
Six Breeding Farms

Making an Impact in North America

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In putting together this year's StudBook, Martina and I were, of course, talking about breeding, and breeding-related articles that we were going to include. We asked ourselves: who are the influential breeding farms in North America – who are the leaders? Which breeders and farms are serious in their breeding, and are trying to make a difference in Icelandic horse breeding on this continent?

There were a handful of farms and breeders that immediately came to mind. Most of these were, coincidentally, located all over the US and Canada – giving a nice regional- and representational sampling. In alphabetical order, the farms are: Ásta and Will Covert of Flying C Ranch in California; Andrea Brodie of Lough Arrow Icelandics in Aguilar Colorado; Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir and Jason Brickner of Sólheimar Icelandics in Tunbridge Vermont; Kristján Kristjánsson and family of Thor Icelandics in Claverack New York; Erhard and Iris Marenbach of Tölt Away Icelandic Horse Farm in Enderby British Columbia; and Lisi Ohm of Vindsdalur in Vanderhoof British Columbia.

After choosing our six breeding farms, Martina and I each sat down and made a list of questions. Martina's questions were somewhat easier, and not as in-depth as my questions. But I felt that if we are going to take the time and interview these leaders of Icelandic horse breeding, I wanted to ask them serious questions, and get serious answers from them. When Martina read my questions, her response was silence, then a long and drawn-out "Okey." We compiled and refined our questions, narrowing them down to 13 main questions, each with about half a dozen sub-questions. We then contacted our six breeding farms, all of which were excited about being involved.

We were thrilled about the breeder's thoughtful and in-depth responses. However, we were saddened when we realized that some of their responses were over 3,000 words, and we had to edit them down to about 1,600

words! It was torture for us to have to cut the interviews down, but they still give great insight into these breeder's goals and philosophy, what bloodlines they are using and why, which lines they seek, how they raise and train their horses, etc., and that is what we were seeking.

There are a number of great breeders out there, who are full of knowledge and experience, and on the following pages you will gain direct access into the minds of six of today's North American Icelandic horse breeding leaders. Enjoy. ●

A sampling of questions asked:

What are you looking for in your breeding; Who are your breeding mares / stallions and what are their blood lines, what characteristics are you seeking from them; Do bloodlines matter to you, are you seeking or mixing certain bloodlines?

How many years have you been breeding; Where did your breeding start (with what mare / stallion and bloodlines); How has that breeding developed; Is that the foundation of your breeding now; How many horses have you bred; What are they showing; What is your favorite horse that you have bred?

Do you use WorldFengur in your breeding decisions; Does BLUP matter to you; Do you research bloodlines; Do you have your young horses assessed, and older ones assessed at breed evaluations; How much value do you place on these assessments?

What is your breeding inspiration; Is there a breeding farm, breeder, or a horse that has inspired and or influenced you in your breeding?

Tell us about your farm; What percentage is breeding; How many foals do you get a year; How do you raise your horses; How do you judge your horses; How do you decide which ones to sell?

What are your thoughts about Icelandic horse breeding in the last 20 years, positives / negatives; Do you think we have good enough stock in North America to produce offspring that can compete at the top level, worldwide; Going forward, what are your thoughts?

Flying C Ranch

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Left: Perla frá Rauðuskriðu
and Bjartur from Flying C
Ranch in 2005

Our goal is to breed horses with good character and clear gaits. Of course we aim for superior quality competition horses, but most importantly, good riding horses. We don't have certain bloodlines that we are seeking, but there are some that we rather avoid. We do look at the stallions' assessments and the age that they were assessed. We think it is important to breed to horses that were quick to develop and naturally talented.

Our breeding program is rather young, it started around 10 years ago. We started breeding with Will's show mare, Perla frá Rauðuskriðu, since we liked her character and maturity, but first and foremost she was a talented competition horse that was enjoyable to ride. While we prefer to breed first prize horses, she was imported young before being assessed. When choosing stallions we prefer to use stallions we are familiar with, or have even trained ourselves.

We have bred about 25 offspring, and sold horses to Canada, Hawaii, New Mexico and other states. Most of them are mature horses with good character and nice gait distribution. There are a few horses that are very memorable along with Sif from Flying C Ranch, she is a daughter of Hrafn frá Garðabæ and Perla frá Rauðuskriðu. We sold her as a yearling to Hawaii. She was a very smart and mature mare with nice long legs and a beautiful trot. Her half-brother, Hamar from Dalalíf, out of Rák frá Akureyri, is a very promising 4-gaiter. He is a round and compact horse, with nice movements and great suspension in trot. He is in training now and it is very exciting to see him develop.

Once a horse has proven itself to meet our breeding goals, we either put that horse into our breeding program, or sell it. Sometimes

we keep the horse for a while before selling it. Most of our horses are for sale, just depending on what level they are in their development, and to the right buyer. Our idea of a real success in breeding is to produce a sport competition horse for our own use.

Olil Amble and Bergur Jónsson of Gangmyllan, the Breeders of the Year in Iceland 2010, are a great inspiration to us. The type of horse they are breeding fits into our idea of quality riding and competition horse. The starting and training of their horses is also inspiring. We often get inspired when we see a horse, or ride a horse, that is our type of horse. We then look up that horses' background and sometimes try to reproduce a similar pedigree with one of our mares.

Breeding Stock

We have four broodmares in our breeding program. Perla frá Rauðuskriðu, a 4-gaited mare going back to Gustur frá Sauðárkróki. Rák frá Akureyri (8.39), granddaughter of honor mare Ósk frá Brún; Gola frá Höfðabrekku (8.25) dam of Villandi frá Feti (8.11), who has a unique color, but that is not the reason we put her into our breeding program; and Fjöður frá Ási 1 (8.21), a daughter of Feykir frá Hafsteinsstöðum. They were all ridden in competitions in Iceland before being retired as broodmares. All of them have nice separation of gaits and speed variance in gaits. They all have good characters, and were a pleasure to work with. We don't believe in using horses to breed that we wouldn't have wanted to continue riding ourselves.

