MARE PERFORMANCE TESTING

An Introduction

In response from interested members, the Society is reprinting information from previous years on Performance Testing of mares in one document. This covers how to arrange for the testing itself, the purpose of testing, the outline of the testing procedures and, finally, an in-depth article on freejumping training.

APPLYING FOR PERFORMANCE TESTING

The December newsletter will have an Application for Classification and Performance Testing. Should you wish to nominate your mare for either Classification and/or Performance Testing, you will need to complete this application in full and return to the Society by the nominated date. Because of the extra arrangements that need to be made in regard to the Performance Testing, NO LATE ENTRIES will be considered.

COST

The cost is $100 per mare. This helps to cover the societies costs for facilities and test rider transport etc.

TEST RIDER

The Test Rider is nominated by the Society. The Test Rider must not have any connection with either the horse and/or the owner. Should the Test Rider or owner indicate that there is a conflict of interest, the owner of the mare must present her at a different location or, in the case of there being sufficient numbers to warrant more than one Test Rider, with a different rider.

NORMAL RIDER

It is the responsibility of the owner of the mare to provide a rider for the mare. For the best results, the rider should be very familiar with the mare and training should be very established.

VENUE

The venue will be decided by the Committee. The venue must have a full size arena, preferably indoor. Jumping lanes need to be constructed and these can be either outdoor or indoor. Sufficient stabling is also necessary.

The Classification, itself, may or may not be held at the same venue as the Performance Test depending on the suitability of the venue, numbers and other factors that may come into play. To enable efficient planning of the Itinerary, it is essential for members to nominate for Classification and Performance Testing by the due date.

RESULTS

The results are sent to the owner, complete with the original Pedigree Papers as soon as possible after the end of the Inspection Tour. Both the results sheet and the Pedigree Papers are notated with the status of the mare under the Society's seal.

GUIDELINES FOR MARE PERFORMANCE TESTING

PURPOSE OF TESTING

By holding the first broodmare performance test during the 1997 Inspection Tour, the Hanoverian Horse Society of Australia has taken an important step in the development of the breeding program and what is on offer to the breeders.

Until now, the selection of broodmares in Australia was carried out by judging the exterior appearance as well as the main paces, trot and walk, in hand. These assessments give conclusions about the general suitability as a riding horse. With the introduction of the mare performance test, the criteria which are important for the use in future competitions can be directly recorded and judged, namely the quality of the main paces under the rider, and the rideability which is the basis for dressage, and the jumping ability in freejumping as the basis for the breeding of show jumpers. From this, the breeders and the Breeding Committee of the Hanoverian Horse Society of Australia obtains important information for the possible achievements of the performance horses produced.

The Mare Performance Test was first established in Hannover in 1987. Most newly registered mares in Germany have been presented for this test and it is mandatory for State Premium Mares and stallion mothers. This test also helps establish a Breeding Value Index for the mare's sire which is a source of valuable information on the stallion's strengths and heritability.

To encourage owners to put their mares through the testing, we have established the Elite Stud Book in Australia. For mares that have been presented for classification as a three year old and received a final score of eight or more, the performance test is the next step to achieve Elite Stud Book status. Mares can be tested at three or four years of age and must receive a final score of 7.0, or at least a subscore of 7.5 with a final score of at least 6.5. Five year old mares may be performance tested if they have foaled in preceding years, but an age penalty will apply. Elite Stud Book mares must produce a live Hanoverian foal by the age of six years to receive the premium of $1000.

The Mare Performance Test is developed for young mares, which means three to four year old fillies. The testing of older mares is not warranted, except in exceptional circumstances. The point of the Performance Test is to ascertain what the natural ability of the young horse is. It is not the aim to complete a task without fault, or with perfect manners.

