



The Icelandic horse is a sturdy, strong and larger-boned breed of horse known for its extra gaits, the tolt and pace. The Icelandic horse is an average weight of 330-380kg and does not generally grow higher than 14.2hh, like many native breeds. It is referred to as a horse rather than a pony, perhaps due to the breed's weight, bone structure and weight-carrying abilities. The legs are strong and short, with relatively long cannon bones and short pasterns.

Studies performed specifically using Icelandic horses, assessing their weight carrying ability and the effect it has on various scientific measurements, suggested that a rider body weight ratio of ~25-30% of that of the horse is classed as a limit, based on Lactate accumulation where fatigue occurs quickly (GJ Stefansdottir et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2008). However, lactate accumulation appeared to also be related to genetic and individual factors, rather than sheer body weight ratio, namely the back or *Musculus longissimus dorsi* conformation. Other studies also indicate that overall body condition is more important than the body weight ratio for performance (Garlinghouse and Burrill, 1999) and that the rider's balance and technique (De Cocq *et al.*, 2010) is relevant. Stefansdottir et al. also found that peak Hematocrit levels were seen to be lower in Icelandic horses than in other breeds and interestingly the smaller horses out of those studied had higher aerobic capacity indicating the strength of the breed for its size.

Therefore, even with these scientific studies, it is difficult for the IHSGB as a breed society to state a standard recommendation for how much weight an Icelandic horse can carry. With the current available information, the size of the horse is not a simple and decisive measure of how much weight it can carry and for how long, and requires further analysis. However, assuming the horse is the correct weight and is suitably fit, the above body weight ratios (25-30%) can be used as a 'guide' for sport and leisure riding respectively.

As a breed society, it is the IHSGB's responsibility to ensure that the welfare of the Icelandic Horse is always taken into account, and it is our desire to educate our members on how to care for their horses in the best way for the role they want it for, with long term comfort and soundness part of that aim. Based on the available information, it is our obligation and desire to enhance owners and riders' education, skills and knowledge on how to keep and train their Icelandic Horses to a suitable condition for their use; for example, ensuring the horses are fit and trained sympathetically enough towards the competition season or all year round as a leisure horse.

We hope that our research on this topic will be of benefit as a helpful overview of the currently available information.

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