

## **The Interstallion questionnaire: a valuable information source for sport horse breeders**

Erwin Koenen  
NRS, P.O. Box 454, 6800 AL Arnhem, The Netherlands

### **Background**

The lack of detailed and easy to understand information on the variation and similarities of testing schemes, methods for estimation and definitions of breeding values constitutes a major obstacle for an optimal selection of warmblood sport horses. This lack of transparent information may become more problematic with the further internationalisation of equestrianism. The absence of transparent information is also a problem for the Interstallion group to identify the desired steps towards an adequate international comparison of breeding values.

One of the first Interstallion activities was therefore to review the present breeding programmes. To obtain a detailed overview an extensive questionnaire was compiled in 1999. This questionnaire included questions on population statistics, breeding objectives, testing methods and genetic evaluation systems.

### **Results**

This questionnaire showed that adequate information on the present breeding programmes is not or not easily available. This was clearly shown by the slow initial response: only 12 out of the 44 approached WBFSH members responded within one year. Two reminders and several personal contacts were required to increase the final number of replies to 19. These breeding organisations are all European and represent a total population of approximately 100,000 breeding mares. Although many other organisations did not respond, the results received were considered to be representative for all sport horse organisations as all major organisations participated and the total number of horses registered by the non-participating organisations is small.

The answers of the questionnaire have been analysed by three sub-groups of scientists. They presented three papers on breeding objectives, testing methods and genetic evaluations at the 2001 WBFSH seminar, at annual EAAP meetings as well as at the World Congress on Genetics (see list of references). These papers are useful tools for breeding organisations and geneticists to formulate future research needs in the mentioned areas. Furthermore, these papers may encourage breeding organisations to initiate further validations and improvements of the present methods. Such activities are likely to improve the selection efficiency of the national breeding programmes.

### **Recommendations for further activities**

Knowledge of the variation and similarities of the different breeding schemes is essential for breeders to understand test results and genetic proofs of foreign stallions. The results of this questionnaire showed that, even within a specific project, it is extremely difficult to compile a detailed international overview of the different systems. As much effort has been invested in reviewing present breeding programmes, the Interstallion group encourages the WBFSH to optimise the use of obtained results.

Practical breeders will benefit from the Interstallion activities if the WBFSH provides them with the results in an easy way. The Interbull experiences in dairy cattle, where questionnaire results are published in so-called "Interbull Bulletins", indicate that the availability of detailed and standardised information can be extremely valuable. With the increased use of Internet (31 out of the present 46 WBFSH members run their own website), the Interstallion working group recommends the WBFSH to publish the results in a standardised format on the Internet. The integration of the questionnaires

data within the existing WBFSH website (<http://www.wbfs.org>) would be an easy and cheap method to provide interested breeders with information that may improve their understanding of the different breeding programmes. If individual breeding organisations link their website to this central website and *vice versa* valuable data will become easily available to many breeders. In this situation, the WBFSH provides the breeder with information on the breed structure, testing schemes and genetic evaluation methods while the website of the individual organisations provides the breeder with test results and/or breeding values of individual stallions.

### **References**

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### **Acknowledgements**

Financial support provided by KWPN, EAAP, WBFSH and ICAR is gratefully acknowledged.