

Icelandic Horse

Breeding in North America

Written by
Barbara Frische,
International FEIF
Breeding Judge

Translated by
Martina Gates

Facts gathered by
Martina Gates

With the formation of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC) in 1987, registered Icelandic horse breeding began in the United States. The USIHC has its own registry. It has, however, worked in partnership with WorldFengur (WF), since its official role as the Studbook of Origin for the Icelandic horse was implemented in 2001.

There are currently 56 first prize stallions available for breeding in the United States. This is a high proportion, especially when you consider that there are on average about 100 foals registered every year. It is evident that in previous years, great effort has been made to import high quality stallions into the United States. But, at this point, a greater focus needs to be placed on the selection of breeding mares.

2009 young horse evaluations

Every FEIF country is permitted to hold breed evaluations according to FIZO rules, as well as foal and young horse evaluations. For the first time, last year (2009), several young horse evaluations were held across parts of the United States. These evaluations were meant to aid breeders by giving them indications of their young horses' strengths and weaknesses, in relation to conformation, gaits and rideability. This form of young horse assessment was met with great enthusiasm, and there was a lot of interest in acquiring information and knowledge.

The quality level of the horses varied, but the best young horses were absolutely comparable to the best in Europe.

It is equally important in the United States as in Europe to give breeders information, an understanding, and encouragement to help them breed horses that are market specific, and as universally useable as possible.

The goals

The main breeding goals are: clear gait delineation; easy, rideable, clear beat tölt; good self-carriage; excellent natural balance; friendly,

independent, brave and cooperative character; a natural, but not too "hot" willingness; wide, flowing movements with good forward thrust and carriage. Furthermore, it is advantageous if the horse has an expressive and correct conformation which supports its health (e.g. strong legs, good hooves, etc.). This is easily recognizable for the breeder in the individual scores and comments of the assessment scale.

Last but not least, the Icelandic horse should stay breed specific so it can clearly be recognized and differentiated as being Icelandic, from all the other great breeds in the United States.

In theory this sounds easy, but how can the breeder reach this goal in practice?

1

Education and training:

- a. Use WorldFengur to learn about interesting parents and their bloodlines, or breeding values (BLUP).
- b. Participate at breeding seminars, riding clinics, or lectures given by experts on breeding subjects, which can be very interesting for all Icelandic horse riders,

Q & A

1. Approximately how many US registered foals are there every year?

2009 – 23

2008 – 103

2007 – 139

2006 – 125

2. How many mares are in the US registry versus stallions?

Approximately 2220 mares vs.

Approximately 565 stallions



Above: Bjoert from Vindsdalur.
Left: Heljar from Mill Farm,
ridden by Kristjan Kristjansson.
Photo: Thorunn Kristjansdottir

even if they are not breeders (e.g. a forward sloping back automatically creates a center of gravity too far forward).

- 2 Read Icelandic horse specific literature:
 - a. National stud books, such as this one.
 - b. Stud books from Iceland and other countries e.g. Germany and Scandinavia. Availability and information is available through the national Icelandic horse associations and their homepages.

- 3 Attend breeding shows; full evaluations, young horse evaluations, stallion shows, and farm shows.
 - a. Whether you have a horse in the show or not, all breeding evaluations are very informative and everyone can recognize potential future breeding horses and their offspring.

- 4 Attend an Icelandic horse show to get an idea of the gaits and the scoring.

- 5 Many countries offer breeder trips that are well organized. You will be in the company of equally interested individuals, and will visit well-known and famous breeding farms. (This can be here in the United States or abroad. An example of a great trip would be to watch Landsmót in Iceland. That's where many of the world-famous breeding farms gather to show their best horses).

- 6 Information through the National Breed Association, whose committees and breed leader can always be of assistance to any breed specific questions. www.icelandics.org

Achievements through quality

The most important rule for any breeder, anywhere in the world, is that you can only achieve satisfactory offspring by using quality parent horses. Quality is defined by all of the already mentioned attributes, plus anything special that the breeder prefers. All of these qualities are judged in all breeding shows to try and minimize any unwanted characteristics. Our pleasure horses especially need to have these great qualities to help balance out what their riders might not be able to achieve through skill, experience, or age.

This is a great requirement that only good, well-bred parent horses can achieve. The more faults a horse has, the more it will pass on to its offspring. This is not to say that only highly evaluated horses should be used in breeding, but that the breeder should be very well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the breeding horse and its marketability. The breeder should be aware of the breeding suitability of the breeding pair, and the resulting ramifications of this pairing.

The cost of raising a foal, whether it is good or not so good, is the same until they have matured, but the value of a good horse is much greater. Not to mention that it is much easier to sell a good horse, which gives the breeder more choices in picking the future owner.

In conclusion . . .

The horse breeding tradition in the United States goes way back. We can already see several excellent and committed Icelandic horse breeders in this beautiful country. I would be thrilled to see more in the future, and hopefully it will lead to many more people crossing paths with this extraordinary, beloved Icelandic horse. ●

Facts & Stats

American-bred first prize stallions:

Heljar from Mill Farm	8.05	8.10	Total 8.08
Hamur from Mill Farm	8.05	8.02	Total 8.03

American-bred first prize mares:

Ósk from Helms Hill	7.78	8.43	Total 8.17
Pia from Winterhorse Park	8.18	8.04	Total 8.08
Gæfa from North Salem	7.80	8.22	Total 8.05
Óskadís from Mill Farm	7.96	8.06	Total 8.02
Pökkadís from Winterhorse Park	8.29	7.83	Total 8.01
Sola from Helms Hill	8.16	7.90	Total 8.00

Canadian-bred first prize mares:

Bjoert from Vindsdalur	8.13	8.03	Total 8.07
Jodis from Fitjamyri	7.68	8.28	Total 8.04

Miscellaneous statistics:

- US stallions judged for full eval.: 15
- US mares judged for full eval.: 42
- Canadian stallions judged for full eval.: 5
- Canadian mares judged for full eval.: 42
- US stallions judged for conf. only: 18
- US mares judged for conf. only: 27
- Canadian stallions judged for conf. only: 7
- Canadian mares judged for conf. only: 13
- US bred stallions: 420
- US bred mares: over 1,200 (the largest portion is in California)
- Canadian bred stallions: about 60
- Canadian bred mares: about 700
- Stallions judged in the US from other countries: 27
- Mares judged in the US from other countries: 130
- Stallions judged in Canada from other countries: (full) 6 – (conf. only) 7
- Mares judged in Canada from other countries: (full) 29 – (conf. only) 5
- Unjudged registered stallions in the US: over 500
- Unjudged registered mares in the US including imported mares: over 2,000
- First prize stallions in US: 55
- First prize mares in US: 59
- First prize stallions in Canada: 5
- First prize mares in Canada: 2