

Issue One

THE

2024

ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress
Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)



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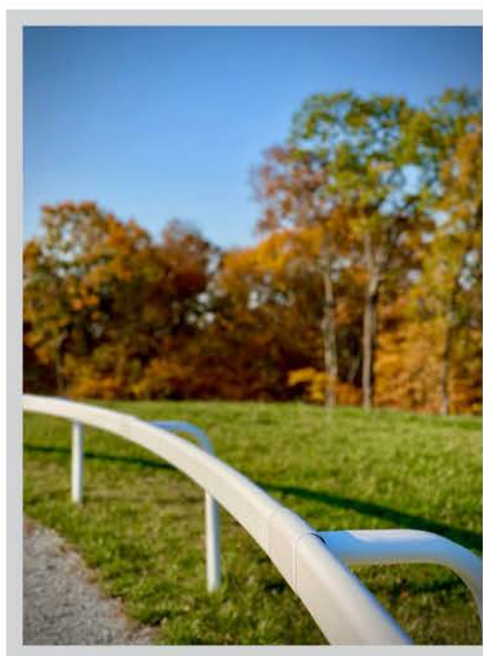
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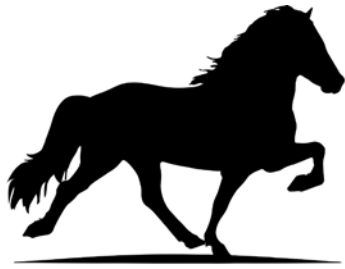
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ICELANDIC HORSE

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On the cover: Carly Zaayer rides Sólon frá Sörlatungu in a mounted archery demonstration at the First Annual Fenrir Viking Festival, held on the grounds of the Kentucky Highland Renaissance Festival in November. Carly is the riding school director and breeding manager at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY. She and several members of the Sirius Ohio & Kentucky Regional Club train and perform as the Archers of Arvak, led by Christine Stewart-Marks. The Icelandic horse's smooth gaits and sensible temperaments are very valuable when riders must drop the reins and focus entirely on steadying their aim—often at speed! See more on page 22. Photo by Debbie Joplin.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

The Icelandic Horse Quarterly is published by the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC), a member association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations), as a benefit of membership. Renew online at www.icelandics.org. © 2024 All rights reserved. **Article Submissions:** USIHC members and non-members are invited to submit feature articles and photos for publication. Send them to co-editors Nancy Marie Brown and Nicki Esdorn at quarterly@icelandics.org. All submissions are reviewed by members of the Quarterly Committee. We reserve the right to edit or reject any submission. **Affiliated Club News:** Contact your club to submit news items and photos for the Club Updates section. **Letters From Our Readers:** All readers are invited to submit letters commenting on articles previously published in the magazine or on topics of general interest. Send them to quarterly@icelandics.org. All letters are reviewed by the committee. We reserve the right to edit or reject them. **Advertising:** See <https://icelandics.org/advertising-in-icelandic-quarterly-magazine> for ad rates and sizes. For page availability, contact ad rep Jean Ervasti (917-648-8824 or jean.ervasti@gmail.com). We reserve the right to reject any ad. **Deadlines:** January 1 (for Issue One, mailed in March), April 1 (Issue Two), July 1 (Issue Three), and October 1 (Issue Four). **Quarterly Committee:** All USIHC members are invited to join the Quarterly Committee to review submissions, vote on the cover, and help edit, illustrate, and distribute the magazine. Sign up at quarterly@icelandics.org. **Committee Members:** Carol Andrew, Margot Apple, Andrea Brodie, Nancy Marie Brown, Leslie Chambers, Alys Culhane, Jean Ervasti, Nicki Esdorn, Amy Goddard, Em Jacobs, Kate Kalan, Constance Kollmann, Gabriele Meyer, Anne Owen, Alex Pregitzer, Emily Potts, Chris Romano, Sara Stewart, Judy Strehler, Lynn Wiese, and Nancy Wines-Dewan. **Graphic Design:** James Collins.

DISCLAIMER

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THE USIHC MISSION

- To promote the knowledge of the Icelandic horse within the United States and its correct use as a competition and riding horse.
- To keep a registry of purebred Icelandic horses in the United States.
- To facilitate communication among all USIHC members.
- To represent the United States in FEIF.

The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF (www.feif.org), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 21 countries. FEIF governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland.

The USIHC was formed in 1987 by representatives of the U.S. Icelandic Horse Federation and the International Icelandic Horse Association to meet the FEIF rule that only one association from each country is allowed to represent the breed.



WHY JOIN THE USIHC?

As the owner or rider of an Icelandic horse, you chose a very special breed with its own culture and history. It is important to learn about the breed's unique traits, capabilities, and needs, so that you and your Icelandic horse will have a happy relationship and it will live a healthy and long life. By joining the USIHC, you connect to a worldwide network of experts to help you care for, ride, train, breed, and learn more about your horse.

The USIHC is the umbrella organization for 12 regional clubs; activity clubs can also be formed.

Our Registry links to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses (USIHC members have free access to WorldFengur), and we publish *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*, maintaining an online archive of all issues since 2008.

The USIHC sponsors scientific research on the Icelandic horse, helps promote the Icelandic horse at expos and through social media, supports educational seminars and events like the American Youth Cup, organizes leisure activities like the Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride, creates teaching tools like the Riding Badge Program, and offers practical and

monetary support to organizers of shows and clinics.

The Icelandic horse has international competition rules: You can compete in the same classes and receive comparable scores in any FEIF member country. Likewise, the Icelandic horse is one of few breeds with international evaluation standards, so that breeding horses from all over the world are judged on the same 10 points of conformation and 10 ridden abilities. The USIHC helps organize sport and breeding shows that conform to FEIF rules.

