

## TEAGASC EQUINE OVERSEAS TOUR

# Holstein horsepower



**Susan Finnerty joined Irish breeders and producers on a Teagasc tour to the home of the Holsteiner horse**

**H**ORSE breeding for some is a religion and a selection of devout followers gathered in Dublin Airport at an ungodly hour last Friday morning for the latest Teagasc equine overseas tour. Expertly organised by Wendy Conlon, whose inside knowledge of the Holstein breeders and fluent German proved invaluable, and Crea English, it was a whirlwind tour to the home of the Holsteiner horse.

Timed to coincide with the breed's annual colt inspections and elite riding horse auction, the first two days were spent by the 24-strong Irish group at the Holstenhallen, an exhibition and concert venue, in Neumünster. This year's colt candidates had already had a preliminary school in the transformed arena on Wednesday, before limb and movement at walk and trot assessment outdoors the following day.

By Friday, when the Irish Brigade arrived, it was a full house for the loose jumping element when spectators from home and overseas watched to see if they could spot the next new supersire or competition prospect. Blessed with not the best seats in the house and decoding announcements in German, it took us several minutes to match up each colt's number to a superbly informative catalogue, worth every cent of its €13 price tag. However it was clear from several exuberant jumping displays, rewarded by a vocal audience, that there were some outstanding prospects for the inspectors to choose from.

This year's panel included Dr. Thomas Nissen, Jens Hauschildt, Michael Gonell, Wulf-Hinrich Hamann and Christian Thoroe who oversaw a process, which ran like clockwork. The colts had already been assessed in August and October which was a benefit for them and so Friday's loose jumping element was a final confirmation for the inspectors and another opportunity for prospective buyers to view this year's batch.

On Saturday morning, colts were first shown individually by sprint-speed handlers and again, the German 'clapometer' flagged favourites, before being brought into the arena in small groups to stand in front of the inspector's table for the decision. We soon recognised the "gekört" or "nicht gekört" verdicts or when one was awarded a premium, with the highest-marked colts scheduled to return later for the championship.

Early that morning, while walking around the stables, I'd spotted a photo opportunity of a laid-back sales entry having a snooze and recognised her again when the recharged Casall filly was the top-priced lot in the Elite riding horse auction. In another coincidence, this three-year-old was bred and consigned by Professor Dr. Hartwig Schmidt whose yard was on Sunday morning's calling card.

Related to Carsten-Otto Nagel's wonderful mare Corradina, she was sold for €150,000 to a Lower Saxony yard, while

the second-highest price of €100,000 was paid by an Italian buyer for Nerrado Junior, by Nerrado. In all, 35 horses were sold at an average of €41,885, with the majority staying in Europe, including four event horse prospects going to the UK, and further afield including Dubai, Mexico and the United States.

## TOP LOTS

With the champion colt results announced in reverse order, there was just Harm Thormählen's Sandro Junior and Timm Peters' Uno I remaining in the electric atmosphere of the arena as to which was this year's champion. It was no surprise when Sandro Junior was the last colt standing as the dark bay son of Sandro Boy has been the crowd's clear favourite over the two days and he was the first to go under the hammer in the auction, which immediately followed.

Again, it was noticeable how deftly ran both the loose jumping and auction sections were carried out, with the 2017 champion bought by a breeding farm in southern Germany for €260,000.

The reserve champion will stay in Germany too as the Uriko-sired colt Uno I was bought by the Marbach stud for €96,000. Speaking of Marbach, where La Biosthetique Sam's sire, the Irish export Stan The Man stood in his late years, Wendy Conlon's announcement that she hoped to have a special guest speaker for the Irish contingent led to some frivolous guesswork.

Unsurprisingly, it proved to be neither Michael Jung or Angela Merkel but the Holsteiner Verband's breeding director Dr. Thomas Nissen who generously gave his time during one of the busiest weekends of their year to share his frank views and costs of the selection process, plus the challenges facing this German studbook.

Those thoughts were often echoed over the next three days of fascinating visits to farms around the Holstein region to breeders interwoven with household names such as Cor de la Bryere, Capitol and Sacramento Song.

