

SPORT HORSE CONFORMATION

Evaluating Athletic Potential in Dressage,
Jumping, and Event Prospects



Christian Schacht

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in Dressage, Jumping and
Event Prospects

Translated by Stefanie Reinhold

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my parents and thank them for their help, without which I would not have been able to achieve success in my business.

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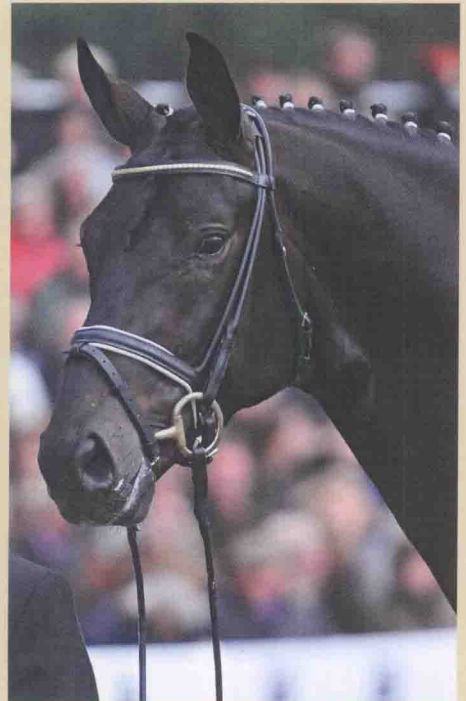


An objective and sympathetic approach

This book is not meant to teach conformation analysis, but rather provide an explanatory aid for all those with a deep interest in horses. It is intended to help recognize a horse's conformation and to draw conclusions about his possible career and potential. When today's breeder or horse owner showing in-hand, for example, is told that one or another element of his horse does not meet the ideal, he wants to be able to "mathematically" grasp the "why" in order to understand the score being given by the judges. It is such an understanding that this book aims to provide.

At the same time it is important to note, that all ideals, all the "lines" observed on the horse that show conformation and determine angles (see p. 16), and all the mathematical rules combined are not enough to recognize a horse's potential. No reference book can teach you the "feel" for this exquisite creature. The horse continues to belie

.....
*No book can teach "feel" for
the horse.*



all theory: Horses with extreme conformational weaknesses are able to achieve high performances, which—in view of their anatomical deficit—no one believed them capable of doing.

Alfred Knopfhart describes that bees—according to a purely mathematical ratio of weight versus wing strength—cannot fly. You can't deny, however, that they do indeed fly!

Horses are works of art

Attitude, personality, willingness to perform and trust in the rider all have a far greater effect on how a horse can be used than his conformation may suggest. Somebody who tries to understand the whole horse just based on individual parts of his body—or even on his overall conformation—will never really be able to evaluate his complete potential, which involves so much more than just his physical attributes.

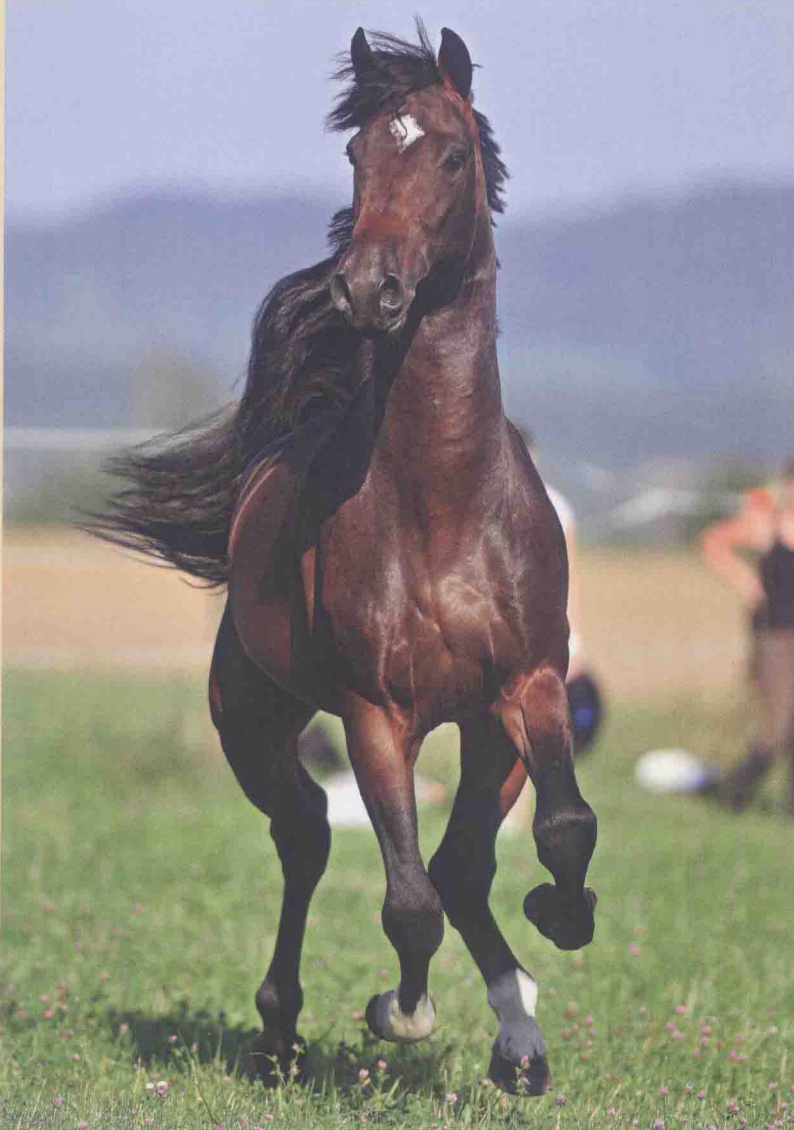
It's the same as someone who reduces a piece of art to its percentage of certain shades of color, or who judges a composition by only reading the sheet music. The horse is a total work of art that satisfies the human's need for harmony with his beautiful harmonious lines, who speaks to our heart through his beauty and nobility, and whose perfection makes us aware of our own weaknesses.

