

ed has totally changed. With the abolition of the agricultural horse, the natural selection disappeared and the decline of the Irish horse started.

Recently a sense of panic was felt in Great Britain and Ireland, so the Irish draught stallions were used in abundance to try and rectify the situation, unfortunately with little effect, and very few top class horses emerged from these breeding habits.

The reasons are that the selections according to present day requirements are not carried out, and the evaluations of present day Irish draught horses do not rely sufficiently on performance ability, but more or less on accepted showing lines.

Changing times on the Continent

One should also realise that an Irish draught stallion will rarely produce a sporting horse in a direct line, but used to create the draught mare which, if used as mentioned earlier, still has something to contribute in the production of a modern day sports horse.

Contrary to what has happened in Britain and Ireland, on the continent, changing times were noticed early enough, and the breeding authorities consciously laid down guidelines and regulations to breed a horse with many of the qualities of the old draught horse, but adapted to modern day sporting activities.

The authorities took into account what the horses were going to be used for, and specified the temperament and physical qualities which the breeding stock should possess in order to be selected. For that purpose, these specifications are very exact, and the horse's ability to be a good doer is specified, along with its length of stride and jumping technique and so on.

In order to ensure that these qualities are maintained and further developed, stallions are selected according to performance ability and their progeny is monitored regularly.

Although most continental countries have their own breeding policies with some differences between them, the basics are very similar —

selection according to ability, and a clear understanding by the breeders of what the requirements of the sporting horse are.

Showing, as seen in Britain, is hardly practiced on the continent. These breeding policies are dynamic and continuously evaluated and improved as will be explained in the Belgian example.

The Belgian Example

One of the countries which in recent years has come to the fore in its production of the sporting horse is Belgium, with good representatives like Darco, Didi, Big Ben and Butterfly, showing that without a great tradition of horse breeding, or a vast amount of money, it is possible, in a relatively short time, to obtain very effective results.

The special characteristic of the Belgian breeding policy is that, without being totally autocratic, it is a laid down controlled plan, directed by a commission that decides which stallions will receive a licence to breed, but the production and marketing are left to the private individuals.

The Belgian breeders, not unlike the Germans and the Dutch, made good use of the resources in the neighbourhood and initially invested in numbers of typical Dutch mares and crossed them with old fashioned German stallions of classical lines like Ferdinand, Gotthard, and Flugal.

These lines represented special qualities of size, power, and movement, and are considered most influential German lines. This crossbreed produced the typical Belgian brood mare which at present, crossed with a modern thoroughbred, produces the best of the Belgian modern horse.

This use of German foundation stock is not unique to Belgium, as was mentioned before. In Holland, German stallions like Burggraaf (Holst), Rossini (Westf), Porter (Holst) and Farn (Holst), the sire of Nimmerdo, are very much in use.

In Denmark, influential German originated stallions like Atlantic, Herzog, the sire of

Marzog, Galantus and others appear prominently in the Danish blood lines.

It is interesting to note that, providing the mares are of old classical lines, the use of thoroughbred, or modern Francais stallions, produces most successful results.

In Germany these famous thoroughbred stallions are most influential in creating bloodlines from which many competition horses evolve such as Lady Killer, Marcio, Angelo, De Lowe and many others. Horses like Ahlerich Amon, Corlandus and Sioux are descendants of these thoroughbred horses.

The Belgians have made good use of French blood, with horses like Fleury De Manoer, African Drum and Eterest (sire of Big Ben), as well as thoroughbreds like Colorado, and German horses like Wotan, by Wohler.

Dynamic Progressive Fluctuating Policy

It is important to note that European breeding plans are not fixed, but a dynamic progressive fluctuating policy. From information and observation it is noticed that the type of stallion used, such as thoroughbred or heavier, varies according to requirements, and the breeding authorities licence stallions not only according to individual merits, but they decide what type of stallions and of what percentage they require within the scheme at the time.

In recent conversation with a Belgian horseman I was told that many feel the infusion of lighter types of horses into the Belgian lines has reached its present usefulness, and there is evidence that the latest crop of young horses are not as good in jumping powers and technique as the crop of a few years earlier. A warning signal to the commission to return back to the foundation stock.

Similar points were mentioned to me by a German breeder in 1973, with the result that the breeding authorities limited the percentage of thoroughbred stallions within the licenced stallions.

Mares Type and Fashion

The expressions old fashioned and type are mentioned often, and clarification of the meaning behind these terms is required. It is important to understand that the main quality of the European warm-blood is that it is a recently developed type of horse, according to present requirements.

Over the years the characteristics of the horses have changed significantly, and differ from the original type which at times is referred to as 'the old fashion'.

The old fashioned horse is much heavier in conformation than the modern horse. It has short strong legs, and the general impression is one of a square, low to the ground, horse with tremendous athletic ability of suppleness and power to its movement.

The exterior of these horses differs from the accepted idea of the British show horse. There is a stronger and flatter top line with the points of the hips higher and wider, facilitating room for muscles to develop. They also differ from the British idea of being rangy to the opposite of being closed and well engaged.

When loose they display, not only free extravagant movement, but also the ability to lift their shoulders higher than the hind legs and move in a speed boat like manner.

It is very important that the female is very true to this type in order for it to be a good brood mare. Using a mare of this kind provides few intelligent options. Crossed with a thoroughbred, or a light warm-blood, it will produce the modern competition horse. Unfortunately if one produces a filly it may be of a wonderful riding type, but not necessarily the best for breeding.

On the other hand, using an old fashioned stallion may give us true foundation stock, as described earlier, or a riding type of size and substance.

These types are recognised in Europe and in recent Dutch promotional literature, two winning mares were displayed, one representing the riding type, and the other the breeding type, both of magnificent qualities, but totally different in shape.