TESTING PROCEDURE

The assessment of the broodmare in the performance test will be carried out in the following manner:-

1. MAIN GAITS UNDER SADDLE
Result for Trot
Result for Canter
Result for Walk
Average of these three scores = Sub score - Main Gaits

2. RIDEABILITY
Result for Rideability (Awarded by the Classifier)
Result for Rideability (Awarded by the Test Rider)
Average of these two scores = Sub score - Rideability

3. FREEJUMPING
Result for Freejumping (Style/Manner)
Result for Freejumping (Ability/Scope)
Average of these two scores = Sub score - Freejumping

The average score for sub scores 1, 2 & 3 = Final Score

The points awarded range from 0 (did not perform) to 10 (excellent). Each part, gaits under saddle, rideability and freejumping will have an influence of one third towards the end result. In Germany, it is held that the main result is not of main importance. It is more important how the end result is achieved. The inherent potential of a mare ought to be recognised for it can happen that mares with outstanding jumping ability show, for example, weakness in their main paces or in their rideability. The end result could bring down the average score but the jumping assessment would show that the judged mare could be very valuable for the production of show jumpers.

COURSE OF EVENTS

The following order of events would be expected to be followed on the testing day.

1. **Freejumping for all Mares**
   For this purpose, a jumping lane of three jumps will be put up. The first two jumps encourage the mare to find her rhythm. They should not be too high as at the last jump, an oxer, the jumping ability will be tested. It is very important that this jump is put up very solid so that the horses can be well aware of it and respect it. Therefore, lots of poles and planks should be used. Red and white material for the jumps is preferred.

2. **Assessment of the Gaits**
   For this section, groups of four will be put together if possible. The arena should be preferably 20 or 30 metres by 60 metres so that the young horses can develop their full ability along the sides. The paces will be examined in order of trot, canter and walk on both reins. Some lengthened strides may be asked for.

3. **Assessment of the Rideability**
   The examination of the main paces will already give first indications of the rideability. To strengthen this judgement, after examination of the rideability, various movements will be asked for in the arena (eg. riding on a circle, serpentines or halting from the trot). The judging of the group of four (if possible) will take approximately 15 minutes. After that, every mare will be ridden by the test rider who will give a further assessment.

4. **Classification**
   If the mare has not already been examined for Stud Book classification prior to the Test, this will take place after the test riding, when the mare is unsaddled.

REQUIREMENTS FOR FREEJUMPING

During the freejumping, the filly should show good potential ability, and a good overall style at the jumps. She should be freely forward going enough in her attitude without the need for too much support from the whip handler. The ideal technique of the horse over the jump should be "round" with an arched back and a low nose. This is called "good bascule". The lower forelegs should be angled towards the nose in order to inhibit faults from hanging legs.

Uneven forelegs, folded under the body are not desirable. Similar things are to be said about the hind legs. Hind legs are scored low if the horse pulls them up under its body or lets them hang. The horse should open itself over a fence. Other undesirable techniques over the jump are highly raised head and neck. That will cause a straight back instead of an arched one.

There are no standardised heights for the evaluation of the ability. Significant in the evaluation is the overall behaviour before, during and after the jumps and the care used to handle the given test. If it is clear that a horse has difficulty jumping low fences, it should receive an adequate score after two or three rounds. At the other end, for the highest scores of 9 or 10, a horse has to convincingly jump an impressive fence of approximately five feet.

Technique and scope are closely connected to each other. Most horses are able to jump high fences if they have good technique. It may happen, however, that horses with outstanding scope do not take low fences seriously, and only show their capability over high jumps.

THE MAIN PACES

There are a few criteria which apply to all three paces. Elasticity is of great importance, the swing through the whole body which gives the rider a pleasant feeling. This is essential for the quality of the paces as well as for the demand for cadence. The movement should be forward going with even elastic steps and good active hindquarters, originating from a supple back.

The horse must show freedom and regularity in the paces. It must be well put together in the course of the movement. Trot and canter should show a natural trend uphill. In trot, the horse must be able to lengthen the steps developing from an active and regular working trot. A certain knee action is desired if it develops from a free moving shoulder and enables the legs to point

straight forward. The canter should be light, rhythmic and with regular strides nicely covering the ground. The walk should be a marching pace in which the footfalls of the horse's feet follow

one another in four time, well spaced and maintained. It is not desirable if the horse is stiff in the back and is not forward going, shows short steps or just walks on the forehand. A great mistake in walk is if the pace is not maintained in four time, that is, the horse should not walk, for example, right front leg and right hind leg at the same time and show a two time pace.

