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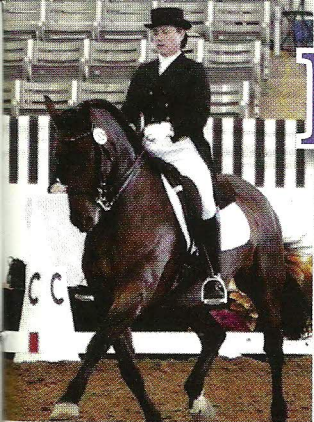
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Friesian Sporthorses



An Emerging Breed for the 21st Century

By the FSA staff

The crossbreeding of Friesians is a controversial topic in some circles. When the first Friesian registry was formed in 1879 in the Netherlands, crossbreeding was common. The popularity of the crossbred, however, led to fears that the purebred Friesian may become extinct. By 1913 there existed only three purebred Friesian studbook stallions. Steps were taken and registry rules were revised to ensure the future of the purebred Friesian horse, which today is flourishing.

Meanwhile, the crossbreeding of Friesians has seen a remarkable resurgence in popularity, especially in the last fifteen years. Much of the earliest crossbreeding was highly experimental, and the goals and motivations of cross breeders varied greatly. Among this group of breeding pioneers were those who admired the characteristics of the Friesian but desired to create a sportier hybrid, and the earliest concept of a Friesian Sporthorse was born.

The goal of Friesian Sporthorse breeding is to create a quality horse of sport horse type, building on the strengths of the Friesian, but with a greater emphasis on sport potential. Friesian Sporthorses most commonly combine Warmblood and/or Thoroughbred blood with that of the Friesian, as this breeding has proven to be the most successful for sport. The infusion of Warmblood and/or Thoroughbred blood most notably tends to consistently improve the overall athleticism and stamina as well as the quality of the canter.

The Friesian Sporthorse Association

As the popularity of sport-bred Friesian crosses increased, there was a growing demand for an official registry to recognize, document and further develop these sport-bred crosses as a breed. In 2007, after years of planning and preparation, the Friesian Sporthorse Association (FSA) was officially launched. The FSA is the official registry of the Friesian Sporthorse, and it is the only registry dedicated exclusively to the Friesian Sporthorse. It is also the first and only registry to recognize the Friesian Sporthorse as a developing breed with strict and specific guidelines for breeding and registration.

Since its inception, the FSA has grown into an international registry and registers Friesian Sporthorses from around the world. Registry issues and decisions are handled and voted on by a five-member Advisory Board that represent decades of sport horse experience with Warmbloods and/or Friesians. In 2008 the FSA trademarked the name "Friesian Sporthorse." The registry also is internationally recognized and authorized to issue UELNs (Universal Equine Life Numbers) which adds to the legitimacy and recognition of the Friesian Sporthorse as a breed worldwide.

The Friesian Sporthorse is still a relatively small breed with currently less than five hundred Friesian Sporthorses registered in the world. However, the popularity of the Friesian Sporthorse continues to grow as more people are exposed to the breed and discover the beauty, athleticism, trainability and fun personalities of these horses.