The heavy clay soil shaped the type of horse once produced in the Holstein region and these local breeders' experiences over the decades both echoes and contrasts with their Irish counterparts. For example, filly foals are valued by Holsteiner breeders, as they are the next generation of carefully-curated mare lines and a fashionable stallion is not regarded as a 'quick fix' solution in one generation.

More common problems include the shortage of suitable riders for the breaking and production of young horses, thoroughbred-sired geldings are viewed as a by-product for the eventing market, while the Holstein and Irish breeders have also witnessed the rise of the Benelux breeding countries.

**Next week:** Walking in the shadow of giants



A capacity crowd watches the Holsteiner colt inspections which ran like clockwork

**€260,000**

paid for the top-priced champion colt Sandro Junior

**€76,722**

Average auction price for a licensed colt

**€19,454**

Average auction price for a non-licensed colt

**2,800**

average number of Holstein foals produced per annum

**62**

colts presented for the 2017 inspections

**26**

licensed colts



Sandro Junior, champion colt at the Holstein auction 2017 pictured at the home of breeder Harm Thormählen

**10**

colts sold from Saturday night's auction within Germany

**7**

premiums awarded amongst last weekend's successful licensed colts

## TOP 10 APPROVED COLT SALES

<b>Sandro Junior</b>	(Sandro Boy x Singulord Joter)	260,000	Germany
<b>Uno</b>	(Uriko x Colman)	96,000	Germany
<b>Cardin</b>	(Casall x Cassini I)	220,000	Germany
<b>Cassitaro</b>	(Casaltino x Casaro)	60,000	Italy
<b>Caruso Bello</b>	(Cascadello I x Carry)	65,000	Italy
<b>Quandaros</b>	(Quaterback x Carpaccio)	32,000	Germany
<b>Fracom</b>	(Fragonard xx x Chepetto)	29,000	South Africa
<b>Balvenie</b>	(Baracuda x Vlrstway)	45,000	Germany
<b>Covilus</b>	(Casall - Contender)	65,000	Ukraine
<b>Calasco</b>	(Casall - Quidams Rubin)	45,000	Belgium

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This has been my third Teagasc equine tour, which may seem odd for someone who has no involvement in show jumping, but I have always been intrigued as to why continental breeding is way more advanced in this sport. What better way but to go and visit and to experience their scientific method to breeding elite horses!

Repeat customer Jimmy Quinn

PHOTOS: Susan Finnerty





Teagasc On Tour: The group, with leaders Wendy Conlon, Crea English and breeder Harm Thormaehlen with the leading horse at the 2002 World Equestrian Games, Fine Cera

## IN HIS WORDS - DR THOMAS NISSEN, BREEDING DIRECTOR AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, HOLSTEINER VERBAND

“WE select the stallions starting in August and watch around 250 to 300 stallions. Eight, nine years ago, we had about 500 to 550 stallions and then the horse business goes down. So now we have about 250 stallions at the beginning of this year and we selected 71, then the vets check them and all the radiographies [X-rays].

“Some years we have dressage stallions, it varies between one and five, but this year there was only one. We say to our breeder, ‘we have to concentrate on producing jumping horses’. We do not want to combine jumping mare lines with dressage lines, because otherwise we have neither good jumping or dressage horses.

“In Europe, we have such specialised dressage breeding and lines that it is not our aim to follow them and breed dressage horses. But some of the breeders love to breed dressage horses and so we make a small line for them.

“If you breed jumping horses, you can also produce eventers. We had the luck, that when we changed from the foundation horse to the sport horse, that there was a lot of thoroughbred in the pedigree in the third and fourth generation. The eventing rules changed and before, they needed very blood horses with a lot of thoroughbred. Now the racing [long format] has gone, so they need horses with good movement and good jumpers, so it is perfect to buy them here. Or Ireland! The Irish breeder is very good at producing eventing horses.

“When we select the young stallions, it is important that you know we have mare lines you can follow to the 18th century. You will not have success only with mare lines - the performance of the horse must be in context with the stamm (mare) line - but you will find a lot of performance horses that appear from the same stamm [mare] line every time. So the breeders, riders and dealers



know the stamm line and they will look for that line. Casall, for example, is from the stamm line 890.