THE RIDEABILITY

Rideability is the interaction between rider and horse. Does the rider desire to sit on the horse? Does the mare accept the rider's aids with submissiveness and without any tenseness or resistance, so that the rider has an effect on the horse easily and without any effort? In other words, does the rider feel comfortable? This is closely connected with the rideability. The horse must willingly respond to the aids of the rider with a good active mouth, accepting the bit, and answering the rider's aids without any resistance. It is not expected that the horse completes all the lessons perfectly, rather to give the impression that the horse is prepared to work together with the rider. It is a big fault in rideability if the horse shows resistance in its mouth. This results often from a wide, inflexible and solid neck which prevents accurate bending.

PREPARATION OF THE MARE

It is not the point of these rules to give instructions about the training of young horses. It is important that the mare is worked by an experienced rider for at least six to eight weeks before the performance test. The rider must be able to work and exercise the horse so that it shows itself on the day of the examination with a good head carriage and is able to show the quality of its paces. For the preparation towards the main education, the horse should be familiar with the bit, bridle and saddle and should have a good education on the lunge rein. For the preparation of freejumping, regular jumping training is necessary.

During the preparation period, it is appropriate to freejump the horse once a week. It is all up to the specialised education by a competent rider. If all this is given to the mares, I'm sure that with the good horsemanship of our Australian breeders, we will have recollections of the show that we can all be proud to look back on.

(Dr. Ludwig Christmann, translation by Kerstin Bomke)

FREE JUMPING

The pedigree alone is no guarantee

The article below, reprinted from the March 1991 edition of The Hanoverian by Hartmut Kettelhodt, Stable Master at Verden, gives an excellent outline as to the hows, whys and wherefores.

Free jumping is part of the natural schooling of young horses. Older horses may benefit with individual training to correct past mistakes. It enhances self confidence and, at the same time, offers (for example where dressage horses are concerned), an interesting and relaxing workout in conjunction with free running.

These recommendations, based on experience in the auction training, mainly relate to working with young horses. Free jumping can, provided the horse is suitably well developed, be considered as part of the training and schooling program of a relatively young horse without any cause for alarm. A systematic and quiet working regime, based on capability, allows the youngsters to jump single fences as well as combinations. These young horses are thus starting their jumping education in a rather playful manner and are carefully and slowly prepared for their future jumping career under saddle. The young horse will display its natural ability without the rider's influence as due to the speed on the approach.

In the middle of the long side, there is a combination which is approached on the left rein and jumped facing the exit. The first jump is a smallish upright with a pole to ease take-off, followed by an oxer at a distance of about 7-7.3m. Both jumps are on the low side to start with so they only consist of cross bars. To avoid running out, barriers are put up before and between the jumps. To guide the horses generally and assist the people holding the schooling whips, we build a run around the school out of dressage markers.

We normally require the assistance of four people, three to guide the horses with schooling whips and one to build and put up the jumps. One whip carrier is placed by the jump and the other two are positioned in the middle of the two circles. They take their orders from the trainer and are quiet, if not passive, members of the team. They keep an ever watchful eye on the horse and are ready to encourage the horse if required. Loud talking and unnecessary use of the whip make the horse lose concentration.

LET THE HORSE DO IT'S BUCKING

The horses are brought in a head collar or bridle. To protect their legs it is essential to use either boots or bandages. Before starting the freejumping, the horse should be allowed to run free to have a good buck, get rid of excess energy and generally relax. Once the animal returns to trot or a quiet canter, the free jumping over low fences may begin. New and unknown fences must be shown to the horse beforehand. The youngsters will then lose any misplaced respect and without doubt put in a much calmer performance.

Every horse will always start with a set height which has been determined according to the horse's ability and schooling.

