,000 miles in 2 weeks and evaluates the colts. They are presented in hand on hard surface, at liberty in an arena and in free jumping. The evaluation is concluded by in hand walking while the final announcements are made.

Type, body frame, the quality of the gaits, character and the abilities over jumps are the criteria most important for a final conclusion. Out of this great number of colts, about 70 get permission to gather in Neumünster at the end of October for the final approval days. But before that happens, each colt has to be vet-checked, x-rays included. The Trakehner Verband was the first to ask for this in Germany and still today, you will find approvals where the stallions are not x-rayed. In addition, it tells the commission, if a stallion has a severe hereditary malformation that, even though it might not be visible from the outside, is reason enough not to allow that horse into the breed. All horses that pass this first hurdle will come together in Neumünster.

This traditionally begins on a Wednesday with the arrival of the horses. On Thursday morning, the stallions are presented to the commission and the spectators for the first time on hard surface. Here they have to walk and trot. The commission will have a good
impression of the correctness of the candidates’ gaits, the foundations and any malformations there. Additionally, the temperament of the horse can be evaluated in this electrified atmosphere. Friday morning begins with the free jumping, obviously necessary to see how the stallions react when confronted with new situations in the arena and also to test the abilities over jumps. Friday afternoon is reserved for the performance on the triangle in hand. Here again, correctness and also the quality of the gaits can be observed. The stallions walk up to the commission, stand in a 90° angle in an open frame (all four legs visible), trot around the triangle two times and leave the arena straight away from the commission.

Became elite stallion in 2004:
Maizauber by EH Bartholdy

Saturday morning is the final day of the approval process. Here, the stallions are shown at liberty. The canter, natural balance and again temperament can be evaluated and when each stallion is caught and walked around, the speaker of the commission announces a first verdict: “nicht gekört” (not approved) or “wird wieder vorgestellt” (comes back). The not approved stallions go back to the barn. The others that have the chance to be presented again return into the arena and are led on a big ring walking. The commission is standing in the middle of the ring and has to reach a final decision. Each number will be called and given the final decision of either “gekört” (approved) or “nicht gekört. The top stallions get a premium and have to leave the ring once more while the other approved stallions are described and evaluated over microphone for everybody to follow the decisions made by the commission. Finally, the premium stallions come back and will be ranked with the premium titles first, the reserve champion and the champion at the end.

The approval process is clearly marked by several decisions. It is obvious that an approved stallion meets the highest standards regarding movement, temperament and jumping abilities. However, specialists have a chance as well,, meaning when a stallion shows outstanding jumping potential but the trot is not the best, he will still find his way into the breed. One criterion that is very important for the Trakehner, more than for any other breed, is type. Type does not only mean the expression of the face. Equally
important is a harmonious body with long lines and a big frame that clearly shows the TB background of the Trakehner. Since the Trakehner is not only a formidable riding horse, but also has a duty to fulfill in refining other warmblood breeds, this is a very important factor. With the approval, the stallion has not yet earned the permission to breed. First, the stallion has to pass a 30 day test in the coming spring with 7.0 or better and then gains the permission to be bred to mares. One year later, another 70 day test has to be passed before the permission for breeding a lifetime is given. Stallions that do not go through the testing process may gain permission through outstanding sport success, a model that seems to be the best since only stallions that have proven performance careers may enter the breed. Prominent examples are the multiple Grand Prix dressage winner Biotop with the late Dr. Reiner Klimke and the stallion Almox Prints J, Grand Prix show jumper and participant at two Olympic games.

The millennium approvals for the Trakehners certainly proved at what high standard this breed is standing. The stallions days of Neumünster for the year 2000, held the last weekend in October in the old and famous Holstenhallen, where only one week later the Holsteiner approvals took place, consisted of 70 two-year old Trakehner colts shown in a 4 day marathon. Every seat in the Holstenhallen was occupied with thousands of spectators from all over the world watching the best of one year. The 2000 stallion crop was marked by very sportive stallions with excellent gaits stamped by impulsion, shoulder freedom and that certain suppleness that makes every riders’ dream come true. The free jumping was outstanding, probably among the best we have seen in the past years. The true Trakehner type is slowly fading out – something that needs to be kept in mind since that is what really makes this breed stand out. Not to mention that it is the reason other registries use the Trakehner as a refiner.

However, the champion stallion of 2000, the black King Arthur, had it all: type, expression, a formidable body and movement from another world. King Arthur came out of the young Buddenbrock’s first foal crop, via his sire, elite stallion Sixtus the stallion line founded by the Anglo Arab Burnus AAH and his unforgettable and legendary son Habicht. King Arthur sold for 300,000DM at the Sunday auction to Gestüt Tasdorf in North Germany. His half brother Connery, a wonderful bay out of a daughter of Cornau (the late elite stallion Consul’s dam) named Caro-Dame by Karo As, impressed with his movement like no other stallion this year. He only touched the ground out of pure will and every time he appeared in the ring, the crowd went wild. He will be stationed at Hörem, this world famous stud farm that not only brought us Consul, but also stationed the great Mahagoni, sire of the several Olympic dressage horses like the USA’s Peron with Michelle Gibson in the 1996 Atlanta games.