The USIHC is responsible for the U.S. teams at the FEIF Icelandic Horse World Championships, the FEIF Youth Cup, and the FEIF Youth Camp. Through FEIF, the USIHC votes on rules and policies that affect the welfare of the Icelandic horse worldwide.

As a member of the USIHC, your dues and registration fees make all this possible. Our board members and committee chairs are all volunteers. As a member-driven organization, the USIHC grows stronger the more active and involved our members become. Please join us so that the USIHC can, as FEIF's mission states, "bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse."



USIHC NEWS

USIHC CONTACTS

Committees

Affiliated_clubs@icelandics.org
Leslie Chambers (860-334-8259)

Breeding@icelandics.org
Virginia Lauridsen (515-556-3307)

Education@icelandics.org
Caeli Cavanagh (802-299-5468)

Leisure@icelandics.org
Janet Mulder (907-351-4473)

Promotion@icelandics.org
Emily Potts (413-531-6336)

Quarterly@icelandics.org
Nancy Brown (802-626-4220)
Nicki Esdorn (914-826-5159)

Sport@icelandics.org
Ásta Covert (805-688-1393)

Youth@icelandics.org
Lucy Nold (831-332-5328)

Directors

President@icelandics.org
Virginia Lauridsen (515-556-3307)

Vice_president@icelandics.org
Jeff Rose (608-438-9435)

Secretary@icelandics.org
Jeff Rose (608-438-9435)

Treasurer@icelandics.org
Leslie Chambers (860-334-8259)

Caeli Cavanagh (802-299-5468)
Ásta Covert (805-688-1393)
Janet Mulder (907-351-4473)
Lucy Nold (831-332-5328)
Emily Potts (413-531-6336)
Sara Stewart (541-603-3307)

Registry

c/o Ásta Covert (805-688-1393)
PO Box 1724
Santa Ynez, CA 93460
Toll free: 866-929-0009
registry@icelandics.org

Main Office

United States Icelandic Horse Congress
c/o Virginia Lauridsen
3273 Rustic Trail
Truro, IA 50257
Toll free: 866-929-0009
info@icelandics.org

Website

www.icelandics.org
webhelp@icelandics.org

CAELI JOINS BOARD

In accordance with the USIHC constitution, the Election Committee accepted nominations for the Board of Directors until October 22, 2023. One nomination was received: Caeli Cavanagh was nominated by Virginia Lauridsen and seconded by Lucy Nold and Deb Cook. In 2023, three directors were up for re-election. Jeff Rose and Sara Stewart opted to run; Lori Cretney declined. Since there was only one nominee, no election was held. Jeff, Sara, and Caeli will serve three-year terms beginning January 1, 2024.

New board member Caeli Cavanagh has actively participated in the Icelandic horse community for almost 20 years. She was the third American ever to attend Hólar University's Bachelor's program in Riding and Riding Instruction, and is one of only three Americans with Level 3 training certification from FEIF. Currently she runs Alfadans Equestrian Arts, a full service Icelandic horse training and education center in Portland, Oregon. A successful sport competition rider, Caeli earned the highest National Ranking in Four Gait in 2022 and in Five Gait in 2022 and 2023. She was nominated for FEIF Trainer of the Year in 2019 and 2022. In 2022, she received the top spot in the world for number of nominations for Good and Harmonious Riding, and was honored to represent the US at the 2023 World Championships. Caeli has authored and assisted on numerous projects for the USIHC. She ran the third North Amer-



Caeli Cavanagh and Peyr frá Ytra-Vallholti competing at the World Championships. Photo by Katie Daly.



Jana Meyer of Lunar Hill Icelandics in Vermont is the USIHC's nominee for the 2023 FEIF Trainer of the Year Award.

ican Youth Cup, was an integral part of the working group that produced the US Trainer's Exam, and recently spearheaded the Lifetime Achievement Medal program. She looks forward to continuing to serve the Icelandic horse community through a place on the USIHC Board, bringing both a national pride and a global perspective to the position.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

The USIHC is proud to nominate Jana Meyer for the 2023 FEIF Trainer of the Year. Jana is an impressive and accomplished equestrian who has offered invaluable help to the entire Icelandic horse community in the US. Jana served on the USIHC Trainer Certification Committee, helping to develop a system to certify American trainers according to the FEIF matrix. She was a trainer at the 2019 and 2023 North American Youth Cups, and was the USIHC team leader at the 2023 World Championships in the Netherlands. Jana has led several educational seminars for our community, and will co-lead a judging webinar in 2024. In addition to her FEIF Level 2 certification, Jana holds a USIHC Sport Judge B license and has judged national and world ranking shows throughout the US. She is also licensed as an equine massage therapist and a Centered Riding instructor. She runs Lunar Hill Icelandics in Chelsea, Vermont.

FAST-TRACK TRAINERS

Trainers currently working in the US have one more chance to gain their USIHC trainer certification through the Fast-Track option. The tests will be held June 11-14

at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, Iowa. Trainers interested in applying for the exams can find more information and an application form at <https://icelandics.org/usihc-fast-track-testing>. Or contact the new Education Chair, Caeli Cavanagh, at education@icelandics.org.

After June, applicants for US trainer certification will need to complete a series of educational modules developed by the USIHC Education Committee before they qualify for testing and certification.