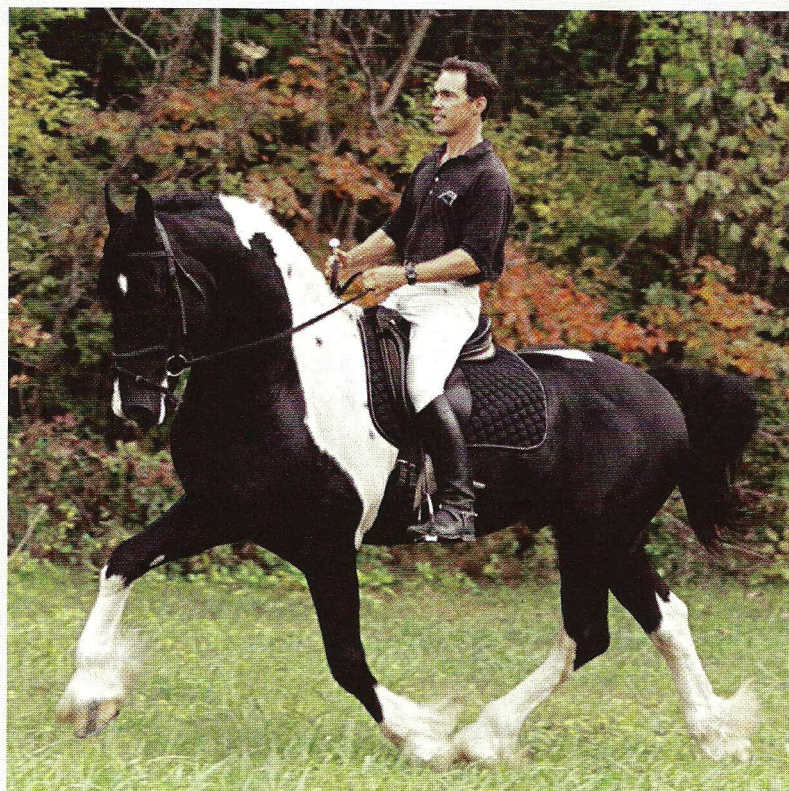


Photo courtesy Hidden Promise Sporthorses

Nico (1996-2010), legendary pinto Friesian Sporthorse. The only pinto Friesian Sporthorse to be fully approved for breeding. Owned by Hidden Promise Sporthorses and ridden by James Koford.



Photo (also with article title) courtesy Brooke Cramton

Ducati CH, a Friesian Sporthorse gelding competing at Grand Prix with owner/trainer Brooke Cramton.

Registry Goals and Structure

The FSA aims to encourage, document and recognize the breeding of Friesian Sporthorses worldwide. The structure and registration guidelines of the FSA were heavily influenced by established sport horse and Warmblood breeding practices.

The FSA's heavy emphasis on sport is reflected in the strict guidelines of both the Main and Auxiliary Books. The previous success (and lack thereof) of crossbreeding certain breeds with the Friesian was carefully examined, and much consideration was also given to the unique characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the Friesian. An incredible amount of thought, planning and discussion went into establishing the registration guidelines for Friesian Sporthorses.

Friesian Sporthorses must have at least 25% Friesian blood. Initial registration is divided into Main Book, Auxiliary Book and Foundation Book as determined by a minimum three generation pedigree. The Foundation Book is for purebred Friesian stallions and mares which are being used for crossbreeding. The Main Book is for horses which are at least 25% Friesian, combined with up to 75% Warmblood, Thoroughbred, Iberian, and/or Georgian Grande. The Auxiliary Book is a little bit more open, allowing limited percentages of Saddlebred, draft, or Arabian blood (but not all three). The specifics of the Main and Auxiliary

Books are outlined in more detail on the FSA's website (FriesianSporthorseAssociation.com), or registry officials are happy to help determine which book a specific horse may be eligible for.

A Certificate of Pedigree (COP) may be issued if a horse does not meet the criteria for one of the three books but can prove a minimum 25% Friesian heritage.

Friesian Sporthorse stallions and mares are approved for breeding after meeting certain performance and/or inspection requirements as well as meeting the strict pedigree requirements. Additionally, mares may be awarded Star and/or Preferred Mare status based on their exceptional quality and achievements and that of their offspring.

All Friesian Sporthorses (including geldings) are eligible to earn Elite Book status at the following levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Elite Book status is earned via performance and may be achieved at dressage, combined driving or eventing performance. (Bronze Elite Book status may also be achieved by meeting a minimum inspection or in-hand score.) The criteria are tougher for each level of recognition. There are no age limits or special pedigree requirements for horses to be eligible to earn Elite Book status; it is entirely performance based and open to all FSA registered horses.

Friesian Sporthorse Characteristics

Friesian Sporthorses are generally of a middle weight sport or Baroque type, often with the higher and more arched neck set of the Friesian. They frequently have the thicker mane, tail,



Photo courtesy Bama Rogers

Hanover Cangaaro, ridden by Rachel Haase, owned by Bama Rogers / Hanover Farm, is the first Friesian Sporthorse to earn Elite Book status via eventing.

and feather of the Friesian. The gaits are generally expressive, with a tendency towards a more animated leg action. Although frequently black, all colors and markings are recognized.

Friesian Sporthorses tend to inherit the friendly, people-oriented personalities and level-headed temperaments purebred Friesians are famous for, making them a popular choice for amateurs as well as professionals. They are known for their hardiness (something attributed to the hybrid vigor from crossbreeding) as well as their good feet.