As a rule you start with the easy jumps and gradually bring the horse on to cope with the difficult ones. The first jumps are considered to be mere jumping exercises aimed to relax the horse. It is only when the horse goes into the jump without hesitation and displays adequate confidence over the jump, that jumps are put up in the form of a small and inviting oxer.

Because the horses are led in quietly and are not allowed to run into the first jump, the second jump, a narrow oxer, follows at a distance of 6.80-7.00m. This second jump should be about 20cm higher than the first one and should be constructed of planks and poles. An oxer asks the horses to pay attention and does not on the whole allow them to over jump. Horses do not normally refuse and the necessary impulsion remains intact.

The main focusing point, however, is the third jump, another oxer, following at a distance of 7.20-7.50m. Whereas the first jumps are intended to develop rhythm, the third also provides a guideline to establish both suitability and talent. A particularly good example is a free standing jump with telescopically operated sides, specifically designed for this purpose. An inviting jump where the poles are arranged slightly behind one another. Because horses respect bright red colours, we tend to use red and white striped planks and poles. A brush placed in the middle of the oxer provides a welcome change and ensures increasing awareness. To ascertain that this last jump will be tackled with rhythm and impulsion, enough space must be allowed after the jump. A lack of space, caused either by the closeness of the walls in the arena or a packed gallery will force the horse to break in flight. This often frightens the horses and stops them going forward freely and willingly.

Horses who have never taken part in free jumping are, for the first couple of times, led over the poles, which are placed almost at ground level, on a long rein. After their first shy approach, they begin to follow their handler without problems and with increasing confidence. It is enough if, on the first day, the horse jumps both jumps willing and calm, without a change in tempo. The next time you may even put a little oxer to finish with increasing confidence with correct jumping.

To further the jumping education and presentation of our auction candidates, we build a combination of three jumps. Horses find it easier to find a flowing jumping rhythm and often make better progress over the jump itself. Because some horses tend to run into the combination a bit fast, they are as a rule, lead into the jumps. This method results in the horses remaining calm between runs and they are released in the corner towards the combination in either walk or trot. It is essential to build what is called a jumping lane to enable the trainers to catch the horses easily after the last jump.

TO FURTHER ALERTNESS

The first jump in the jumping lane should be built at a distance of 7-8 metres from the corner (2 canter strides). The first jump should be upright and should be relatively small at a height of 40-50cm. It should, however, be constructed in many different ways, for example, using the lower parts however not be frightened off and no job is to be too big. Mistakes due to lack of concentration ensure more concentration and further the learning process but serious faults at the jump must be avoided at all costs. Should a horse overdo a jump in an unnatural and tense fashion, then the task must be reduced on the next jump. Trust is

the key to the future progress of the horse's education. Never gamble with the horse's trust.

As the horse's confidence increases, the last oxer may, without fear, be put up and widened, always taking account of the horse's age and ability. In order to keep the height of the jumps in proportion so as not to break the natural rhythm, the middle fence too ought to be put up slightly.

TRAINING AT HOME

Giving credit to the above mentioned system, the difficulties of the same also warrant mention; firstly the building of the course requires a considerable amount of work and manpower. It needs 3 to 4 people equipped with schooling whips and 2 people to lead the horses on. How many breeders and exhibitors then have this number of experienced staff to hand at home, as we have the good fortune to have available in the Verden team? It might be worth considering arranging free jumping training sessions, backed by the Association and offered through the riding or breeding clubs and indeed the young breeders club.

Following the motto, "what one can do well is never too much for two" would surely seem to be a recipe for success.

Such training sessions would be of enormous benefit to our young horses as regards their basic jumping education, either on a training basis or to prepare them for a jumping career, regards balance, or indeed, interference of any kind. The breeder, owner and trainer are thus able to gain valuable information early on in the freejumping as to the horse's talent and future jumping career, auction selection, stallion licensing and mare performance testing. Or, alternatively, simply to discover the jumping potential of one's own stock, plan its future schooling, draw up marketing strategies and, finally, select the right partner as regards breeding quality offspring.

Even though free jumping and jumping under saddle are two completely separate issues at the end of the day, one can, on the whole, assume that a horse which shows above average ability in free jumping will later also give a clever performance under saddle.