We have used Hrafn frá Garðabæ, Þór frá Prestsbakka, Stígandi frá Leysingjastöðum II, Pegasus frá Skyggni, Vilmundur frá Feti, and Tjaldur vom Lindenhof here in the US. We mostly use Hrafn frá Garðabæ as our main stallion. We have been very pleased with his offspring, and he seems to fit our mares well. He has given nice compact competition horses that we like. They are tall maturely built



Above: Gola frá Höfðabrekku



horses, and his foals have been easy to handle. His oldest offspring in the US, Hroftur from Hobby Horse, is doing very well in sport competitions here in California.

Breeding Tools

We mostly use WorldFengur as a research tool, not to make decisions for us. WorldFengur is a very valuable database, and it is always fun to look up horses and assessments of horses around the world. We don't base our breeding decisions on BLUP alone, but we do reference it when considering horses. The scores of breeding horses are very important to us and we pay special attention to the age at which they achieved their best scores.

We don't have much experience with young horse assessments, yet. While it takes more time and patience, we feel the only way to evaluate the quality of horses that we are breeding is to train them. That is when you get to know the true character of the horse, and its natural quality of gaits.

Breeding Farm

We breed for quality rather than quantity. We run a full service farm in California, and we always have quality young horses for sale. We get about one to four foals a year, so we do it more for the pleasure of seeing them grow up, but our main goal is training horses and riders towards sport competitions.

The young horses are raised in small herds, in pastures as large as possible, preferably with some hills to encourage strong and healthy growth. We usually try to keep at least one retired adult with them that can discipline them. We think nature is very important in the horse's development and maturity. We take a look at the foals the moment they are born and watch their development. We look for nicely placed neck, supple back, suspension in trot, disposition and movements. We have permanent green pastures year around, and supplement with well-balanced Timothy Hay.

Breeding Thoughts

We think that the breeding in the Icelandic horse world has improved a lot in the past 20 years. There is more knowledge and having WorldFengur has been a great tool to view assessments, and study the breed. We think Europe has really come far with their breeding

program, and in the past few years they have produced some really high scored and promising breeding horses. The US is still struggling due to a lack of good mares compared to how many excellent stallions we have here. There were so many great stallions imported, while, in comparison, not so many mares. We think that is changing, and hopefully we will see more and more great horses born here in the US. Now with the USIHC young horse evaluations system in place, along with more frequent full breeding assessments in the US, we are moving ahead at an exciting pace. ●

Lough Arrow Icelandics

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I have been breeding Icelandic horses for 29 years. I strive to breed friendly, eager to please beautiful tölters, that are easy to train, have well separated gaits, and natural tölt, that won't have to be "retrained" when not ridden for a while. Most of them are 5-gaited with strong legs. I prefer all-around happy, spirited horses; great for trail riding, with ability to maybe win a prize in a competition.

Bloodlines matter greatly to me. I tend to stick with proven old northern lines (Svaðastaðir/Kolkuós/Kirkjubær). Purely line-bred mares can usually produce good offspring with almost any stallion (of course adding traits that complement and or improve the mare's traits). Offspring of such a pairing should probably be crossed with a line-bred stallion, in order to get some consistency in the breeding results as those lines were already culled for rideability in Iceland. I have been lucky to have closely line-bred mares whose foals have been very consistent in conformation and gait distribution. I was fortunate to be able to use Prúður frá Neðra Ási II, a Hervar son, with great northern bloodlines, as a perfect fit.

Of the 50 to 60 horses I have bred, all (except one) have fulfilled my expectations one way or another. There is no perfect horse, so instead of only looking at faults, one should look at the good qualities in combination with the bad, and then adjust the breeding practice.

Five offspring stand out. Two offspring out of my Kirjubær foundation mare Ragna von Reinhardsried: Geira von Maxhofen, who has given me excellent, courageous riding horses with good tölt and sweet character, and Kári von Dáréag Dair, who became a successful competition horse in Germany. The latest little star, Litla Lilja from Lough Arrow II, is a Geira daughter who, as a three year old, shows a possible first prize conformation, promising gaits, and a very unique character. Rán from Lough Arrow, a daughter of Signý from Dáréag Dair,

is a small soul in a large body with incredible work ethic. And finally, Skjór frá Bollastöðum, by Ás frá Armóti, whom I saw at Landsmót several years ago. I was enamored by his enormous presence and had to have a foal by him.

Breeding Stock

I have four breeding mares. Geira von Maxhofen, by Hrafn 737 frá Kröggolfsstöðum, who was a son of the great Hörður 591 frá Kolkuós. She is a typical representative of Kolkuós line bred horses, not too tall, stocky, yet elegantly built with well-separated gaits. She has given me fantastic riding horses and brood mare daughters. Her offspring are uniformly beautiful, tall, easy to train, and all prefer tölt. Some have extremely fast pace. I kept most of them, as I loved their character, clean easy gaits, respectfulness and spirit. They are a joy to ride and will always try to please you. Drífa from Lough Arrow, a courageous mare with very friendly disposition, is out of Geira by Leikur frá Lækjarbotnum (son of Ófeigur frá Flugumýri). Her three foals by Prúður frá Neðra-Ási II have excellent conformation, are uniform in appearance, with evenly distributed gaits. I expect them to be just as easily trained as Drífa was. Signý from Dáréag Dair, a powerful mare with 25% Hornafjörður blood has given me easy to train offspring, which are powerful, have easy tölt, and soft character, contrary to hers, which is the typically hard Hornafjörður character. Blanda frá Hátúni is a project of mine to preserve the roan color in Icelandic horses, combined with good gaits. She is red dun tobiano roan with a hidden bay gene, and will throw only roans or tobianos, no simple solid colors. Her sire goes back to Piltur frá Sperðli, one of the best tölters in Iceland, and Gyðja frá Jaðri, a mare who threw excellent offspring. Blanda is 5-gaited with good gaits, high and wide tölt, and a sweet, but somewhat shy character. Her conformation is of the "old type," but with the right stallions this can be easily improved. She has had three offspring: Særós frá Hrafnstöftum



Above top:
Litla Lilja from Lough Arrow II, 18 months
F: Prúður frá Neðra Ási II
M: Drífa from Lough Arrow

Above:
Glymjandi from Lough Arrow II, 18 months
F: Prúður frá Neðra Ási II
M: Geira von Maxhofen

Six Breeding Farms

Left: Large pastures (165 acres divided into 6 pastures), hills, mountains, a river running through, brome grass pastures, but not too rich, at 7000 ft above sea level.