WINTER WEBINARS

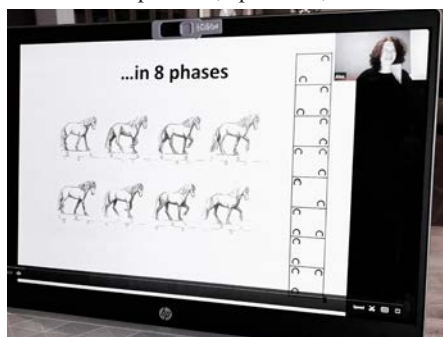
The USIHC Education Committee again put together a series of Winter Webinars. Dates, times, speakers, and topics for those in March and April are:

March 16 at noon ET: Endurance riding with the Icelandic horse, with Survive Iceland Best Rider award-winner, Sami Browneller. This session will discuss how well suited Icelandic horses are to endurance riding and how to start in the endurance riding world.

April 20 at noon ET: Protecting you and your horse, legally speaking, with Jeff Rose. This session will discuss issues of equestrian liability and how to reduce the same, as well as horse insurance, and proof of horse ownership issues.

JUDGING WEBINARS

Alex Pregitzer and Jana Meyer from the Sport Committee, with encouragement and guidance from Þorgeir Guðlaugsson, have developed a series of four online preparatory modules for the Judging Seminar. (See the story in this issue.) Module 1 will be offered on April 5 (7 pm EST), Module 2 on April 7 (5 pm EST), and Modules 3 and 4 on April 14 (5 pm EST). Partici-



Sign up for the judging webinar at <https://icelandics.org/introduction-to-icelandic-horse-sport>.



Greta Alsaukas received the highest scores among the youth members selected to represent the US at the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland.

participation costs \$160 per person, paid to the USIHC (of which \$140/pp will be paid back to Jana and Alex).

S2SS VIRTUAL RIDE

Registration is now open for the 2024 Sea 2 Shining Sea Ride. This year's virtual ride is 4,000 miles long and follows the historic Appalachian Trail, from Georgia to Maine, and the Oregon Trail, from Missouri to Oregon. The ride began on January 7, 2024 and will end on December 31, 2024. The Sea 2 Shining Sea Ride is open to all USIHC members and is included in membership. Riders can participate as an individual or on a team of up to six members. Horses used in the ride must be Icelandic horses, either fully registered or having obtained a participation number from the USIHC after being DNA-verified. Registered horses do not have to be registered in the United States. Any FEIF member country's registry or WorldFengur is acceptable. For more information and to register, please visit: <https://icelandics.org/blog/register-for-the-2024-sea-2-shining-sea-ride>. See the story in this issue for more information and to meet this quarter's Riders of the Month.

VIRTUAL FALL SHOW RESULTS

The 2023 Virtual Fall Show took place this fall through October 27. Both National Ranking and Fun Classes were offered, as well as Division Championships and FEIF Youth Cup Tryouts. The show featured five judges: FEIF International Judges Þorgeir Guðlaugsson, Asa William, and Malin Elmgren, and USIHC Sport B Judges Alex Montan-Gray and Alex Pregitzer.

The division champions were Alicia Marie Flanigan and Slæða frá Traðarholti (Open Four Gait), Samantha Harrigan and Veigar frá Lækjamóti (Intermediate Four Gait), Samantha Harrigan and Mári frá Kolgerði (Intermediate Five Gait), Diane Graves and Falki from Red Feather (Novice Division), Anna Bella Covert and Skuggi from Windsong (Youth Division), Caeli Cavanagh and Kolgrima from Red Feather Icelandics (Green Horse Division), and Greta Alsaukas and Geysir frá Kvistum (Open Four Gait-Youth).

View the full results here: <https://icelandics.org/blog/usihc-2023-virtual-fall-show-results-and-playlists> and stay tuned to the website for the 2024 spring and fall virtual show dates.

YOUTH CUP

Seven applications were received for the three US spots at the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup, which will take place July 13-20 in Münsingen, Switzerland. The applicants selected to attend are: 1. Greta Alsaukas, 2. Liesl Kolbe, and 3. Brynja Meehan. Alternates are 1. Miette Jennings and 2. Wells Wappett. Please help support our Youth Cup Team by contributing to the Youth Fund, which will help sponsor our team and country leader with travel and apparel. Donations can be sent to the USIHC, earmarked for the 2024 Youth Cup, through Paypal or by check mailed to USIHC, c/o Virginia Lauridsen, 3273 Rustic Trail, Truro, IA 50257; Attn:Treasurer.

SPORT SHOWS

The following 2024 shows were approved by the USIHC Sport Committee in January:

The CIA Open Spring Show (April 13-14), a National Ranking show at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, California. Contact Asta Covert (info@tolt.net).

The Ice Championships Triple WorldRanking Shows (May 24-26), at Lettleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, Kentucky. Contact Maggie Brandt (maggie@lettleikiicelandics.com).

Toppur National Ranking Show and Fun Show (June 15-16), with judge Marlise Grimm, at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, Iowa. Contact Virginia Lauridsen (virginia@harmonyicelandics.com).

An additional show planned for this spring, but not yet officially approved, is the Solheimar National Ranking Show (June 15-16), with judge Ann Winters, at Solheimar Icelandics in Tunbridge, Vermont. Contact Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir (sigrunbry@gmail.com).

LIFETIME MEDALS

As of November, 18 applications for Lifetime Achievement Medals have been received. These medals acknowledge significant achievement throughout a competitor's or a horse's life on the oval track. Qualifying scores from as far back as 2007 can be submitted, and both horses and riders can receive medals in Tölt, Loose Rein Tölt, Four Gait, and Five Gait. See <https://icelandics.org/lifetime-achievement-medals>.