Even Alfred Knopfhart—in his book *Beurteilung und Auswahl von Reitpferden* (Sport horse evaluation and selection, Paul Parey, 1963)—reminds us to be humble and scolds the “fault finders,” who recognize them but do not know how to assess them. He explicitly cautions the reader not to reduce the horse to his individual parts and then reassemble him. The horse is an organism, not a “mechanism.” Therefore, Knopfhart defined horse evaluation as follows: “Evaluation does not mean to find fault at all cost, but instead to recognize faults and virtues in conformation and temperament and use these to draw reliable conclusions regarding the horse's performance.”

During riding competitions and breeding shows, I advise young judges to initially open themselves to a first impression of horse and rider and think about what they like about the horse or the presentation. This attitude makes it easy, in my opinion, to enjoy each horse's personality, no matter what his weaknesses may be. Once infected with the “horse bug,” we will spend a lifetime observing: observing

nobility, gentleness and kindness, observing elegance and strength, observing honesty and forgivingness. Let us enjoy it!

Christian Schacht



Elegance and power

Horse Evaluation Tools



Changing preferences

The horse's phenotype (outward appearance) serves as the basis for the intended use of the horse. From antiquity to the modern age, this phenotype has undergone significant changes against the backdrop of changing requirements of historical eras. In our time—where the horse serves as our partner in sport and recreational activity—we can choose from a large variety of horse types, whose distinct phenotypes reflect uses from the past. Suitable breeding programs and maintenance of studbooks helped to achieve systematic progress in breeding during the last three centuries. This distinguishes the modern age from previous centuries. Reproduction serves to create volume—breeding means to think in generations and systematically create class.

Primitive breeds

It is pointless to partake in the discussions around the evolutionary background of the domesticated horse. The question whether the horse is monophyletic (has descended from one source) or polyphyletic (from several sources) is irrelevant concerning his use as a riding animal.

The fact is that when humans first started riding horses (or in other words, started using equines to move about), two very similar types of horses were available—both with origins in today's Ukraine. The Przewalski horse was named after the Russian general and explorer of Asia, Nicolai Przewalski. He was the first to describe this horse breed in 1879, which is now thought to be a separate equine branch originating around 500,000 years ago. This seems to be proven by a set of 66 chromosomes that differs from the one found in the domesticated horse with 64 chromosomes. Our contemporary domesticated horse probably descended from the tapir, which strongly resembles the Konik, an animal that still exists today. The Konik, in turn, is closely related to the Sorraia pony.

With a stick-measured height of 140 to 150 cm (approx. 13.3 hands to 14.3 hands), the Konik and Sorraia are considered small horses or ponies by today's standards. The Konik features a noble, clean cut head with a slightly concave profile. The ears are small and the mouth



Some horse breeds still reveal their primeval origins.

is very short. The Konik has a good foundation and a body with a long back and shallow withers. The croup is short and slightly sloped. The short, strong neck is nicely tied into the shoulder.