Right: Geira von Maxhofen

(sire Álfasteinn frá Selfossi), a red dun tobiano roan with splash, who is pregnant by Vídalín frá Hamrahóli, Skjór frá Bollastöðum (sire Ás frá Ármóti) black tobiano, who will hopefully make a breeding stallion, and Blæja from Creekside (sire Vökull frá Hrauni) blue dun roan, who has received favorable young horse evaluations and might be integrated into my breeding someday.

I prefer Svaðastaðir line bred stallions, or those that exhibit traits I want my foals to have: friendly happy character, easy tölt, easily trainable, and a conformation complementing my mares. You have to know your mares' faults and strengths and then pick the stallions to match. I like to use 5-gaited stallions, which tend to have lots of natural tölt. I abhor piggy pace and fat necks, so these are two characteristics I try to avoid. So far Prúður has given me exactly what I wanted. Vökull frá Hrauni was a natural choice for Blanda. He was beautiful, had lovely character, good tölt, and excellent conformation. I have not decided 100% on stallions for this year, but Prúður is getting old. I would like Geira to have one more foal by him, and maybe Blanda too, as he not only improves gaits, but definitely improves conformation as well. For Drífa, Stígandi frá Leysingjastöðum II is currently planned. I am also not afraid to try out a young stallion that has not proven himself, if I feel he would be the right match for one of my mares.

Breeding Tools

WorldFengur is my Bible. I use it to look up offspring, evaluations, pedigrees, etc. I look at evaluation results in conjunction with age of the horse at evaluation, and that tells me a little of how easily they were trained, how long they were trained to get these results, who trained them, etc. I look at the offspring of an older stallion, even if only few were evaluated, to determine how many of his offspring were slaughtered rather than used as riding horses. It does not hurt to look at BLUP, but it is not the only criterium one should use to breed. It will probably take at least another 15 years to be able to rely on BLUP. Many excellent horses, e.g. from Germany, were evaluated by a different system and therefore their results are not incorporated in the BLUP, which does not reflect their actual qualities.



I believe young horse assessments have a valid place in breeding, if only to give a breeder an unbiased judgment of the quality of the horse he bred. We all need to be made aware of faults we unintentionally overlook while peeking through the rose colored glasses. Unfortunately having mature horses trained and evaluated is a costly affair. I keep in close contact with the trainer I send them to, and value his/her opinion. All this gets integrated into my breeding decisions. For those breeders who are unsure of the qualities of their horses, this is an important tool. Many traits can be seen in a foal, some change over the years. I watch them develop, look for character traits, conformation, and gaits. A lot of breeding is a gut feeling combined with informed decisions. So far my gut feeling has not disappointed me. All of them, except for one (which was humanely destroyed), turned out to be useful riding horses, and some of my offspring are re-integrated into my breeding program.

Breeding Farm

I moved to the United States about five years ago bringing four mares and two geldings with me. They are the foundation of my breeding in southern Colorado, and Lough Arrow Icelandics is a perfect place for breeding Icelandics. Our horses grow up in a large herd and in large pastures with varied terrain where they can learn to be horses, socialize with other youngsters, but also with older horses, and run and play to develop properly. We do not interact much with the horses until they are ready to be trained, which also preserves respect. Our horses are friendly and curious and will come and visit when we check the pastures. We can graze nine to ten months out of the year, and currently run three herds. We do take in a few old retirement horses and youngsters

for boarding. Depending on availability of stallions and, of course, projected economic situation, we have two to five foals every year. Quality certainly has precedence over quantity!

Breeding Thoughts

There has been a significant reduction of the genetic pool due to overuse of some stallions, especially Orri frá Púfu and his offspring. Orri has given such exceptional offspring that every farmer took his best or only mare to him and then used the offspring as a breeding horse. This has resulted in a limitation of genes, because too many horses have Orri in their pedigree. Whether this will be detrimental to the population is yet to be seen.

I personally prefer the stockier kind of horse as opposed to the more elegant, tall, finer Icelandic. Luckily we can make choices. However these choices have to be well thought out, not just based on color or for emotional reasons. Many people in the United States get blinded by color or conformation, but do not pay enough attention to gaits, gait distribution and character. It is mandatory that we know our mares well, their faults, their strengths, and their potential. It is unlikely that a bad mare will produce a good riding or breeding horse, no matter how spectacular the stallion is. We have some excellent stallion material and some excellent mares, of which we could use more. Breed the best with the best, have a concept, and know what kind of foal you want, and how to get it, then hope for the best. ☉

Sólheimar

Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir & Jason Brickner
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Left:
Ameríka frá Akureyri

Right:
Parker frá Sólheimum
at The Sólheimar Open
in 2010



Above:
Sif frá Efri-Rauðalæk

I (Sigrún) started breeding horses in Iceland in 1990. I've always looked to use stallions of the Sauðárkrókur line, as well as sons of Ósk frá Brún. I had the privilege to use Hrafn 802, Ófeigur 882, and Baldur frá Bakka in the early 90's. Between Iceland and the US, I have bred between 30 and 40 horses. On average we get four foals a year, but our breeding program in the US is still very young. The plan is to keep two until they reach show age, and then decide what we will do with them. Therefore, every year we will sell some quality foals.

Our breeding goal is to breed beautiful, well raised, high stepping horses with excellent natural clean beat gaits, great variation in speed (either 4 or 5-gaited) with cooperative character, pride, and charisma. Our objective is to breed naturally muscled, fast developing horses that are easy to train. Basically, the goal is to breed a gæðingur. So far about 80% of our foals have reached our main breeding goal of producing show/breeding quality horses with excellent traits. The other 20% are big and beautiful horses that will make quality gaited trail and pleasure horses.