BREEDING SEMINAR

The Breeding Committee offered a clinic on "How to Prepare your Horse for a Breeding Assessment" with Olil Amble and Disa Reynis, September 25-27 at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, Iowa. Eight participants attended (six riding) with eight horses. On day one, Olil presented a lecture about her own breeding and preparation of horses. She showed a film about her breeding operation in Iceland and another



Brynja Meehan, here taking a lesson from Guðmar Pétursson, was selected to represent the US at the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland.

er which chronicled the progress of one of her breeding mares from young horse to breeding assessment. She encouraged riders to show their own horses and not to be disheartened by scores lower than expected. She reminded us not to compare our scores to those of horses in Iceland, but to the scores of horses in the US. She then assessed all of the horses on the breeding track and gave riders feedback on their gaits and potential.

On day two, Olil worked with each rider/horse privately in the arena. Riders were given ideas on how to improve the presentation and movement of the horse and what steps should be taken next. On day three, Disa presented a lecture on the judging of breeding assessments. She instructed the riders on what the judges are looking for and presented video examples. Participants then learned how the conformation assessments are performed and were given tools on how to better present their own horses for this assessment. Finally each rider presented their horse on the breeding track. Olil was on the headset giving instructions, as would be the case in an official assessment, and Disa gave the horse scores for each gait. Upon completion, they spoke with each rider about the scores and what would be necessary for improvement. It was a very successful experience for all, and an inspiration for trainers and breeders in the US.

BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met by Zoom call on October 10, November 14, and December 12. Complete minutes, including the Treasurer's and Secretary's reports, committee reports, and the annual budget, are archived at <https://icelandics.org/minutes>.

In addition to the topics above, the Board approved the schedule and speaker for the February 24 Annual Meeting, and discussed establishing a two-year calendar of regularly occurring events to help future boards anticipate, plan for, and fund such events. With Lori Cretney's term as USIHC Treasurer ending December 31, the Board voted to hire a parttime bookkeeper/administrator to help with the treasurer's work; a job description was written



Bella Covert won the Youth 16-and-under combination ribbon in the Fall USIHC Virtual Show.

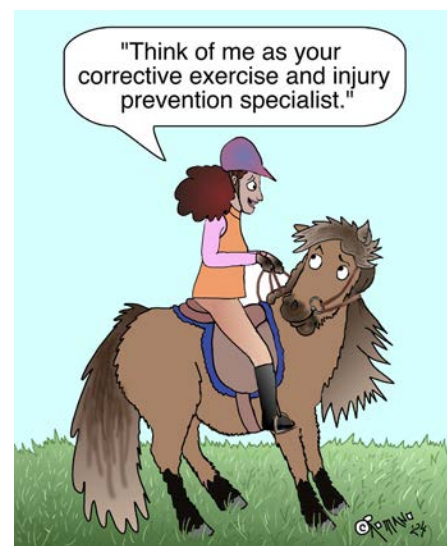
and posted in January. The USIHC bank account and office address have been changed, with the account going to US Bank (a national bank) and the main office address, at least temporarily, to Virginia Lauridsen's address. The Board is also looking into phasing out use of PayPal.

CORRECTION

There is an editing error in the article "Microchips 101" by Andrea Barber on page 25 of Issue Four 2023. The caption of the photo is incorrect. The scanner does not switch between the horse's ID number and the body temperature. When it scans a Bio-Therm chip, both the number and the body temperature are displayed at the same time. We apologize for the error.



Liesl Kolbe, shown with her friend Kami Brickner (left), was selected to represent the US at the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland.



COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The FEIF committees held their annual meetings October 27-28, 2023 in Frankfurt, Germany.

For the Education Committee, the major focus of this year's meeting was on defining the future FEIF Education department. The FEIF trainer/instructor seminar, which was originally planned for March 2024, will now take place in October 2024 in Sweden. To discuss joint topics and future seminars, the committee held joint meetings with the Youth and the Leisure Riding committee. The FEIF "Trainer/Instructor of the Year" award will be set up as in previous years, and all FEIF member countries are asked to be prepared to nominate candidates.

The focus of the Youthwork Committee was on evaluating the 2023 FEIF Youth Camp, which took place in Finland, and looking forward to the next FEIF Youth Cup, at the Icelandic horse Centre Solfaxi in Münsingen, Switzerland, on July 13-20, 2024. Other matters that continue to concern the committee are how to combat sexual harassment and how best to ensure child protection. Of course, the legal aspects of these matters must fall within the laws of the member countries, but we have found that in some areas there are significant differences in the level of protection. The committee feels that by continuing to raise awareness, some of these differences can be leveled out. All FEIF departments constantly re-evaluate their practices and

discuss necessary changes to keep up with current thinking. This is also true for FEIF Youthwork: the FEIF Youth Camp now has a much stronger focus on education, by way of theory and workshops in the context of best practices in horsemanship. Equally, there will be some changes to the next FEIF Youth Cup, one of which is shortening the program by one day, which will hopefully result in less exhausted participants.

The Breeding Committee used the opportunity in Frankfurt to prepare the 2024 breeding season, but also to discuss long-term developments in Icelandic horse breeding. A variety of proposals were prepared for the FEIF Delegates' Assembly and the Annual Breeding Leader meeting in Luxembourg in February 2024. One of the biggest events in 2023 was the World Championships and, based on the feedback, it was obvious that the breeding show was very successful and that the improvements in the course of the show were much appreciated. The committee has already started a discussion on further improvements for the breeding show to be held at the 2025 World Championships in Switzerland.

