

# FEIF Seminar for Young Breeding Trainers

This month I took part in the FEIF Seminar for Young Breeding Trainers in Iceland. This was a fantastic opportunity looking towards the future as an inspiring professional trainer and rider. The seminar is aimed at those you wish to develop their skills in the presentation and management of breeding horses. There were 22 (including me) riders/trainers from all over the world taking part at the fantastic facility of Skeiðvellir owned by Katrín Sigurðardóttir and Davið Jónsson.



## **Tuesday** - Arrivals and Introductions

We arrived at Skeiðvellir on Tuesday evening just before dinner. We were first introduced to Katrín and then to Inge Kringeland, a successful Norwegian breeder and the FEIF director of breeding. After a rather tasty dinner we made our way to our accommodation at Hotel Stracta in Hella, a 10 minute drive from Skeiðvellir. The hotel had great facilities including hot tubs and saunas which were thoroughly tested as the week went on.

## Wednesday - The work begins!

Breakfast was 8:20 at Skeiðvellir followed by a lecture about conformation assessment from Elsa Albertsdóttir, a FEIF international breeding judge. The focus was on three main aspects of what makes a desirable conformation trait:

- Firstly, does it contribute to a healthy horse? Is it a good quality anatomically?
- Secondly, is it functional? Does this trait aid towards a better riding horse i.e. Does a broad and well muscled back allow a horse to carry out the tasks we ask of it better than a horse for example with a longer less muscled back.
- Finally, is it beautiful? Whilst this may not contribute to functionality or longevity (but should not impair them) of a horse it is none the less a highly desirable trait and something that, with small variations, breeders and Icelandic Horse people worldwide can agree on. We want to have beautiful horses.

Another point emphasised in our lecture was what the point of a breeding show is. The idea behind a breeding show is to assess the heritable traits of a horse, qualities that this horse could pass to its



offspring. This is how the weighting of different conformation and ridden qualities is decided. A presented horse is an example of a phenotype. The characteristics that we observe in the horse are the result of the interaction of its genotype, the heritable qualities of the horse, combined with the environment (feeding, shoeing, training etc). We know that in the Icelandic Horses 40-50% of the phenotype is genotype and the rest is environment. This is why we place such importance on horses being shown young (ages 4 and 5). We can say of a horse turning 4 that chances are it has been in training for 6 months or less, this means that the horse presented is showing more of its natural talent allowing us to place a higher value on this horse as a breeding horse.

For some of us this caused a little confusion... How can we know this horse is of better genetic quality than a 10 year old horse with e.g. 8.50 or higher for riding abilities? This is the job of the BLUP system which many of us are familiarised with through WorldFengur. To make it as easy as possible to understand take a 4 year old horse with a total score of 8.14 and a 5 year old horse with a total score of 8.14 as well. These two horses have exactly the same scores for everything. The 4 year old horse has a higher BLUP score because it has shown the

same qualities with a much lower environmental factor thus demonstrating just how good the raw material of this horse is.

Another well emphasised aspect of the breeding show is that we will have a better idea of the genetic properties of breeding lines if more horses, geldings and average horses as well, are assessed. This allows us, for example, to better pick a stallion for our mare. To illustrate the point, if a stallion has 15 offspring all turning 6 years old and none have even been taken to a breeding show then perhaps we should scrutinise just how high the quality of said stallions offspring are.

So far this short report has taken us to about 10:30am on the first day!

After our lecture we were split into 4 groups and each group given a horse to try and present so that



we could show as many of the good qualities of this horse as possible.

This was a great opportunity to get feedback about bringing out the best traits in a horse.

After some tasty kjötsúpa for lunch it was time to take a horse each and we would ride a breeding show for our judge and Viðar Ingólfsson who would also be giving us feedback about what was good and how we would be able to show our horses better the next day.

I was given a little 4 gaited gelding called Freyðir to ride. He was a fun guy. In our 4 groups whilst one was riding another group would be Judging and then comparing with Elsa and the trainer afterwards. Another group would be assigned to assisting the group that were riding by keeping track of how many runs had been shown and offering some ideas to improve the show.



Afterwards we had dinner and a small round up of the day and returned to the hotel to spend the rest of the evening in the hot pot and sauna.

#### **Thursday- ride, ride, ride!**

Thursday began with breakfast at Skeiðvellir and then we were straight into the riding again this time with Guðmundur Björgvinsson as the assisting trainer. The focus of the day was to work on the feedback that we had been given from the day before and to improve our show. I can say safely say that all of us improved on horses that we sat on for the first time the day before. I for example improved up 0,5 for almost all gaits and 1,0 for walk. This was a reflection of the great support that we received from our trainers and fellow riders assisting us. Now we were all working very well together, an amazing feeling.

After riding it was a talk with the young trainer Ólafur Andri Guðmundsson, who was sharing his story up until now. He took us from when he was a young boy in the west of Iceland until now where he is running the horse breeding farm Fet.

After a panel discussion on how the seminar was for us we came to the conclusion that we would all like to have a second seminar, to follow up on how we have progressed since this seminar. With the idea that we should have shown horses and share our experiences with the group.

#### **Friday - time to say goodbye**

Once again the day started with breakfast at Skeiðvellir. Afterwards we had a lecture with the incredibly experienced farrier, breeder, horseman and former Icelandic team leader Siggí Sæm. He was talking about the shoeing of breeding horses and how that even if we aren't farriers ourselves we should have the knowledge from experience on how to have our horses shod best to suit them. He also talked about the history of (mainly bad) shoeing in Iceland and also how the technology of shoes is changing and that we shouldn't expect steel/iron to be the future. It was incredibly interesting and inspirational to meet someone with more experience than two of my lifetimes yet has kept his work up to date.



This was the closing chapter to our seminar and I will finish with thanks to Katrín and her family in Skeiðvellir for accommodating us, Inge Kringeland for leading the seminar. Elsa, Viðar and Gummi for offering their time to come. Everyone who attended the seminar who I hope I will have the pleasure to work with again in the future. Also the IHSGB/Trustees for making the seminar possible, hopefully one day I'll pay you back by training and presenting some 1st prize horses.