We are very critical of our own breeding program. We always look at what the stallion and the mares produce, and then determine if we will continue breeding them. We only breed our mares to stallions that have shown to produce excellent offspring. Our mares are only re-bred if they produce great offspring. It is as expensive to raise an average foal, as it is to raise an excellent foal. We also believe that excellent young horses are easier and faster to train than average horses, they need less gait training, and often have a better, more cooperative character.

Breeding Stock

We have four breeding mares in our program. Two of them, Savarta-Nótt and Ameríka, are out of my breeding mares, Snerra frá Skúfsstöðum and Katla frá Refsstað, that I used in Iceland. It remains to be seen how they do in our breeding program. Svarta-Nótt

frá Akureyri is a 4-gaited mare with 8.16 for conformation and 7.81 total score. She has big movements, and is independent with a strong character; therefore, we bred her to Parker in hopes of producing an offspring with a more cooperative character. Her first offspring, Glói, is a big beautiful 5-gaited foal with natural tölt, who will make a good trail riding horse. Ameríka frá Akureyri has 7.80 total score. She has clear beat, with a sweet character and fierce willingness that we hope Parker will help mellow out. Ameríka is having her first foal in 2011.

Ósk and Sif are not from my original breeding. I have always wanted to own a mare with the Hrafn 802 and Ófeigur 882 mix, because I really believe in fusion of these bloodlines. Ósk frá Kálfholti has 8.51 for talents, including 9.2 for tölt. She is the mother of the Landsmóts-winner, Röðull frá Kálfholti. She consistently produces exceptional horses. Her son, Tristan from Sólheimar, son of Parker, did very well at the young horse evaluations in 2009. Tristan's full sister, Ísold, born in 2010 is just as good as Tristan. Ósk has a level head and nerves of steel, is super sweet, but also strong minded. She is a tremendous broodmare and has already proven to be one of the best broodmares I have had the honor of owning. Sif frá Efri-Rauðalæk has a 7.85 total as a six year old. She is eager, enthusiastic, and well raised, an easy horse for anyone to ride. Both Hrafn 802 and Ófeigur 882 are in her bloodlines, which has been a very successful mixture. Her first offspring, Blásól, has tremendous movements, is very proud and light on her feet, has a well-raised neck, and has the charisma we are looking for.

So far, we are solely using our stallion, Parker frá Sólheimum. He is an exceptional 4-gaited stallion with great character, that has proven himself as a breeding stallion, which is a key element for us. Parker has 8.44 for talents, and 8.31 for conformation, with 8.39 total score. His impressive offspring include, Sigur, a 4-gaited stallion with 8.37 total, Penni

a 4-gated stallion with 8.26 total, Tryggvi-Geir with 8.07 total, Prímus with 8.02 total, and Gloppa with a total score of 8.01. His offspring, both 4 and 5-gated, have shown high natural movements, well raised neck, great back and croup, cylindrical body, long legs, great gait separation, clear beat, big suspension in trot and canter, and much tölt. Some Parker daughters will be going into our breeding program. We would probably breed a stallion with a fusion of Ófeigur 882, Hrafn 802 and some Sauðárkrókur in his bloodlines to them, like Bjartur von Hof Osterkamp.

Breeding Tools

We use Worldfengur a lot to research bloodlines, look at scores, and also to do virtual mate selection. Bloodlines matter most in our breeding decisions, then scores, and last BLUP. In order to make the best decision, all three components have to play a part. It is very important to know our breeding horses, both their weaknesses, and their strengths.

As breeders, we think about how certain traits are passed on through different bloodlines and how these bloodlines fit together. We have a variety of bloodlines in our breeding; however, the Sauðárkrókur line is fairly dominant. The Sauðárkrókur horses are famous for many things, including incredible talents in all gaits, speed and clarity of gaits, tremendous charisma and exceptional character. It has been a very successful mix to blend the Hrafn 802 and the Ófeigur 882 lines. We mix compatible bloodlines together in order to produce the best horses, and avoid breeding two individuals with the same weaknesses.

It is important to have both our young horses assessed, and also train and evaluate the older ones. We try to be clear headed and never lose perspective of the ultimate breeding goal. In order to do so, the horses have to be evaluated by an unbiased party. It is always easy to say, my horse is first prize or can be first prize, but it is another thing to put your money where your mouth is.

Breeding Farm

Sólheimar is a center for the Icelandic horse. We offer training, starting young horses, lessons, clinics, horses for sale (both fully trained trail and show horses, and also young horses), stud services (AI and live cover), tack sales, consulting, shoeing, and breeding. Breeding is only a small percentage of our business, but it is our ultimate passion.



Successful breeding is not just about producing a great youngster, but also about upbringing, training, and then eventually showing the youngster. We make sure the youngsters are healthy with the correct feeding, trimming, deworming, vaccinations, and handling during the developmental years. Our youngsters live in a pasture right outside of our living room window, and the barn. We see them all day long. In the summer, we sit at night and watch them play. We start seeing what they are about right from birth. We find it best to closely look at them at 10 days old in order to determine how they will turn out to be.

The mares, foals and young horses are on grass 24/7 from summer to fall. In the late fall, when the foals are weaned, they live together with an old gelding that keeps an eye on them and gives them confidence. We handle the foals enough to make sure that they stand for the farrier and the vet. At three and a half years of age, we start training the youngsters with groundwork. Training can greatly influence the continued success. The first couple of months of a horse's training are the most influential, with good and bad habits getting embedded in the youngsters' mind, therefore, keeping the mouth soft and the cues gentle is crucial for the future and well being. The ultimate goal of aspiring breeders should be to show the world their final product. After the horse has received the correct training and been successfully shown, the breeder then proves to the world that they have produced a terrific horse.

Breeding Thoughts

I think that Icelandic horse breeding has had a positive, forward progression in Iceland and

also in the US in the past 10 years. Today it is a rarity that I come across horses with character problems, it has, for the most part, been bred out of the Icelandic horse. Further, we see more average horses and less poorly gaited horses. More emphasis has been put on conformation. It simply does not suffice to have poor conformation, despite having high quality talents.