The Sports Committee and the Sports Judges Committee discussed most of the sport-related topics on their long agenda. Items related to the welfare of the horse included limiting the maximum starts per day, the volume of noise at competitions, saddle placement, and the consequences of not following the regulations, as well as

the assessment of rider ability/connection. Various other proposals for adjustments to the guidelines for sport judges were also discussed. The working group on facilitation for disabled riders gave an update on its work on the creation of a repository of information from the various FEIF member countries. The participants at the committee meeting liked the idea of forming an advisory group that can give advice on hoof, shoe, and veterinary issues. The adapted T2, where the loose rein section is ridden on both reins in the final, will be a proposal to the 2024 Delegates' Assembly. The possibility to re-shoe after being disqualified from a test for violation of a shoeing rule will be on the agenda.

The Leisure Riding Department's meeting started with a presentation on its vision of contributing to the global shift toward nature and well-being and embracing the latest trends and aligning them with the Icelandic horse-riding ethos. The members, together with Atli Már Ingólfsson and Jean-Paul Balz, discussed the key objectives of the department: 1) promoting the Icelandic horse for leisure riding; 2) bridging the gap between all committees by incorporating elements of breeding, education, sport, and youth engagement in a noncompetitive setting; 3) focusing on the welfare and happiness of the horse; and 4) engaging new audiences who are interested in the Icelandic horse, but might be intimidated by the competitiveness of sports or the intricacies of breeding.

The Horseyum Atom



NEW BLUP INDEX

New breeding evaluation (BLUP) indexes have been calculated for 2023. They are now available in WorldFengur for a total of 492,564 horses registered before September 8, 2023. The number of full international breeding assessments on which the calculation is based was 36,160. These assessments are divided over all FEIF countries as follows: Iceland 22,379, Sweden 4,459, Germany 3,721, Denmark 2,819, Norway 1,279, Austria 387, Finland 294, the Netherlands 319, the United States 228, Canada 117, Switzerland 110, the United Kingdom 39, and the Faroe Islands 9. The results of DNA testing for the pace gene of 1,027 horses were also included in the calculations.

Please bear in mind that a BLUP accuracy rate below 60% constitutes an unreliable prediction and needs to be regarded cautiously. The accuracy rate is based on the amount of information—i.e., the number of breeding assessments of related individuals—behind the calculations. Therefore, the BLUP of horses with assessed offspring has a higher accuracy rate.

The BLUP is calibrated on the average score of horses born in Iceland in the past 10 years, so the control group was born between 2014 and 2023. The scale is set with 100 points as the average value; one standard deviation unit (std) equals 10 points for all traits except for height at withers. The population of horses is distributed over the range of 70-130 points (6 std),

with only a few horses outside of that range. BLUP for height at withers is published in centimeters and is a deviation from the average height of horses measured in the referenced period.

BLUP is published for a total of 24 traits, including height at withers; head; neck, withers and shoulders; back and croup; proportions; leg quality; leg stance; hooves; mane and tail; tölt; slow tölt; trot; pace; gallop; canter; rideability; general impression; walk; total score (TS); TS for conformation; TS for riding ability; TS without pace; TS for riding ability without pace; and test status.

The BLUP for virtual mate selection is updated simultaneously. This information is highly useful for breeders to take into account when planning the mating for the next generation of horses; for this purpose, the “Select a stallion” and “Virtual mating selection” tools in WorldFengur—both based on the BLUP—are invaluable.

HARMONIOUS RIDING

All FEIF International Sport Judges at WorldRanking events can nominate riders to be included in the list of Good and Harmonious Riding because of their fine riding style. This is independent from the test, or the marks given. In 2023, Máni Hilmarrson was nominated 8 times at 4 different events, Susanne Birgisson (DE) was nominated 11 times at 3 different events, and she won the FEIF Feather Prize at the World Championships. Congratulations to all 144 riders who have been nominated for Good and Harmonious Riding in the 2023 competition season. Thank you to all riders listed for being such excellent examples of the type of riding we want to see in our sport! Follow the link for the complete list of Good and Harmonious Riders: <https://www.feif.org/sport-dept/worldranking/good-harmonious-riding/>

SURVEY LAUNCHED

What constitutes a suitable match between horse and rider? The past year has been characterized by debates on horse welfare and the concept of the Social License to Operate (SLO). The importance of the reputation of the Icelandic horse sport among the public cannot be denied and underesti-

mated—that reputation is a prerequisite for the existence of the sport.

An important survey about the factors that should be considered when matching riders with Icelandic horses has been launched by FEIF, in cooperation with The Suitably Mounted Group, to help understand what riders, officials, veterinarians, and anyone in the Icelandic horse world thinks about how to suitably match horses and riders in order to support horse welfare. The survey is anonymous, consists of 14 questions, is open to any equestrians over 18 and should take around 10 minutes to complete. See <https://de.surveymonkey.com/r/HGVQC2R>

BLOOD MARES UPDATE

As the international Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations worldwide, FEIF condemns the practices and the mistreatment of mares on blood farms. We would welcome a decision of the European Commission to stop the import and production of PMSG and support any action taken by the Icelandic authorities to stop the procedure in Iceland completely.

Earlier this year, the Icelandic ministry announced that the current regulation will be repealed and the keeping and collecting of blood from pregnant mares will fall under Regulation 460/2017. This regulation is concerned with the welfare of animals used for scientific purposes and aims to ensure that animals used for such purposes are not subjected to unnecessary stress. According to Article 4.1, keeping of animals for the above purpose is subject to authorization and in the event of infringements the license can be withdrawn by the veterinary supervisory authority. Article 10.1 states that no animal experiment may be carried out if there is another recognized method that does not involve the use of laboratory animals to achieve the desired effect.