Deviations are not common and are more often than not attributable to the influence of the rider. To evaluate the jumping ability of young horses, often not backed, there is indeed no alternative. It is not, therefore, without reason, that free jumping is considered of great importance when judging the potential of breeding stock, i.e. the stallion licensing, stallion performance test and mare performance test. Potential buyers at Verden auctions are also of the opinion that the free jumping is an important part of the evaluation process.

EVALUATION

The evaluation must take into account character, temperament, inner calm, intelligence, the will to win and enough courage as well as natural talent and willingness; a combination of these characteristics will no doubt produce a good show jumper. These are all criteria which can be established at the outset.

To judge the more technical points of a jumping performance requires somewhat more routine of the horses. It is only once the horse has complete confidence that it is able to concentrate on the task in hand and work out its own approach. Regular work will produce stronger muscles, the jumping will become more powerful, the horse approaches the jumps much calmer and becomes increasingly more balanced. It is only now that jumping is more certain, the horse learns how to collect, improves its leg

technique, uses its neck correctly and jumps relaxed with its back well rounded. The fences may now be put up and the overall picture as regards jumping ability finally begins to make sense.
Inherited jumping ability is only one indispensable ingredient for a recipe for success because the pedigree alone does not jump. Free jumping must therefore be practiced with young horses on a regular basis, for instance, once a week at the outset. The first objective is to build up confidence. The horses should approach the fences willing and relaxed and so gain increasing confidence. To guarantee success, both the selection and building of the fences as well as quiet and correct handling of the horses are of paramount importance.

FIRST TESTS

The first tests are carried out over two jumps in conjunction with free running. If this exercise is carried out in a large indoor arena, namely 60m in length, then it is advisable to reduce the length to 40-50m. We have discovered that otherwise the horses are coming in a bit too fast and not only lose valuable energy unnecessarily, but also jump flat

Should a horse approach the combination too fast it may be slowed down by placing a ground pole 3.5m before the first jump. It may also be appropriate to put the first fence up to command the required respect and alertness. If the horse increases its speed within the combination, thus jumping too close to the second jump, a ground pole is placed between the two jumps.

NO RECORDS

"Higher, wider - repetition and one more time". Take heed, there is the danger, particularly in relation to horses endowed with outstanding jumping talent, that they are made sour by asking simply too much of them. It is far better to see two to three jumps over 1.0m performed in a calm and collected manner, than one tensed high jump over 1.5m which will never be repeated because the horse has frightened itself over his own giant leap.
The main aim of the first months in training is to get the horses used to all shapes and sizes of jumps. They will learn, through the different sizes and combinations of jumps, to deal with changing situations. This will teach them to be alert, have a good look first, think and jump with more respect and quality. The horses must

STANDARD SITUATIONS

The distances mentioned above are only approximate measurements. Whatever applies to the individual situation must be judged by the trainer because he is aware of the horse's level of schooling, knows its approach into the fences and its overall jumping performance. The distances will therefore vary with different free jumping venues. I am thus of the opinion that distances are measured precisely and accurately recorded so that they may be used as a guideline in further training. If one were to try and achieve optimum conditions for every single horse then fences would have to be constantly moved about. It is therefore imperative that a standard measurement is adopted so that candidates who vary a great deal from those set measures will have to demonstrate their ability given standard situations. Given these conditions, the horses will and can achieve optimum jumping performances. Because they are led up to the jumps, they will remain calm and are able to concentrate on the set task. They are let off individually at the right speed, approach the combination correctly and, given the correct distances, gain