The Sorraia especially stands out due to its head shape. This breed typically has a long skull with a convex nose and a narrow forehead. The neck is very long and flexible, thus making it easy to get the horse to yield in the poll. The pronounced withers harmoniously transition into the rather short back. The croup is muscular and sloped. Another distinctive feature of this breed is its tail carriage. Even in moments of excitement, the tail carriage is rather low. The body itself is very narrow and the curvature of the ribs is rather flat.

Preferably baroque

The Sorraia is the foundation horse for classical horsemanship and influences horse breeding to this day. The proven close relations between the Sorraia and the Mustang illustrate the extent to which its distribution continued around the globe.

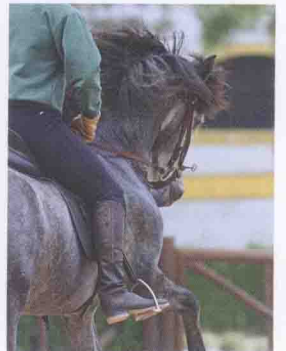
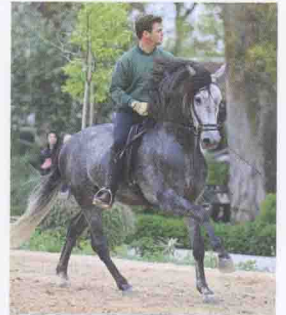
The rideability and speed of the Iberian horse has always been captivating and made it a sought-after spoil of war and what we would

call today an “export commodity.” In 1991, Arsenio Raposo Cordeiro wrote in *The Lusitano—Iberia’s Proud Horse Breed*, “This is where the horses for the Carthage armies came from and also where the riders were recruited to fight in the Spartan forces against Athens. The fastest horses were used for racing in the Roman hippodromes.” If you ponder the vast extent of the Spartan, Greek and Roman empires and believe the affinity of these horse people for the Iberian horse, then it seems likely that this breed has significantly influenced the development of hippological history.

Apart from the use as a cavalry mount, where the speed and agility associated with the Iberian horse was an asset, its qualities of push-off power combined with rideability were a crucial element in using these horses for mounted bullfights. Two breeds developed as a result: the Lusitano and the Pura Raza Espagnola.



A typical representative of the Spanish Horse breeds. The physique predetermines his talent for High School movements.



1



1 Today's modern sport horse—one that has “go,” likes to move, features good rideability, and has a pleasant personality—is a result of cross breeding European horses with English Thoroughbreds in the eighteenth century.

2 Here the horse's lines of conformation are ideal: The withers are higher than the croup (line A) and the shoulder's pivot point (center of rotation and easily seen when horse is moving, see photo on 77) is higher than the hip joint (line B). The higher this point, the better and the more freedom the horse will have in his shoulder. The minimum requirement is for the pivot point to be at the same height as the hip joint.

2



Modern equestrian sport, modern horse types

Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the phenotypes of riding horses in Europe were shaped by the genetic makeup of the Spanish horse. Even to this day, the Iberian horse has many admirers.

The origins of the modern riding horse do not really appear until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Examples of horse breeding for the modern age are seen through the development of the Trakehner, the Holsteiner and the Hanoverian. The Trakehner is a purebred horse, and the breed has significantly added refinement to the breeds from Hannover, Westphalia and Oldenburg, among others. The Holsteiner, which dominates show jumping worldwide, is a product of mating a landrace (a local variety of a domesticated animal) with French blood. The Hanoverian has been in the leading ranks of the WBFSH (World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses) for years.

Today's dressage, jumping and event horses differ considerably in physical appearance and movement from those that epitomized the riding horse for several thousands of years. This considerable pheno-

typical change came about as a result of mating the Continental horse with the English Thoroughbred in order to rebuild the considerably weakened horse breeds after the Napoleonic wars.

The Holsteiner breeding lines, such as Cicero, who was linebred on the maternal grandfather's side seven times on Burlington Turf and eleven times on Achill, as well as Ladykiller, Marlon, Anblick, Cottage Son or the French lines over Furioso, for example, prove just how elementary the influence of the English Thoroughbred was for the performance breeds of the modern sport horse. It also explains why the classical riding sport has been called "English" riding: Lines, movement, size, foundation and texture of today's light Warmblood find their origins in English horse breeding. Changes in the physique of the horse caused changes in his movement—and thus riding style, too.



Movement potential, willingness to perform and sensitivity are all qualities of today's sport horse types.