Two great individuals might not necessarily produce a gæðingur, but they will probably create a terrific trail and pleasure horse. It is not enough to only look at the stallion – the mare is just as important in breeding. Both have to match in traits and in bloodlines. We need to understand both the weaknesses and the strengths of both individuals, and to know the bloodlines in order to pick the best match, as the foal might receive traits from the grandparents, or even the great grandparents.

Many breeders have inspired me, such as Sigurman Hartmannsson at Kolkuósi, Sigurður Haraldsson at Kirkjubær, and Sveinn Guðmundsson at Sauðárkrókur, as well as Gunnar and Kristbjörg at Auðholtshjáleiga, and Magnús and Hólmfríður at Blésastaðir. Many horses have influenced and inspired me throughout the years. Hörður 591 frá Kolkuósi became my favorite horse of all time, even though I never personally saw him. Ósk frá Brún was another tremendous horse that I was so fortunate to personally get to know. Ósk was not only an amazing individual with superb gaits and spirit; she became one of the best breeding mares in Iceland. ©

Thor Icelandics

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Left:
One of the favorite mares at Thor Icelandics, Fjöður frá Hrafnhólum, daughter of Drottning frá Hrafnhólum Et Sleipnir frá Hrafnhólum (son of Hrafn frá Hrafnhólum)

Right:
The foundation mare, Fjöður frá Litla-Hrauni, in the early days of her pregnancy with Hrafn frá Hrafnhólum



Above:
Háfeti frá Hrafnhólum at a 2010 Thor Icelandics show. Háfeti is by Suðri frá Holtsmúla (son of Orri frá Þúfu), multiple Icelandic 4-Gait Champion.

I bought my first broodmare at Landsmót in Skagafjörður in 1974, Glöð frá Silfraðastaðir. She was a four year old, very proud young mare, who had a tiny bit of training, with high carriage and big open movement. I spent all of my money on her, and had to borrow some from my dad, who thought it was ridiculous spending all that money on this young mare. Glöð is still behind some of our breeding, but the main mare behind our breeding today is Fjöður frá Litla-Hrauni. My father bought her as a yearling when the stallion station at Eyrarbakki closed. She is a daughter of Héðinn frá Vatnagörðum. I was a kid when I first saw Héðinn, and I had never seen such an outstanding looking stallion on the track, or such a high stepping tölting horse. Héðinn was a son of Hörður frá Kolkuós, whose bloodline is known for good looks and character. Fjöður's mother, a palomino mare, was by Lýsingur 409 frá Voðmúlastöðum. Fjöður was tall, good looking, had that Kolkuós look to her, extremely high stepping, open moving, and had a lot of speed in the gaits. But her biggest and most fun attribute was her character. She was probably the most spirited horse that I have ever trained, and at the same time, the lightest horse on the bit that I remember riding. She definitely had enough spirit to be on her hind legs and carried herself amazingly from behind, which created this lightness.

Breeding Stock

Our biggest goal is character. I want my horses to be very secure and proud, and to have enough spirit to be able to work from behind and carry themselves in the gaits. We are looking for big, open moving, fluid tölting horses, with big trot. I believe that we have a solid foundation of those characteristics at Thor Icelandics, and in our breeding in Iceland, and our future is to try to mix that with more pace and 5-gaited ability, without losing any of that great tölt.

One of my main mares today is a palomino mare, Drottning frá Hrafnhólum, who was the

last mare out of Fjöður, and is by Toppur frá Eyjólfstöðum, a son of Hrafn frá Holtsmúla. Right now we have two of Drottning's offspring at the farm, Fjöður frá Hrafnhólum and our stallion, Þór frá Hrafnhólum.

In the US, we have mostly been using Stígandi frá Leysingjastöðum II, which is one of the most amazing tölting horses that I have ever ridden. The flow through this horse in the tölt is what I am looking for in my horses, not to mention his outstanding character. Some of his offspring are 5-gaited, and we are very excited that we can create a 5-gaited horse with great tölt. We've also been buying youngsters from other interesting bloodlines and some potential brood mares, to possibly mix with our foundation. Some of these include offspring from Parker frá Sólheimum, Adam frá Kviarhóli, two Fjalar frá Hafsteinsstöðum daughters, one of which is a first prize daughter out of a Adam frá Meðafelli, to name a few. The next two to three years will tell if any of them are good enough.

My favorite horse that we've bred so far is Hrafn frá Hrafnhólum, who was out of Fjöður frá Litla-Hrauni. We are still breeding mares from Hrafn. He was a son of Hrafn frá Holtsmúla, so a lot of our breeding has Hrafn 802 from Holtsmúli in the background. Our Hrafn had so many qualities it was the ultimate excitement for me. The way he moved, behaved, his character, charisma, he was such an amazing animal to have in the barn and to deal with. His spirit was just fantastic. You could actually put somebody on him that was inexperienced and he would be absolutely cool about it and easy, but as soon as you changed the atmosphere and you asked something from him, this guy just responded. That change of energy was amazing. As well as his talent in the gaits: he was 5-gaited, and was one of the highest stepping, open moving horses that I have ever had. I started to train him when he was three, and in the spring when he was four, he was already performing at such a high level where some of the older show horses in the



barn couldn't stand a chance against him in tölt, trot, pace or just in looks.

One of the things we are looking for in our breeding is that the horses come along quickly, offering you all of this. As a trainer you have to be careful not to overuse it.

Breeding Tools

Bloodlines matter to me, and then I always go back to the character. There are certain bloodlines in Iceland that are throwing great horses, but I question the character of some of these bloodlines. I believe that you can breed a great horse, that's just as good, and stay away from the questionable character which can be difficult to get rid of.

I research bloodlines when I'm thinking about buying horses that I don't know too much about. I don't use BLUP for my breeding decisions, I guess I'm lucky enough to be breeding third and fourth generation, which means I know a lot about their character and talent, knowing their background, and therefore it's much easier for me to read the youngsters at a young age.

