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CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGED

During the World Championships for Young Dressage Horses in Verden the study group Interstallion of the WBFSH gathered for a meeting. In a conversation with Ulrich Hahne Professor Jan Philipsson from Sweden explained ideas and projects of Interstallion.

Interstallion is a new concept in horse breeding, with which most breeders are not yet familiar. Interstallion aims to make available international information for comparison. Professor Jan Philipsson explains "Horse breeding has become international. The entire circumstances changed, since artificial insemination is available. Stallions as well semen are being traded worldwide. Breeders now have access to stallions from all over the world, and for obvious reasons they would like to have information about these stallions. They would like to know how high the breed value is and how to interpret it. Prospective buyers of a stallion from a foreign country want to access this information too".

When a foreign stallion is presented for acceptance, it is of prime importance for the approval committee to be able to better interpret the results of performance tests and breed value estimations. In individual cases the information is available but difficult to evaluate. According to Professor Philipsson it is crucial for a proper approval decision to be able to properly classify the available international information. Interstallion offers help.

Interstallion tries to standardize the information, which means to make it compatible. With that in mind, it is necessary to know how performance tests are run, which criteria are being evaluated, which breed values are published and how they are calculated. To accomplish this task, the data must be made available. The next step must be to answer the following question: How are these breed values comparable to the own association? Presently Interstate tries to find the answer. First the basis must be known, upon which the breed values are calculated. It differs greatly from country to country. It is, for instance, absolutely possible that one and the same stallion has different breed values in Germany and in The Netherlands. "As a breeder in Germany I cannot just apply the breed value from The Netherlands. We must make our breeders aware of this fact." Professor Philipsson explains.

COMPARABILITY

But how can we compare the different breed values? A project has been initiated, in which information from mare performance tests in Hannover, Holstein, Denmark, Sweden and The Netherlands is being researched to produce an answer. Furthermore, it is being researched how these populations are connected. This can happen through stallions like Ramiro or Alme with offspring or grandchildren in different associations. Relations between populations will be calculated, which finally allow conclusions about the relation between the results of different breed value estimations. Professor Philipsson believes that because of the results from the project in the future one will be able to determine, if a stallion from Sweden would be of interest for Hanoverian breeders based upon the results of the stallion's breed value estimation from Sweden. "If high correlations exist between the breed value

estimations of two populations, then one can assume that the sire fits to two populations." It is, however, a long journey, until we reach this point.

The development in Germany is a good example for the different methods of breed value estimation in different countries. The old system included competition results excluding Grand Prix classes. This issue was discussed at the Interstallion meeting. According to Professor Philipsson, there is no point in excluding those horses from the breed value estimation that we strive to produce, internationally competitive and successful jumper and dressage horses. These results from international competitions were not usable. With the new system of an integrated breed value system, which also allows the inclusion of stallion and mare performance test results as well as young horse classes, Germany has now a very good system. "Germany did a great job" Philipsson praises. "Its system sets an example for other countries. This is especially of importance, since Germany's breeding areas play a significant role internationally. Horse people from foreign countries anxiously await the breed values of these horses."

The international competition results present a similar problem. At present they are not available for the breed value estimation. The information of many terrific horses gets lost, when they are exported, when they compete successfully under a foreign rider, or when a German rider competes them in foreign countries. In cooperation with the FEI Interstallion views it as one of their goals to make these international competition records available. It requires a data exchange between the information of the national breed associations and the international show records. The pedigree of successful horses must be known to correctly apply the success records. The system of the international life number could be helpful to clearly identify the horses.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Furthermore Interstallion wants to feature the different breeding goals of the various member associations. For the communication on an international level it is of obvious importance, how each association defines its breeding goals. Only that way the evaluations of the individual attributes can be properly and correctly interpreted. A comparison of the various stallion performance tests showed a high relation between all performance tests to the horses' later successes in competition. Interstallion came to the conclusion that the present stallion testing methods are good, no matter if the stallion was tested for seventy days like in Germany or only ten days but then as four-year olds like in Sweden. Furthermore, Professor Philipsson concludes that the time frame of the testing could be shortened in many countries. In his opinion it is of utmost importance that the judges are well qualified to judge a performance test and that the stallions are old enough to actually be properly tested.

In the course of globalizing the breeding of horses, the information of other associations gains in importance considerably. Interstallion tries to take into account this circumstance to provide breeders with the best possible information for their breed decisions.