A new documentary film was recently released by the Animal Welfare Foundation/Tierschutzbund Zürich, which recommends a ban on PMSG and informs on alternatives using hormone-free methods or synthetic preparations. The title of the film is “PMSG—the hormone of misery | Good reasons for a ban.” Watch the trailer at: <https://youtu.be/A-2WILhrRU>.

CLUB UPDATES

There are 12 Regional Clubs affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the one nearest you, see the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

ALASKA

by Ellen Halverson

We have started planning events for the summer, but I thought it might be fun to share what our club members do with their Icelandic horses in the winter. Just to keep moving and riding a bit, and so we don't forget everything, my horses and I take weekly dressage lessons.

Janet Mulder notes that winter in southcentral Alaska brought record snow falls this year, resulting in more time shoveling and plowing than riding. Her Icelandic horses thrive in the winter and are happy and healthy despite the weather. She points out that the snow makes a lovely backdrop for holiday photos!

Marj Weathers has been using her new skills from the Ride Like a Viking program to do liberty work with her horse SeljaRós. She says her recall is better in the winter, when there isn't any distracting grass.

Dan Coverdell uses winter to set SMART goals for each of his horses, and for them as a group as well. Each will have



Left, Alaska Club member Stormi Nugen and Snæfriður playing ball last fall. Right, at the Frida Club's archery clinic, Shelley Shearer receives tips from instructor Lukas Novotny. Photo by R.J. Hanagan.



Lots of snow makes for good photos! Here, Alaska Icelandic Riding Club member Mia poses with Skjómi.

an individualized training plan for the activities of the summer.

Stormi Nugen uses R+ training with her yearling, Snæfriður from Arctic Circle Icelandics, to work on liberty training. Her horse can do things like going to a target on cue, picking up things and bringing them to her, putting things in buckets, waving a flag, and doing liberty patterns.

FRIDA

by Mary Schwarz

The fall was all about connection and learning for the Frida Icelandic Riding Club, with many different opportunities to choose from, all held at beautiful Mon-

taire Icelandic Horse Farm in Middleburg, VA. In September, world-renowned rider and judge Nicole Kempf gave a clinic. Riders young and old, beginner to advanced, took advantage of the opportunity to learn, practice obstacle course training, and experience the competition track.

Carrie Brandt of Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky taught a liberty clinic, also in September. Carrie has extensive training in liberty work, studying under Dan James of Double Dan Horsemanship and Patrick Sullivan of Modern Day Horsemanship. She has also competed successfully in International Liberty Horse Association competitions. Clinic participants could





The Frida Club's fall schooling featured instruction by Nicole Kempf.

choose from several different tracks of liberty work: in-hand, bridleless, or positive reinforcement (R+) clicker training. The two-day clinic offered both lectures and hands-on practice. A sunny Day One gave way to unremitting rain on Day Two, but everyone kept up their spirits (under a tent!), while Antje Freygang set an example of persistence patiently working with her gelding, Dalur, despite getting soaked.

Nicole Kempf and Alex Pregitzer taught a several-day clinic, culminating in a schooling show, at the end of October. Nicole and Alex brought a wealth of training, competing, and judging experience

to the event, providing lessons throughout the week and then coaching participants through the show. There were options for riders of all experience levels and ages, including another obstacle course. What made this schooling show particularly valuable was the real-time feedback given by Alex while participants were on the track. Each rider got an inside look into what a judge is watching for during their ride and could walk away knowing specifically what they should work on.

Shelley Shearer organized a mounted archery clinic in November, with instruction beginning with groundwork

and safety, which included horse desensitization. Instructor Lukas Novotny, a world-class champion with years of teaching experience and World Horseback Archery Federation (WHAF) certification, provided expert instruction. According to Shelley, "Lucas taught how to desensitize your horse to archery, several different ways to shoot, and did a fun exercise where we slowly decreased the size of the target down from full size to just a bottle cap. People who had never shot before the weekend were shooting at a canter by the end."

FIRC members had one final opportunity for fun in 2023 (this time without their horses) at the annual holiday party hosted by members Pat and Al Carballo in Maryland. FIRC members are fairly spread out geographically through Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, but many made the drive to gather, feast, talk horses, and participate in a delightful game of getting to know other members.

HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

We had a busy fall season and are looking forward to 2024! In September, members attended a clinic with Freya Sturm at Vinur Farms in Trout Lake, WA. This clinic addressed Feldenkrais and Centered Riding. Vinur Farms continues to support Icelandic riders in the Pacific Northwest, including Alaska. Monica Sheehan Urrutia also hosted a clinic with Freya at her



Left, Mary Schwarz and her daughter Rosamund took part in the Frida Club's Fun Show in September. Photo by Nancy Schwarz. Right, Ben Sizemore, Freya Sturm, and Kristen Petersen represented Hestafolk at the Washington State Fair. Photo by Lauren Murphy.





Hestafolk member Pam Hill waited three years to use this costume, as the holiday parade was canceled due to COVID. "It brought a lot of smiles," she says.

farm, Eagle's Roost, in Arlington, WA, in October.

Lauren Murphy, our club president, attended the last of the two state fairs she

attends each year, where she does a wonderful job of introducing her Icelandic, Andi, to the public. Lots of folks come back looking for her, and many stories

are shared of Iceland trips and Icelandic horses. More members have been able to go and help her, as the crowds are huge in Puyallup, which is just south of Seattle and so has a large area to draw from.