The reserve champion Hofrat, a shiny dark brown stallion by the 1995 champion Gribaldi out of Habsburg II by Guter Planet was sold at auction for 170,000DM to the until now pure Hanoverian stud farm of the Meyer family. The Meyers are well known for breeding Hanover’s star Weltmeyer. Frederike Meyer had been looking for a Trakehner for quite some time and Hofrat was simply irresistible. Five other stallions were approved with a premium title. Chateauneuf, bay son of the Irish TB Sir Shostakovich xx out of State premium mare Chamonix by Kostolany impressed with his talent over jumps and sold for 80,000DM to a show jumper stable in Lower Saxony. Harlem Go, a radiant chestnut by the elite stallion Maizauber out of state premium mare Hamamelis Go by Pardon Go sold
for 130,000DM to Northrhine-Westfalia. Grafenstolz, a dark brown by the advanced
dressage stallion Polarion out of state premium mare Gipsy Lady by Camelot will be the
first Trakehner at the biggest Württmeberg stud, Birkhof, where a number of outstanding
Hanoverians and Oldenburger stallions will be excellent matches for the great Trakehner
jumper. Pret a Porter, chestnut by the Grand Prix sire Ivernel out of premium mare
Ptresina by elite stallion Sokrates, bred and owned by Klosterhof Mendingen, was not
for sale. What a good decision this was of owner Burghard Wahler, because only three
months later, this outstanding dressage talent sold for 300,000DM at the Trakehner Elite
Auction. Summertime, a wonderful brown Michelangelo son out of premium mare
Sarogna by elite stallion Arogno, not only combined generations of outstanding dressage
sires, but showed that he would step into those big footsteps. He will be stationed at the
legendary Hämelschenburg stud of Otto Langels that is not only home of Kostolany and
the 1999 champion Freudenfest, but also produced a great number of internatinally
successful sport horses and stallions that influenced the local breeds to quite some extent
like the well-known US Trakehner stallion Kaspareit, standing at Dancing Fields Farmm
in Walnut Creek, CA.

Other approved stallions were the bay Refrain, son the of the US TB stallion Motley xx, a
top racehorse producer in Europe, presenting his first Trakehner son in Neumünster out
of premium mare Reconda by Consul. Refrain was sold for 90,000DM to an event rider
in Switzerland and impressed with his beauty and big frame. Emerson, chestnut son of
elite stallion Benz out of state and elite mare Etana by Falke went back to his breeders
Mr. Hanke, who also brought us Caprimond. Distelzar, the second approved Gribaldi son
out of Distelgold by elite stallion Arogno was an absolute highlight. His gaits were
unbelievable, very elastic and with great rhythm, never ending suspension and of such
grace that the crowd spontaneously rose to the feet clapping when he came down the long
side of the arena. Distelzar was sold to Burghard Wahler’s Klosterhof Medingen, where
months later, he was the top selling horse at the Trakehner Elite Auction, bringing
600,000DM. We will certainly see him again at the National Young Horse Championships this fall. The chestnut Schönbrunn, by Ivernal out of Schöne Capri by
Caprimond was sold to Holstein where he will be schooled as a top dressage horse. The
bay Manhattan, son of another Grand Prix dressage stallion, St. Cloud, out of Manou by
elite stallion Leonardo sold to the State stud of Radegast. He displayed a wonderful type
combined with the movement a future dressage prospect should have. Powerpoint, again
a chestnut by the elite stallion Van Deyk out of Parisienne by Mormone xx sold to France
and while his type didn’t meet Trakehner standards, his qualities both in his gaits and
over fences were reason enough to approve him.

Idaho, chestnut son of legendary Abdullah out of state premium mare Irina by
Zauberklang was the best jumper of the inspections, maybe even of the past years. He
simply played with the obstacles. With him, Uwe Heckmann, commentator of the free
jumping, found his masterpiece. Heckmann made the ground crew run and soon, the end
of the standards were reached. Idaho left quite some room between himself and the pole,
still in perfect harmony with a well-balanced stride and bascule. His abilities were
rewarded with a score of 10, much to the delight of the crowd. He will be prepared and
presented in the jumper circuit in the years to come and certainly was a good example
that the old saying “Trakehners can’t jump” isn’t true at all! Offenbach, a wonderful
stallion with excellent abilities and talent for dressage and jumping. Son of Königsstein
out of Odett II by elite stallion Herzzauber also found a home in a highly respected sport stable.
But the stallion approvals are not all of this fascinating process. The Sunday auction is also reserved for 16 selected elite mares and 21 elite foals. This year, the mare auction topped off everything we had seen in the past years. For of the mares presented were the champions of their regional inspections and one was the champion mare of Denmark. The Neumünster days also see the selection of the National Champion Mare of one year.

Saturday evening was reserved for the gala show. Here, numerous stallions, famous mares and sport horses celebrate the Trakehner horse that is simply among the best of Germany’s wonderful warmblood registries. As always, the “Ostpreussenlied”, the East Prussian hymn presented by Freiherr von Langen, the solo trumpeter of the Hamburg State Opera, marked the finale. When the lights are turned down and the spotlight is on the man in the horse-drawn coach, it was not only the elder East Prussian generations feeling a knot in their throats. The pageantry of this event allows these people to reflect for a moment the home they lost and the also shows the younger generations what a wonderful treasure this horse breed is for a country long sunken. The 2000 stallion approvals certainly showed a glamorous way in the future.