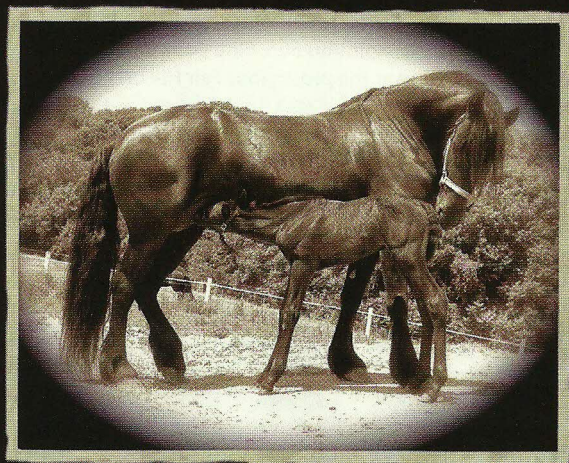
They are an especially popular choice for dressage and driving, although there are Friesian Sporthorses enjoying success as jumpers and event horses as well. In 2009 the Friesian Sporthorse gelding Hanover Cangaaro became the first Friesian Sporthorse to earn Elite Book status for eventing. In the dressage arena, Friesian Sporthorses are proving themselves in open competition at all levels and against all breeds. Considering how few Friesian Sporthorses there are currently in the U.S., it is especially impressive to see how many have enjoyed dressage success, competed through FEI and been included on the USDF Dressage Horse of the Year Top 20 lists. ■



Lexington, Elite Book Friesian Sporthorse stallion, competing at FEI dressage. Owned and ridden by Gigha Steinman/River Oaks Farm.

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The Appeal of the Friesian Sporthorse

By the FSA staff

Many people have never even heard of a Friesian Sporthorse. Yet those who own and ride them often become fiercely loyal to the breed. People are attracted to Friesian Sporthorses for a variety of reasons. Most find their appearance, gaits and temperaments appealing. Some come from a background of other breeds but were looking for something a little different in their next horse. The horses themselves are the breed's best advertising.

Melanie Cain-Stage of Florida describes herself as a "long time Appaloosa fan" and admits she has a fondness for colored horses. Itching to get back into dressage, she knew she would be competing primarily against Warmbloods. Her wish list included a horse that would be competitive but also colored. Given that she is 58 and has rheumatoid arthritis, she also wanted something calm and sensible.

Melanie found a pinto Friesian Sporthorse mare at a Friesian Sporthorse breeding farm, and remarks it was love at first sight. "Her gaits were fantastic and she was stunning," says Melanie. "I'm looking forward to a wonderful dressage career. My advice to people who think they are too old to ride—I say don't give up on your dreams. Find the right horse like I did and just go for it!"

The Best of Both Worlds

Many Friesian Sporthorse enthusiasts are people who came from a background of either Warmbloods or purebred Friesians but decided they preferred the blend of the two breeds over either breed individually.

Tashlin Hall of Kendhall Park Friesians in Australia has both Warmbloods and Friesian Sporthorses, and she stands a purebred Friesian stallion. After buying her first Friesian Sporthorse filly she found that "working and training with this filly was just so easy and pleasurable." She states that although she still adores her Warmbloods, she finds the Friesian

Sporthorses "just a little bit more dependable and stable-minded, especially in their formative years."

Judy DeBoer of Saucony Creek Sporthorses in Pennsylvania started with a purebred Friesian mare. "I had always intended to eventually breed her," she recalls, "but after realizing some of the shortcomings of the pure Friesian breed for sport use, I chose to cross her to Warmblood stallions instead of producing purebred offspring."

"Friesians do have much to offer—most have outstanding temperaments, great feet, and stunning beauty," Judy is quick to add, "but I wanted to produce horses which were healthy and well suited to sport, and I felt Friesian Sporthorses were a perfect choice."

Carrie Simmons of Cornerstone Sporthorses in Florida came from a Warmblood background, at one time even standing a German Warmblood stallion. "I like the temperaments, the hybrid vigor, and the slightly heavier bone structure of the Friesian Sporthorses. I've found that the infusion of Friesian blood results in horses which are very similar to Warmbloods, but with a little something extra," Carrie explains.

In 2011 Carrie took her Friesian Sporthorse six-month-old filly Lily ROF to a USDF/DSHB show. "I wanted to prove a Friesian Sporthorse could hold her own against traditional Warmbloods," she says. Lily ROF did more than hold her own. The filly went on to become the 2011 Southeast Regional Champion and was the first Friesian Sporthorse known to win this honor.

LEFT TO RIGHT : ❶ Romulus SCS, Elite Book Friesian Sporthorse gelding competing at the prestigious Fair Hill breed show, is owned by Judy DeBoer / Saucony Creek Sporthorses. ❷ Lily ROF was USDF/DSHB Southeast Regional Champion 2011 with handler Dean Graham. Lily is owned by Carrie Simmons / Cornerstone Sporthorses. ❸ Kendhall Park Romance is a Friesian Sporthorse mare, earning Elite Book status via inspection in Australia and is owned by Kendhall Park Friesians / Tashlin Hall.

