

MY TRIP TO THE YOUNG STOCK AND STALLION SHOWS IN NORWAY

By Pat Wolfe



Our Canadian flag flew with those of ten other countries.

I've attended the annual stallion show in Norway five times. My first time was in 1986, 30 years ago. That was memorable since the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl happened while I was there, and it took place a mere 200 kilometres from the show, but luckily on the other side of a high chain of mountains. I love going to this show and meeting friends from many countries and seeing so many wonderful Fjords all in the same place. It's always been a highlight of my horse career.

I left home April 27 and flew Ottawa/Toronto/Iceland/Bergen arriving 26 hours later. In Bergen I met up with two American friends, Eric Watness, the Norwegian Fjord Horse Registry secretary and Bob Long, their president. Our plan was to spend two weeks together attending the Fjord Horse International (FHI) Conference and attending a series of Fjord horse shows. We had been invited to stay with one of the judges at his family farm in the mountains, seven kilometres from the show and across from a ski hill. It was a beautiful area and they were wonderful hosts.

I wanted to see as many horses as I could on this trip so I went a week earlier than I normally would.



As you can see, we stayed in a perfect location and Alse and Grethe Epse were wonderful hosts.

This year there were three Young Stock shows leading up to the Stallion show the final week. I saw over 60 Fjords at the Young Stock shows and another 31 stallions at the stallion show. This year the Young Stock shows were in Orsta, Forde and Breim. Mares were shown from yearlings to three year olds and stallions were shown from yearlings to two year olds. If approved, the three year old mares receive breeding licences. The three year old stallions are shown at the stallion show in Nordfjordeid. It was an exciting time as I was invited into the Young Stock rings with the judges, along with a Finland trainee and two American evaluators.

Nils Ivar Dolvik, chief judge in Norway, really likes the way we score Fjords in North America. Norway is the mother Country of the Fjord Horse and the Norwegians feel responsible for the direction the horse takes. They are really pleased to give us information on what a Fjord horse should be today. Type is very important to them. Movement is also very important. Although they don't want a high stepping horse, they do want their Fjords to cover ground with a bit of fanciness to their

step. The horses in the trotting race showed the trot they are looking for. The walk should be a long stride with the body totally relaxed.



The judges invited me to pass out ribbons at the Young Stock Show.

There were four categories of stallions being tested for licensing: 19 three year olds (seven received licences and only one got a first in quality); 6 four year olds who had received breeding licences as three year olds last year and needed to renew their licences (two had their licences renewed); 4 four year olds who had not been tested as three year olds (only one received a licence); 2 older stallions whose owners wanted to have their stallions' scores increased (they didn't change). In Norway, stallions who do not receive licences cannot breed and are gelded.

These shows are very important to keep the breed strong. The Norwegians have the same concerns we have in North America, especially with improving the quality of legs. The three year old who got the first quality licence will get at least 35 breedings in his first year.

The four year old stallion evaluations began Wednesday morning with 6 four years olds. Our morning was spent watching the four year olds free lunging and free jumping in a closed indoor arena at the Norsk Hestesenter. In the afternoon these stallions were judged for riding. The owners of each

horse rode first doing a dressage pattern showing a walk, trot, and canter, and then a professional rider took over doing the same pattern. One single professional rider rode all the stallions.

After each ride, the professional rider talked to the judges about each individual horse. What was interesting to me was that sometimes the horses went much better for their owners than for the professional. You could see which horses were used a lot and see the great rapport between horse and owner.

Also on Wednesday afternoon there was a meeting of the FHI, the Fjord Horse International, with members from ten of the 13 member countries in attendance, and in the evening the International Conference General Assembly was held. I was there representing Canada. (see page 16)

Thursday morning was the four year old's pleasure driving test, starting with the owners following a pattern in a four wheeled competition vehicle showing walk, trot, and extended trot.

Then the same as Wednesday, a professional driver took over and did the same pattern. Again, the driver discussed with the judges the way the horses handled. After the indoor test, first the owners, and then the single professional driver, had to drive up a steep hill, stopping for a full minute both half way up and then half way down. There were no brakes on the wagons.

After the pleasure driving test the four year old stallions were ready for a driving test in traditional work harness and a wagon. They were expected to stand quietly while being hitched, then like the previous test, drive up a hill stopping half way up, and come back down half way and halt and hold the wagon on the hill. It was more difficult with the wagon as there was more weight to hold back. It was interesting to see how some of the stallions held the wagon by planting their four feet at the same

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angle. They looked like they might sit back on their butts. Lastly they were asked to do a figure eight, stop, and unhitch quietly.