Going forward, we would definitely like to play into the BLUP more than we have been. We'd like to show the horses at four and five as much as we can, and try to improve the BLUP score from what we have right now. It's going to take a while to get these scores up for us, but I think it's important to be aware of the BLUP.

Having talented, experienced breeding judges assess your young horses can help breeders, like myself, to pick out potentially the best youngsters from your group. I think this is an especially helpful aid for young/green breeders.

I found the FEIF judging system that Barbara Frische judged from to be very interesting. There are still things to me, as a breeder, that are a tiny bit confusing and could be discussed, but overall it's a good tool. Plus, it creates excitement. Then when you bring the horses to an evaluation, you can compare these young horse scores to the evaluation scores, and see how good the judging is. The future will tell, but I have faith in it.

Breeding Farm

Thor Icelandics is a young farm. We bought vacant land in 2006 and started to create a horse farm. What saves me in regards to the breeding is that I had horses in Iceland, and I knew about a lot of, to me, interesting breeding horses from being a breeder here for 18 years, prior to 2006.

We are expecting seven foals at Thor this spring, and three in Iceland. This is going to be a big and ambitious year for us. We felt like we needed to be able to choose from a larger group, but in the future, we won't be breeding this many horses every year – that's not our future goal. As a breeder, I believe that you have to offer your good stuff for sale, as well as anything else. The price is only going to be different. Even though lately, we've been turning down offers for some of the youngsters, only because we're trying to bring our first group of Thor-bred horses all the way forward to showing them at a breed evaluation.

I look at myself as a farmer: I will sell most of the horses, because that's what farmers do. There's always a renewal in the breeding. Those I pick for the renewal have to have things that appeal to me, regardless of scor-

ing. I want the average in my breeding to be as high as it can be in regard to quality, talent and character, because otherwise it will run you into bankruptcy. The goal is that most of the offspring will hopefully turn out to be extremely good horses, and then some.

To me, the youngsters have to run in as big a field as one can have, and learn the pecking order. They need grass in the summer, and need to be able to move – the more the merrier. Pecking order is important to me, because that's the initial training. We don't handle our youngsters too much, but we trim and deworm them, so by age three they've become pretty handled. I watch my foals very carefully from two to eight weeks to see how they move in the gaits. After that, they sometimes change their movement, which is fine. Some of them will only show you trot after two months.

Breeding Thoughts

I think the average quality of the Icelandic horse, especially in Iceland, has definitely gone up. There are more good horses with easy characters to choose from than ever before. There are so many outstanding horses competing at the big shows, that 20 years ago you wouldn't see that many, at that caliber, competing as you would today.

To me, the US has been a little disappointing, especially my first 10-15 years here. There were a lot of extremely low quality mares that were being bred, that would never have been bred in Iceland. Some of these mares came to us for breeding to Pá frá Laugarvatni and Fjalar frá Hafsteinsstöðum, and it was actually not fun to breed Fjalar to these mares. I feel as though there are more people now that are serious about breeding, and there is definitely more variety of very good stallions to choose from. There are also some very good mares in the US right now that have been brought over in the last five to ten years.

In the last few years, breeders in North America have not been bringing forward enough young and exciting mares and stallions in breed evaluations, and used them enough in their breeding. For example, on the west coast, they haven't even had a breeding show for years. Regardless, the future is bright and exciting, but it is up to us, the breeders. I think that we have mares and stallions right now that should be able to produce offsprings that could compete against the best in the world. ●

Tölt Away

Icelandic Horse Farm

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www.toltaway.com



Above top right:
The foal, Birtingur

Above:
Yearling Svartur, one of the favorites,
son of Kóngur and Svarta

In 2002, we were newcomers to the breed. Originally we had 12 horses, which tripled after a neighboring farm sold off a large number of horses. Looking back, it was not a smart move, but we ended up with some nice broodmares. We sought after any education that was offered, including seminars given by knowledgeable and internationally respected instructors. By 2004, Erhard was a Canadian National Sport Judge for Icelandic Horses, and in 2006 he became a National Breed Judge. Erhard has been the breeding leader for the Canadian Icelandic Horse Federation since 2004. Iris took on the WorldFengur registrar job for Canada in 2007. Since 2009, we've had a full-time professional trainer on our farm.

We have a clear idea of what we would like to see in our offspring. We realize the importance to set our breeding goals at a high standard, and our breeding goal is very close to the current breed standard. We do not breed for color or size, but for elegance, movement, character, and even gait distribution. Our horses need to be eager to work, and level minded. We prefer 5-gaited horses, although we do not specifically breed for pace, but we find that pace is important in order to keep tölt in the breed. The horse market has been slow in the past few years, and marketing a rare horse breed is not easy, as any breeder knows, so we are very selective and take it slow.

We look at bloodlines, but it is not our only breeding criterium. We evaluate what the individual mares provide in good traits, strengthen these, and try to improve the foals with the selection of a suitable stallion. Throughout the years, a variety of horses have inspired our breeding, but they all had the power, elegance, movement, and willingness with which some super horses perform. Looking back at our early foals, some of our best horses were out of combinations where we trusted our gut instincts more than others' recommendations.

We did some experimental breeding as well. For instance, our stallion Skjómi fra Tölt Away is 26% inbred. He has Orri on both mother

and father's side, which means we will not be breeding him to a mare going back to Orri. He was the best young horse at the breeding show in 2006.

In total, we've bred 50 foals so far. We used to get a lot more foals than we do today, and we've had several foals that we're very excited about. They will be shown in breed assessments in the coming years. One of the best foals we bred is Svartur, by our stallion Kóngur, out of Svarta. He is just a yearling, but we are sure this little stallion will go far. He combines movement and elegance with a friendly personality. After so many foals, you just know when you've got a special one. Some of the other youngsters that we're very fond of from our breeding are Jalda, Joka, Björk, Lóa, Hyra, and Lucia, to name just a few.