Pam Hill took her mare, Aradis from Lone Cedar, to the Jinglebell Ride hosted by the Tahoma chapter of BackCountry Horsemen. She has waited a long time for this costume ride, as it had been cancelled during COVID.

The club approved our revised by-laws, ethics, and riding etiquette documents at our annual meeting. We hold the meeting in person and by Zoom so that all may participate. We make sure that all club members know they are welcome to weigh in on any issue at any time by contacting anyone on the Board. We are looking forward to our new online membership process and paying electronically, since we are so spread out. The club is still having its monthly Zoom meetings and learning together. Topics covered have been nutrition, pasture management, allergies, lunging, bits, saddles, girthing, and more. Some of the best conversations arise spontaneously during these meetings.



The youth riders at the Klettafjalla Fun Show.

KLETTAFJALLA

by Ellen Lichtenstein

After a very busy year, the Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club wrapped up 2023 with our third annual Fall Fun Keppni, held at Tamangur Icelandic Horses in Larkspur, CO. Around 20 horses and riders from across the region, including six youth riders, came together for games like red-light-green-light, pole bending, and a costume contest. Everyone had a great time and won ribbons, but the club wishes to give particular congratulations to one of the youth riders, Quinn Denmeade, who ranked highest overall across the entire day's activities.

NEIHC

by Jennifer Bergantino

Like all clubs, the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club has an email list. In addition to a plethora of welcomes to new members and the usual tack for sale, we had lively exchanges this fall on clipping, feeding, paddocks, sources of online training, saddle fitting, favorite riding gear, and tips on buying and acclimating an Icelandic horse. More than 30 pictures were posted on January 1 to ring in 2024. We are a congenial bunch!

Activity at Ebba Meehan's Merrimack Valley Icelandics in Boxford, MA started in October with a performance at The Topsfield Fair. Eight riders—Lexi Mitchell (youth), Brynja Meehan (youth), Kate Kalan, Valerie Moore, Ebba Meehan, Shelby Walker, Scott Smith, and Erika Tighe (coach)—delighted the audience with their drill team, and Andrea Smith and Nancy Rohlf displayed riding in



Jana Meyer teaches Jennifer Bergantino at an NEIHC clinic. Photo by Charity Simard.



NEIHC member Andrea Smith introduces Próstur to the beach.

harmony. Ebba reports, "This annual performance has become an exciting opportunity for our riders and horses." It has also evolved into a must-see event for the equestrian community of North Shore Massachusetts, as the Icelandics are becoming well known. The MVI Drill team has already started preparing for 2024, adding some new moves to their routine. Some of the riders also participated in this year's Equine Affair in Springfield, MA (see below).

MVI offered several clinics this quarter. In November, Carrie Brandt and Guðmar Pétursson gave 14 participants a variety of learning experiences, from general lessons to liberty training to Knapamerki testing. Congratulations to Jenny Sanderson for passing Knapamerki levels 1 and 2! We thank Shannon Simmons and ANJ Stables for hosting this clinic. In December, MVI held a clinic with Vibeke Thoresen. She is a Hólar University graduate who gives riding instruction and trains horses at Guðmar's Hestaland and is pursuing a Master's degree in Equine Science at Hólar.

On the competitive front, six MVI riders went to Vermont for the last show in the Sólheimar Triple Crown Series. The group had a full schedule, each riding four classes a day! Brynja Meehan and Valerie Moore also participated in the Virtual Show this fall, with good results: Brynja made the US Team for the FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland next July. The ever expanding crew at MVI also enjoyed beach rides and miles of trail riding, including participating in the NEIHC

group trail ride in early November and a Twilight Tölt under the light of the moon in late December.

At Sólheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir was busy with clinics in November and December, lessons, and training and importing horses. October saw the third installment of the Sólheimar Triple Crown series of nationally ranked shows. Participation was off the charts, Sigrún says, with 40-plus horse and rider combinations and over 100 entries in sanctioned classes, with additional entries in fun classes. A single class, Four Gait Pairs, boasted 22 riders. The show was truly international, attracting riders from Canada, who, like many riders, had joined all three shows. Riders who competed in all three and earned the highest cumulative score in a class were crowned Triple Crown Champions. Kamilla Brickner and Finja Meyer-Hoyt tied for Triple Crown Champion in Youth Tölt. In addition, Kamilla was crowned Champion in Youth Four Gait. Other champions included Sigrún, Susan Sundstrom, Liesl Kolbe, Aleece Hoyt, and Jenny Sanderson, some in multiple divisions.

"My favorite class of each show is Four Gait Pairs," says Sigrún. "This time it was extra special. Richard Davis and Aleece Hoyt rode their program in memory of Marilyn Blaess, who passed away in July—and they rode her own horses. Her husband, Richard, rode Magnea, and Aleece rode Marilyn's beloved Vörður. They came in second, with a score of 6. What a wonderful way to honor an amazing woman whom I loved very, very much."



Richard Davis and Aleece Hoyt rode in the Sólheimar Show in memory of Marilyn Blaess.



Attending the Northwest Gaited Horse Association Fall Show are Zo Zinke-Haschemeyer on Aria (left) and Jennifer Quinn on Lolita.

The Icelandic riders at Cedar Tree Stables in Ipswich, MA, welcomed Jana Meyer for an excellent clinic in December. The group continues to enjoy the trails, Crane Beach, and participating in the local hunt with big horses. Charity Simard, Brenda Nishimura, and Anna Wallstrom enjoyed the Myopia Hunt Club's annual Halloween Hunter Pace. Nancy Rohlf's organized a highly successful NEIHC Fall trail ride through Bradley Palmer State Forest in Ipswich for 16 riders. Afterward, more NEIHC members, along with friends and family, enjoyed a potluck picnic.