Here you can see one of the stallions holding the wagon back. This hill was steep.

Thursday afternoon the 19 three year old stallions began their testing with a vet check. I enjoyed this because it gave me a great opportunity to look closely at each individual. Next they had to walk and trot in hand on asphalt. The judges were looking to see if the horses were sound or not.

That evening was the most popular of the show with the audience. The whole arena was filled for the three year olds' free lunging test. This is also my favourite test to watch. I love to see horses move naturally. They are individually freed into the whole arena and three people with lunge whips keep them moving.

You could see each in turn having a great time, bucking, twisting and leaping. Finally they went into a gallop, got a little tired and then gave a very strong trot. This test shows the natural ability of the horse to move in all gaits. You can see the head carriage, the length of stride and the movement of the whole body. There were some really good moving horses. The Norwegians felt the quality of their three year olds was quite good this year. It was a sight to remember.

On Friday the three year olds did conformation and movement on the triangle. I got to the show ring nice and early so I could sit directly behind the judges and get the same view they had when the horses traveled on the triangle. The horses were set up in front of the judges to be checked for conformation and then they walked the triangle.

The walk on a Fjord is very important. A lot of Fjords are used for pleasure riding and it is important to have a horse that is supple in the back and can really cover ground with each stride. Some horses were short and stiff and others moved really well. A horse that moves well will bob its head on every step and the back foot will land past the print of the front foot. If you are riding with other breeds it's important that your horse keep up without constantly going into a trot.

Both when a horse is walking away and towards the two judges, they can see the flight of the feet. If the horse is winging or paddling, the judges will look at the legs to see what is causing this fault. Standing in front of the horse, they will be looking for the following: in and out at the knees; toed in or toed out, (this could happen at the knee joint or the fetlock joint); offset knees; wide or narrow at the base. Looking at the front legs from the side the judges will be looking to see if the horse is behind or over at the knees, and the length and angle of the horse's pasterns. Standing behind the horse they will check whether the feet are toed in or out or cow hocked. Looking at the back legs from the side they look for sickle hocked or camped out legs, and pastern length and angles.

After walking the triangle, the horse will trot the triangle and the judges will be looking for length of stride, free movement and the back foot landing beyond the print of the front foot. They will also be looking for a straight flight line of the feet.

Sometimes a horse that has an excellent walk may be stiff and short in his trot. Normally a good walk means a good trot.

In the afternoon the three year olds were tested for driving with farm harness and a wagon, the same driving test as the four year olds: hitching, driving a figure 8, stopping and starting up a hill.

The trotting test was not compulsory this year but six drivers decided to have a driving race with sulkies. They drove two at a time and the fastest time in a 1 ½ km distance was the winner. I wish I could remember the winning time.



Even Myklebust with his stallion Lavrans had the fastest time. This horse could really move!

Saturday was the big day everyone was waiting for. First the judges had one more look at the conformation of the stallions, followed by the annual parade of stallions down to the centre of town and back to the exhibition grounds. The results for the stallions were given out at 1 pm.

The judges began with the four year olds, then the older stallions and finished with the three year olds. Before the results of the three year olds, people in the crowd were chatting back and forth trying to figure out who would be chosen to get a breeding licence and especially who would be the number one stallion.

The excitement began with all 19 stallions in the ring. The announcer gave the results one at a time. If the stallion received a breeding licence, he received a yellow rosette. The horses that do not receive a rosette will be gelded. I had written down in

my book the seven stallions I thought would receive a breeding licence. I got that right. I also had the top three stallions correct, but not in the order of the Norwegian judges. I had the first and second places reversed. Number 17 was of great interest to me because I have his half sister, Emmeline, in my barn. They have the same mother, “Drude Halsnaes” from Denmark.

The highest evaluated horse was “Glod” : 9 for type, 8 for body and bones, 7 for legs, 9 for movement (walk and trot) and 8 for overall impression. At that point I entered the ring with representatives from ten other countries, and put our long blue ribbon with a bronze medallion from the CFHA around the neck of this lovely animal.



Glod, highest evaluated horse at the show, with ribbons from Canada and many other countries.

After this, we had a debriefing with the head Norwegian judge. He did explain why they placed the horses the way they did. When you are standing outside of the ring you can’t see everything the judges see which is something we should all remember when we are having our own horses evaluated.

As I was leaving, I was asked when I was coming back. When I left home I had decided this would be my last trip to Norway but now I’m hooked all over again. Norway, her people and her Fjords, are so special.

