

Warmblood Studbook of Ireland

International Showjumpers with an Irish Accent

WSI Changes Stallion Approval Process

The purpose of the stallion approval process is to identify male horses that have the potential to become highly successful sires. Although horses have changed, top-level sport has changed, and information technology has changed every major studbook, with only slight variation, is using the same approval process it used decades ago. WSI believes it is time for a change and we have done so by fundamentally re-orienting our stallion approval process. Specifically we have changed our definition of what "stallion performance" means in the approval process. But before we explain our new system let's explore the current stallion approval process. When evaluating stallions three types of characteristics can be examined:

Category 1: Invisible Characteristics

By "invisible characteristics" I mean characteristics of the stallion that are very difficult, if not impossible, for breeders themselves to see or discern. Examples include the stallion's DNA (is the purported pedigree of the stallion his true pedigree?) and health status (does he suffer from paralysis of the larynx or pharynx, or navicular disease, or degenerative bone disease, or a neurological defect?).

Category 2: Easily Seen Characteristics

By "easily seen characteristics" I mean characteristics of the stallion that are easily observed and/or discovered by breeders. Examples include the stallion's pedigree, athleticism, jumping ability, movement, and conformation. Most studbooks spend a lot of resources (or to be more precise, the stallion owners' resources) concentrating on these easily seen and discoverable characteristics by requiring stallions to complete a 10- or 30- or 70-day performance test (unfortunately Germany's new but seriously flawed 70-day test incorporates the stallions breeding value index score into his overall test score) or to compete in special shows for approved stallions and stallion candidates or to achieve a certain standard in open competition. But we know from history that studbook officials often make two types of errors: Type 1 errors (i.e., a false positive), whereby a bad stallion is approved

(we see this every year as only a very small percentage of the hundreds of newly approved stallions become successful sires); and Type 2 errors (i.e., a false negative) whereby a good stallion is rejected (we all have read anecdotal stories of famous stallions that failed their initial grading and/or performance test and went on to become important sires). A further difficulty with the requirement of performance through the stallion test is that there appears to be little if any evidence of a positive correlation between success in these tests and later success in top sport and even less evidence of a positive correlation between success in these tests and success as a sire. So many studbooks are using a proxy (i.e., the stallion test) that appears to be worthless in its stated goal of identifying or predicting future top sires. And even using results in open competition is problematic because this selection tool is not immune from Type 1 and Type 2 errors and there is no convincing empirical evidence of a correlation between success in open competition and success as a sire.

Category 3: Difficult to Evaluate But Discoverable Characteristics

By "difficult to evaluate but discoverable characteristics" I mean the core issue with respect to what a stallion approval process should be concerned: The quality of the progeny sired by the stallion. I am aware of only two sport horse studbooks that make progeny evaluations a key component of their stallion approval process, the KWPN and the WSI. Other studbooks ignore this most important criterion for evaluating a sport horse sire, namely the athleticism of his progeny and their later success in sport.

The WSI has decided to eliminate the traditional stallion performance requirement (i.e., the stallion performance test and/or performance through open competition) because we believe it is neither a valid nor a reliable predictor of a stallion's potential to become an important sire. In its place we have made more rigorous the WSI progeny evaluations. So in the future for the WSI "stallion performance" equals "performance as a sire".

Under the new WSI rules each stallion will be formally reviewed and assessed on an annual basis by the Stallion Inspection Committee. And each year the inspectors will be required to select one of three outcomes for each stallion: (1) Approval Maintained for the next twelve months; (2) Placed on the Watch List for the next twelve months; or (3) Approval Rescinded.

Each annual evaluation will consider the stallion's entire population of progeny born into the WSI (and where appropriate, such as in the case of genetic defects and/or health problems, progeny registered by other studbooks). Every potential data source will be utilized in the annual evaluation: His progeny's foal inspections, mare inspections, stallion inspections, and results in national and international showjumping.

When the first crop of foals sired by the stallion for the WSI reaches 10 years of age the Stallion Inspection Committee, using all available data, will make a definitive decision on the stallion's status within the studbook. The stallion will receive either Lifetime Approval or he will lose his approval and from that point on will be ineligible to sire foals for the WSI. To achieve Lifetime Approval a significant percentage of the stallion's progeny must compete in international (CSI) sport.

The WSI assumes that every stallion it approves will pursue a sport career and hopefully be talented enough to compete successfully in international showjumping. But by eliminating the traditional stallion performance requirement we are focusing our efforts and resources on what truly matters: Does the stallion sire athletic youngsters that later become international showjumpers? If he does, his annual performance evaluation will be positive and when his first WSI crop is 10 years old he will be given life-time approval. If not, his approval will be rescinded when the Stallion Inspection Committee becomes convinced that his progeny are simply not good enough for him to warrant approval by the WSI. And that revocation of approval may occur any time during the first ten years after the stallion has been approved.