Breeding Stock

We have Töfri frá Kjartansstöðum, Hrafn frá Holtsmúla, Leikur frá Lækjarbotnum, Ófeigur frá Flugumýri, as well as Orri frá Þúfu bloodlines in our stallions. Our mares go back to Kirjubær, Kolkuós, and Sauðárkrókur. Our first prize mare, Jodís from Fitjamýri, and her sister Bleikja, as well as Lilja and Svarta, have influenced our breeding. This year, for the first time, we will breed to our best Tölt Away mares and we are very excited. In 2009, we had the first four offspring from our stallion, Kóngur frá Kjartansstöðum, a 5-gaited Töfri son. To evaluate which traits he is consistently passing on, we chose to breed him to four very different mares. All four offspring have beautiful self-carriage, improved shoulders, and a very nice neck set compared to other foals from the same mares. All of them are 5-gaited with lots of tölt. We can hardly wait to see the 2011 foals from Kóngur.

The stallion, Manni vom Hof Osterkamp, will be arriving here this spring from Germany. He will fit into our program perfectly. He is also 5-gaited, although pace wasn't shown at his breed evaluation. He has strong breeding lines going back to Hrafn frá Holtsmúla and

Right:
Jodís during training

Below:
Tölt Away's stallion, Skjómi

Ófeigur frá Flugumýri, and is a very gentleman-like stallion. We will be using these two stallions exclusively in our breeding this year. We are not using our stallion Skjómi, as we already have a lot of his bloodline in our herd.

Before the foals reach 10 days old, we have often already made up our minds about which horses we will keep as future breeding stock. It turns out to be fairly accurate, too. Having seen them at four to five years old, we'd pick the same horses. Occasionally there are some horses we specifically like for their capabilities under rider, which only shows at five years of age.

Breeding Tools

We use WorldFengur quite a bit to research bloodlines, assessments, and BLUP. But we feel that there isn't enough data on North American-bred horses. Only a small percentage of horses have been evaluated, and in our experience, North America needs time to catch up in experience on how to successfully show a horse. The results are not always what the horses could be under better trainers and riders. This shows in their scores. For now, our criteria for breeding is more on the horses themselves.

We organized the first young horse assessment in North America. We especially think that the smaller breeders can greatly benefit from those assessments. You get data about your horse from people who give you an independent statement of the facts. Judges have seen enough foals and youngsters to know the difference between a cute foal, and an excellent quality foal.

Some breeders often don't have the education and experience to know what to actually look for. Erhard, having been the National Breeding Judge in Canada, helped us early on to make better informed decisions about our



breeding. Our horses have been very successful in the past breed assessments. Training horses for breed assessments is a huge factor in successfully showing off your horses, and is often totally underestimated.

Breeding Farm

Our horses are raised in herds. Tölt Away Farm has 140 acres, and we lease our neighbors' land as well. The upbringing is important to us: nature vs. nurture. We watch our horses from day one, looking for certain traits, characteristics, confirmation. We then decide if they've met, or could meet, our breeding goals. The foals are handled as little as possible in the first month. With weaning they learn to halter, but otherwise they stay out with the herd and are only taken in for veterinary reasons like deworming, vaccinations, or farrier work.

Between foal and four years old, they get some halter training. Then we start them with lots of groundwork and double lunging, ponying, and then finally some riding in walk and trot. If they offer tölt, we take it, if not, no problem. They do some canter work and after about three months they go back in the field for another year with the herd. When we start them again at age five, they get a short refresher, then the tölt training begins. We try to keep the horses entertained during training with trails, dressage, and variety. Sometimes horses aged four are too young for serious training, either mentally or physically. We start these horses six months later and this makes a world of difference. We don't believe in too early or too much, but give a young horse time to understand what is asked from it. We are

not big fans of showing four year olds at breed shows. They are often pushed too far, and it can backfire later.

Breeding Thoughts

We certainly need more good horses in North America, but we are sure that there are many horses already here, who never had the chance to show their full potential. Presenting a horse well at a breed evaluation involves a lot of preparation and training, as well as having professionals present the horse. This is either not attainable for many breeders, nor affordable, so the horses are presented at breeding shows without proper training or conditioning. This is not the horse's fault, but it reflects badly on it.

At the 2006 breed evaluation in Canada, we achieved "Best Mare of Show" and "Best Young Horse." In 2008, we trained our horses to a much higher level, and had them shown by a professional rider. Our mare Jodís received first prize overall, with 8.28 ridden abilities. Three mares scored second prize, and three mares barely missed second prize. We have learned a lot in training horses, and are proud to have improved so much in the results. We have a ways to go, but certainly we are on the right track! ●



Vindsdalur

Lisi Ohm & family
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Left:
Elli fra Vindsdalur, 6 years old
1st prize conformation, 2nd
prize overall

Right:
Osk fra Vindsdalur,
2nd prize conformation &
rideabilities, 2nd prize overall



Above:
Elding fra Vindsdalur,
2 years old

In 1991, I started breeding in Germany with the goal of one day being able to replace my riding horses. The mare I picked was out from the old Stockholma line. Her daughter received a breeder's award and was the mother of my stallion Leikur, a Fengur frá Stokkseyri son, who gave his offspring great carrying power, large wide strides and a friendly disposition. I still have one of his daughter's in my breeding program.

My goal is to breed well-balanced horses in body and mind, that are soft and elastic in their gaits, easy to train, with natural powerful tölt. They need to have a speed range to be fun on trails, and shine in shows. I don't specifically breed 4 or 5-gaiters, but I find 5-gaited horses, even with little pace, are often easier for beginners to tölt. Good, cooperative character is very important and can really affect the joy of riding and training. I have bred in total about 25-30 foals, two to three foals most years, but the market is still limited. I do believe that one can see the gaits and characteristics in the first two weeks, so this is an important time for me. After that I let them go through their growing period. The decision, which horses to geld or keep in my breeding program goes on forever, and is a changing process. I am starting several talented youngsters this year.

Only one of my offspring was not up to my standards. She is a sweet family horse, and will be sold as non-breeding stock. I aim to be as honest about my horses as possible, because I want horse and buyer to match and be happy. Sometimes I think I should have kept this mare or that, but at the same time, I enjoy being able to sell good horses, where people are happy. That's good advertisement.