Photo courtesy of Saucony Creek Sporthorses



Photo courtesy of Carrie Simmons



Photo courtesy Tashlin Hall



“Their strict registration guidelines give legitimacy to the breed. These are not just random Friesian crosses—they are selectively bred Friesian Sporthorses.”

Gigha Steinman of River Oaks Farm of Florida also came primarily from a Warmblood background. “When I bought my first Friesian cross twelve years ago, I didn’t know anything about them,” she admits. “I was so impressed with him, though, that I set out to learn everything I could about crossbreeding Friesians.” Her journey led her to purchase a young Friesian Sporthorse colt named Lexington, who is now an FSA approved breeding stallion competing at FEI level dressage, scoring in the 70s, and has earned Gold Elite status. “I can’t say enough good things about these horses,” says Gigha.

Most Friesian Sporthorse owners echo Gigha’s sentiments. Megan Pifer of Ohio bought her first Friesian Sporthorse last year. “I was thrilled because she was the total package. She had the presence, intelligence, and movement of her Friesian sire, but also the stamina, elasticity, strong back and uphill carriage of her Thoroughbred dam,” Megan remarks.

Amateur rider Tania Radda of Arizona admits her dressage instructor was initially skeptical of her choice to buy a young, unstarted Friesian Sporthorse. However, her trainer changed her mind the first time she sat on Tania’s new horse. “She rode him once around the arena and told me that she was no longer mad at me,” Tania recalls. “Her words were ‘this horse is brilliant!’”

Broad Appeal

Because Friesian Sporthorses tend to be talented enough for professionals but with temperaments suitable for amateurs, they appeal to a broad range of riders. Friesian Sporthorses also tend to be pretty horses, and although attractiveness does not correlate to talent, many Friesian Sporthorse owners admit to the appeal of owning a beautiful horse.

Robert Labrie stands two FSA Approved Foundation stallions Othello and Mathijs at his farm Friesians of Majesty in Vermont. He believes that Friesians have much to offer to the development

of the modern dressage horse. “First, the crosses inherit the fabulous Friesian temperaments,” he states. “And with the elaborate Friesian movement, the cross is perfectly suited for dressage.”

The Importance of Registry Affiliation

Robert also thinks that the selection of a registry is important. “We chose to associate our stallions with the FSA because they provide strict registration guidelines, breeding approvals and performance recognition programs,” he says. “Our goal is to breed top shelf sport horses, and the FSA has the same goals. They are supporting careful, selective and responsible breeding practices to develop the Friesian Sporthorse for the highest levels of competition.”

Megan Pifer is also very supportive of the FSA. “I am a true believer in the Friesian Sporthorse for both amateur and professional riders. This organization is very professional and works diligently to create great opportunities for its members.”

“I like the fact that the FSA is internationally recognized, plus it’s the only registry dedicated exclusively to recognizing and promoting the Friesian Sporthorse,” says Friesian Sporthorse breeder Carrie Simmons. “Their strict registration guidelines give legitimacy to the breed. These are not just random Friesian crosses—they are selectively bred Friesian Sporthorses.”

Australian breeder Tashlin Hall sums it up nicely when she says, “I feel lucky to have access to register my horses with the FSA, and I look forward to watching the membership and the popularity of the breed grow in Australia and around the world.”

Growing Popularity

The popularity of the Friesian Sporthorse breed will undoubtedly continue to grow as more people are exposed to these special horses. Breeders continue to fine-tune their breeding programs, and Friesian Sporthorses continue to prove themselves in competition. At the same time the general public is slowly becoming more aware of the breed and the subtle nuances that differentiate Friesian Sporthorses from the myriad of Friesian crossbreds. The FSA and its members are proud to be a part of history as they support the development of this extraordinary horse in the 21st century. With the dedication of the FSA behind them, the sky is the limit for Friesian Sporthorses. ■

LEFT TO RIGHT : ① Celtics Whisper is an Elite Book Friesian Sporthorse gelding competing at Fourth Level. Owner/rider is Teresa Foster. ② Yogi Brusco is an Elite Book Friesian Sporthorse gelding. Owner is Tania Radda and his rider/trainer is Tracey Krajenke. ③ Miramar, a rare pinto Main Book Friesian Sporthorse mare, is owned by Melanie Cain-Stage.

Photo courtesy John Paul Foster



Photo by Mickie Krajenke



Photo courtesy Melanie Cain-Stage

