

Friesian Horses In Dressage

By Hermien Wierdsma Renken

About 30 years ago the Friesian horse breed was about to become extinct, with less than one thousand Friesian horses registered in the studbook. Because of the mechanization of agriculture the Friesian horse was no longer of use to farmers. The studbook had serious financial problems but due to a group of very persistent and enthusiast people this development was ended and slowly things got better.

At that time the Friesian horse was re-invented as a recreation horse—a horse to use for pleasure, to relax and have fun with. Previously, the horses had to do farm work and when the work was done, they would go to a show. I'm sure many of the Dutch and Friesian breeders in North America who used horses on the farm remember those times. Nowadays the Friesian horse is bred for show performance instead of farm work (which is a performance in its own right, of course).

In The Netherlands many Friesian horses compete in show driving and dressage. At many dressage shows it's very common to see a lot of Friesian horses, at all levels. A Friesian quadrille team of four approved stallions performed at the highest national level (until one of them got disqualified on offspring). Many Friesians have reached Z-level (about 4th level) and more and more shows organize dressage competitions for Friesian horses ONLY. I think if you compare the percentage of horses that compete at Z-level or beyond against

the number being born each year in both the Friesian and the Dutch Warmblood studbooks, the Friesians might be doing VERY well.

The FPS stimulates the use of Friesian horses in dressage with their program to subsidize lessons for good riders with good Friesian horses. One stallion owner brought his stallion, Reyert, to an Olympic rider, Tineke Bartels, to see if Reyert would be capable of going 'all the way'. Reyert has been in training with Bartels for about half a year now and is doing very well. They were part of the show block at the stallion show in 1998.

Also in North America more and more Friesians perform under saddle. They compete with other horses in dressage and ride in clinics. People go to shows and they see Friesians perform all the dressage movements. If you ever feel that people 'don't understand' that a Friesian CAN do dressage and are prejudiced against them, don't get discouraged. Instead, go out and show your Friesian because that is the only way you will convince others. Many clinicians are also judges, and seeing a Friesian horse in their clinic will get them get used to the appearance. And that also counts for the other riders. The first Friesians in the Netherlands and later in Germany appearing in the show ring were frowned upon too, but now they are very well respected by riders, judges and audience. The same will happen here.



Photos by Bob Tarr, Krug, Noble & Co.

Two sisters from Ohio are proving that they are serious dressage competitors – and they are riding a Friesian horse in their competitions. Amanda Swan (pictured above, right), a ninth grader, rode 16 year old Secret Dream (registered name, Clark) to capture first place in the Junior/Young Rider Division of USDF's All-Breeds Awards for the Friesian breed at Training Level. Their photo will appear in USDF's 1997 Yearbook. Amanda's sister, Kim (above, left), who is an eighth grader, also rode Secret Dream and won second place. In 1996 Kim was first and Amanda second for the same awards. Congratulations to all three of these fine competitors—Amanda, Kim and Secret Dream.