Bloodlines are very important to me, and I have strong preferences. I like to breed with horses that have old and or proven bloodlines. My mares go back to Náttfari frá Ytra-Dalsgerði, Gáski frá Hofstöðum, Hervar frá Sauðárkróki, and Orri frá Þúfu. My horses in Iceland have Kraflar frá Miðsitju, Stígur

and Töfri frá Kjartanstöðum in their background. A breeding horse has to have a big presence, lots of suppleness, and light, wide movements. I select stallions that will hopefully be able to improve the gaits and or conformation of my mares. This is, of course, easier in Iceland with a larger selection than here in North America, as some stallions are so far away that it can be costly.

Breeding Stock

My main broodmare is Ugla frá Stekkjardal, a 5-gaited mare that goes back to Náttfari frá Ytra-Dalsgerði, and is one of the most powerful horses I have ridden. Her daughter Bjoert fra Vindsdalur is the highest judged mare (8.07) in Canada. Her daughter Ósk, is a 5-gaited second prize mare, and Ugla has also given me a promising Stígandi daughter, Djásn. Several of her daughters have been sold and are used as broodmares. My favorite mare is my Gáski granddaughter, Hríma fra Sigurðsson Icelandic Horses (second prize with first prize conformation). My Garpur daughter, Roðadís from Sand Meadow, is 4-gaited, second prize, and I can't wait to see what she will produce. Snæja frá Ás is a 5-gaited second prize, spirited mare with first prize conformation, and great tölt. I like my mares to have a lot of willingness to produce this dance-like feeling.

I used Fengur frá Stokkseyri and his son, Leikur fra Vindsdalur, for some seasons. Leikur's offspring have very loose, supple gaits with impressive hind leg reach. Their front leg action is average so I decided to use Stígandi frá Leysingjastöðum II (out of Andvari frá Ey), who has great character, fabulous tölt, and high lift. I purchased the Stígandi son Blær from Sand Meadow, who goes back to Feykir frá Hafsteinsstöðum and Hörður frá Kolkuós, and is showing a lot of spark and self-carriage to continue this higher action in my breeding. I am very excited to get the first offspring from him this year. It will be interesting to see what he produces with my mares,



compared to other stallions that I've bred them with. I am contemplating using Kóngur frá Kjartansstöðum to see what he produces, as he is a son of Töfri frá Kjartansstöðum.

I co-own several horses in Iceland that I am hoping to integrate into my breeding. A mare out of Krákur frá Blésastöðum, and several 2010 foals out of Ívar frá Blésastöðum.

Breeding Tools

WorldFengur is a tool I use a lot, especially in planning my breeding. BLUP is something I notice and I take into consideration, but it is not always accurate. I research every aspect of the horses, including talking to people from Iceland, who often have deeper knowledge that is not reflected in the breeding scores. It is much easier to assess offspring in Iceland, because there are more, and many have been judged. In North America the stallions are under-used, and the offspring are rarely judged.

I organized some of the first breed evaluations in Western Canada, including young horse evaluations. I believe it is a valuable tool, but a long trailer ride is something to consider for young horses. I believe in having my horses evaluated and the opinions of the judges are important to me. I put a lot of energy into preparing the horses, and have them shown professionally. I used to be a national breeding judge and have had the honor to judge as a student with FEIF International breeding

judges – an unbelievable learning opportunity.

Breeding Farm

My farm is located in the central interior of British Columbia with open skies, long winters and hot, dry summers. Luckily we have no eczema. We have a dressage arena, a round pen, an indoor arena, and miles of trails. The farm includes 160 acres of pasture, a mix of rolling hills and shrubs. This diverse environment is important for their development. Young horses need space to grow. I have had a male and a female herd for some time now, and I would like to continue that. The foals stay with their mothers over the winter and get weaned in the spring. They are handled only as much as needed so we can safely deworm, vaccinate and trim their hooves. I want them to be a horse and learn from the herd. I do check the horses twice daily when they come in for feeding.

All horses are on protein rich hay for about six months a year, and I try to keep them at an even weight. Horses in training get extra feed to ensure enough protein and minerals for muscle development. They have free-range mineral feed all year.

Breeding Thoughts

If I picture myself old and not so mobile anymore – I still see myself breeding horses. I love the moment when I finally start working and riding the once foal that showed promise in the gaits, and see the results of my breeding.

That's just bliss! A breeder has a huge responsibility to the horse. There is a big difference between multiplying and breeding, and I try hard to keep my end of the bargain – to breed good Icelandic horses. I think there are amazing horses here, and lots of possibilities to breed good horses. Simply breeding what the market demands would probably be the smarter business decision, but would it keep the true Icelandic spirit of these horses? I have my doubts.

I get a lot of inspiration from talking to other breeders – at home or abroad – and I believe this is important. I like a lot of the breeding at Blésastaðir. Iceland has a long tradition with their horses, which is special. There are truly natural breeders and riders there, and they know their horses going back generations. Breeding is such a long-term project, that it needs to get re-energized once in a while, so evaluations, and any kind of social gatherings are vital and sometimes not easy to come by on this large continent.

I think the riding and training of the Icelandic horse has developed tremendously in the last 20 years. The training is more horse-friendly, including natural horsemanship, which has been around for a long time but only recently integrated into the training of the Icelandic horse.

There is a big difference between Europe and North America. People in Europe want and cherish better-trained horses, because they are able to ride refined horses. Europe has a high education system, where the “normal” pleasure rider is so much better educated, before they even think of buying a horse, and their expectations are often higher. And riders from other disciplines are taking up Icelandics more often there than in North America. The Icelandic breeders have not yet managed to make our horses fascinating enough to the cutters, reiners, jumpers of this continent. That is a big market waiting.

The question is: do we have the educated clients for those good horses, which look better under good riders? A well-trained horse with good scores, and maybe good show results, can look like a sad little pony after three weeks with a bad or unschooled rider. I believe we need to educate. Icelandic horses are the ultimate pleasure horses, but the better the rider, the more enjoyable the horses become. So this is where we need to improve things here in North America. ●