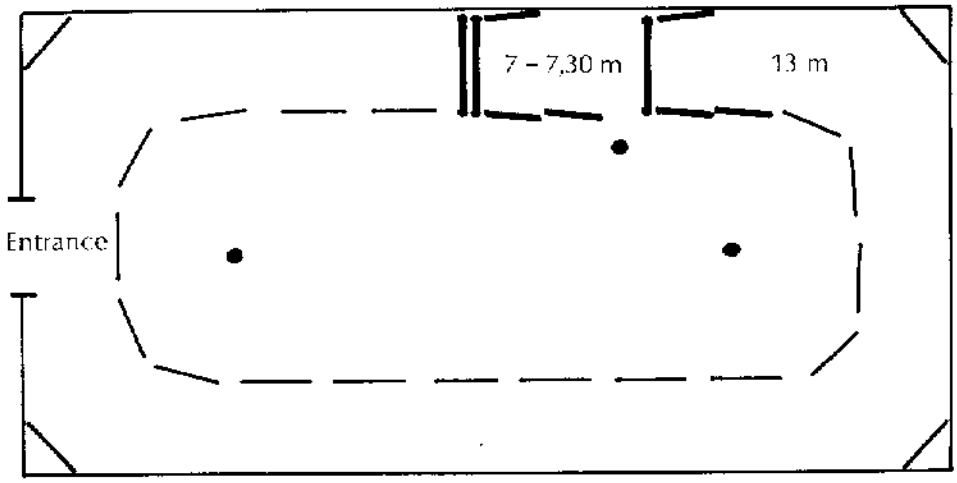
It is clear, however, that short term training is by no means enough to give a clear and concise conclusion. After two to three training sessions, one may only hazard a

vague guess for spectacular but fearful jumps have no meaning and are often merely confusing.

It is very important when building and pr

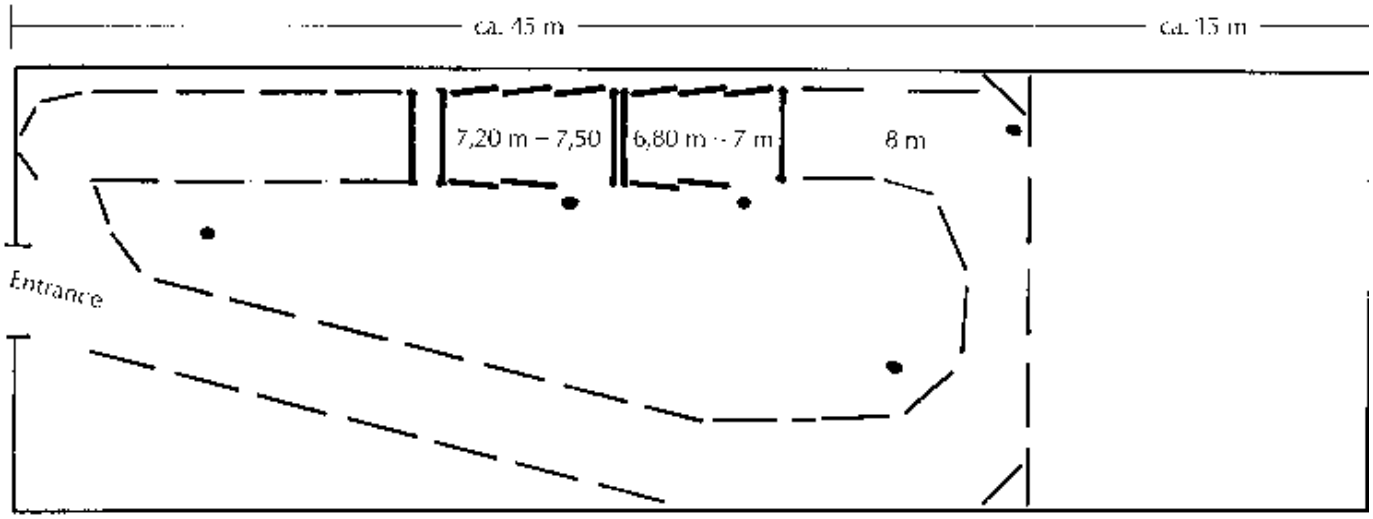
environment to enable the horse to come to terms with its given task. There can only be progress if distracting factors of any kind are removed. The venue must have regard to the present situation and level of schooling.

Diagram 1: Freejumping with two fences in a 20 m x 60 m arena



● = Whip handler

Diagram 2: Free jumping wit three fences in a 20 m x 60 m area



● = Whip handler