“So I think the success of the breeding is not the stallion but the mother line. The breeder here knows that without good mother lines, you will not breed good horses. Sometimes, if you have good luck, it happens that you get a good horse but we say that is a coincidence.

“Ten years ago, we were very protective in Holstein, very closed, we did not accept other stallions and then we noticed that it was necessary to get other genes in our breed, because there will be too much inbreeding. So we used international stallions like Diamant de Semilly and Quidam de Revel. Some 20, 30 years ago, we went to France and looked for some stallions and there we found Quidam de Revel. He was a young stallion at the start of his career and we bought some semen from him, we selected 20 mares and from his first crop, we had three approved stallions. So today we are much more open.

“We have also opened a part of our studbook - Holstein Global - to bring in other mares. If you combine a foreign

mare with a Holstein stallion, then the foal will have 50% Holsteiner genes and this one can come in that part of our studbook.

“For us, for the breeding committee and for the breeders, we have two different parts. One part is the selection of the stallion and the genes we need for us. The other part is for the show. We never will select a winner that is not accepted by the people, he [Sandro Junior] was not only the favourite with us but he had a lot of presence, he was a fantastic mover and jumped very well yesterday, the people loved him.

“The highest price here [for an approved colt] was €600,000 for the stallion Cascadello I. The full-brother of Cascadello I brought, I think, €450,000 the following year.

“Out of this [stallion inspection process] you find the next generation. It is very difficult to find the next [superstar] like Casall, or like Contender, like Caretino or like Cassini. You will get such a stallion not every year. These stallions are sometimes not the champion of their year, Diarado was a champion, Cascadello was second place in his year but Casall was a stallion out of the middle [results] when he was approved. Also stallions like Contender, like Caretino, like Capitol, they came out of the middle, not the top.

“Money is necessary. It is extremely expensive to rent this place here, it costs €100,000 so we need the money to organise this show.

“We were in the comfortable situation of having stallions like Casall, Contender and Caretino. Corrada is still alive, an old man but still available by frozen semen and now we have Casall, he is out of sport and he has very interesting sons.

“If you breed horses for the top sport it is not easy to combine all things for an uncomplicated horse, so we have to

find the right balance. Sometimes we have stallions for the more professional rider but if you produce only horses for the normal rider, then you will only be in the middle.

“Most of the stallions that aren’t approved here are then usually gelded and go into sport. You have the chance here to get the best genetics of the breed and buyers know this, here is the chance to get a horse for the future. This place has a special atmosphere, the visitors can go around the hall and visit the horses. The Holstein horse is popular amongst our young European show jumping breeders and they come here each year.

“The Holsteiner Verband has 5,000 members, 60% of which are in the Holstein region and we have around about 3,000 active breeders. We have also have around 5,000 registered mares.

“We try to use thoroughbred stallions but it’s not so easy just now when we talk about the situation in the breed when selling goes down the last years, now it begins to grow. But when it goes down, the breeder wants to sell their foals and when you present a half-bred foal, then the buyers are looking more for Quidam de Revel or Diamant de Semilly or the more popular sires.

“If you have a thoroughbred sire, no-one knows the name so if you buy a foal and go back to Italy and say ‘I have a foal by Fragonard’, - we have a very good son by Fragonard - then everybody will say ‘Oh, who is Fragonard? I’ve never heard of him before. Is he a Holsteiner?’ But if you go back and say ‘I have a son of Casall’, then they say ‘Oh, Casall! That is very good’.

“Everyone knows you need thoroughbreds, you cannot work without thoroughbreds. At the moment it is difficult but I am sure within the next five or six years, we will need thoroughbreds and then we will come to Ireland to find them!”

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Everyone knows you need thoroughbreds, you cannot work without thoroughbreds



Urbanus, Irish National Champion 2017 for the second consecutive year at the Irish National Championships, ridden and owned by Anne Marie Dunphy.

Photograph by Alf Harvey

## Irish National Champion #FedonTopSpec

“At 16-years-old Urbanus looks fantastic, is feeling stronger and more supple than ever and getting better with age, thanks to TopSpec.”

Anne Marie Dunphy



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