Other NEIHC members spent the past quarter enjoying their horses off the oval track. Maggie Breen's 27-year-old Sprækur "is starting to slow down just a bit and taking it easy," she says, "but we did plenty of trail rides, and I taught some lessons on him for kids." Xenia Von Lilien-Waldau and her horse, Valdís, "really enjoyed participating in hunter paces this year. We did five in total, going through deep rivers and streams, along heavily washed-out trails and riding in non-stop rain."

Andrea Smith welcomed a new horse, Þróstur. Andrea met Þróstur when in Iceland at a Hestaland winter training retreat in early 2022. "I am so happy I got to do things the way I did: 18 months, four trips to Iceland, and a lot of trust in Guðmar and all the folks at Hestaland. Þróstur is calm, sensitive, brave, and so, so sweet! Having the opportunity to get to know him and build trust before he got

here was well worth the wait! Hestaland did an amazing job with him."

NEIHC has a fantastic presence at Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA. Our helmets are off to NEIHC President, Em Potts, for championing this effort. Em reports, "Our event saw an excellent turnout and the demos were well attended. As always, our booth generated significant interest, and we handed out around 400 NEIHC farm lists. Merrimack Valley Icelandics jumped in with short notice to ride in our breed demos, showcasing the versatility of our horses and demonstrating their various gaits. Both riding demos were very well done and represented the Icelandic horse beautifully. Guðmar Pétursson of Hestaland delivered an excellent and educational in-hand presentation for us at the Equine Fundamentals Forum, covering such topics as the breed's gaits, its characteristics, our club, the USIHC, Horses of Iceland, and riding or trekking in Iceland. Leah and Grace Greenberger and John and Maren Prenosil not only manned our booth, but brought Leah's Skati and Koli as our breed ambassadors. Other volunteers included Margot Apple, Hilary Houldsworth, Leslie Chambers, Claudia Barron, Jana Meyer, Nancy Rohlf's, Andrea Smith, and the MVI Team. Ona Kwiatkowski covered the event on social media. The combined efforts of each and every one of our volunteers were instrumental in making this event a success.

"As evidence of our outreach," Em continues, "one of this year's highlights

was a young girl, around nine or ten years old, who has been visiting our booth for the past four or five Equine Affaires. She eagerly stopped by to share the news that she had purchased her first Icelandic horse and was joining the NEIHC. This moment held special significance for me, as I was first introduced to the Icelandic horse at Equine Affaire when I was eight."

NWIHC

by Alexandra Venable

This year has been an exciting one for the Northwest Icelandic Horse Club. Our growing group went on trail rides whenever the weather shined on us, and club members attended various local clinics and events, showing off the versatility of our horses and the dedication of our riders. This year allowed us to finally renew our annual club show, with fabulous attendance. For many it was their first ever show, and even people who at first weren't interested in competing saw how much fun we were having and decided to jump in, with a great time had by all.

At one barn with many NWIHC members, Alfadans Equestrian Arts in Newberg, OR, there were a variety of clinics this fall, including liberty, Knapamerki, dressage, and even a first for many, an introduction to working equitation.

We also had quite a group attend the Northwest Gaited Horse Association Fall Show, with many youth riders and 15 registered Icelandics total. Their riding was a testament to the beauty of our horses and the horsemanship of their riders, and we



New NEIHC Youth Member Carlin and Blæja.

were very proud.

In early December 10 Icelandics invaded the Extreme Mountain Trail course at the Oregon Horse Center and demonstrated the fabulous temperament and bravery of our beloved horses. From waterfalls and logs to platforms and rocky terrain they conquered it all and had an absolute blast.

There was also a holiday party for the West Coast youth riders who had attended the North American Youth Cup. The kids dressed the horses as reindeer and played Reindeer Games. It was lovely to see our youth riders come together to celebrate.

SIRIUS

by Janet Kuykendall

When it comes to Icelandic horses, some people dive right in, while others take a little longer to fall in love with our fuzzy friends. Sirius Icelandic Horse Club member Jeff Marks was in the latter category. Jeff's wife, Chris Stewart-Marks, brought home an Icelandic, and Jeff wouldn't even go to the barn that night to see her. However, the next morning Jeff took one look at her sweet face and completely fell in love. "I realized resistance was futile, and I told Chris she'd have to go buy another horse for herself," he says. Seven years later, Jeff rode in the AERC Flamingo endurance ride.

In Jeff's words, "I started out my first



Sirius member Carly Zaayer rides Sólon frá Sörlatungu in the Archers of Arvak's demo. Photo by Debbie Joplin.



Sirius member Nancy Radebaugh and Gunnar explore a cave.

Limited Distance Ride (LDR) ever with three of my besties: my wife Chris, on her 70th birthday; Thokkadís, Chris's beautiful and regal horse; and Roxie, our adorable, valiant, protective horse, who was my steed for the ride. Chris (an experienced, world-class endurance rider) had warned me that we would go out fast—faster than I had ever gone—and we did. What a rush! There was Roxie, happily flying down the trail, with me enjoying every footfall. This horse is amazing, and I am going faster than I have ever gone before.

"For about two-thirds of the first 15 miles, I was loving this ride. We were on pace to 'turtle,' which was our objective. I could tell that she was getting a little weary, but after a bit, she got her second wind. I, however, leaned back going down a hill, and my form was broken from that point forward. For whatever reason, I couldn't recover. Roxie took care of me as we came back into camp, but I knew I was done! I could barely get off the horse. Roxie was in good shape, and I was very happy about that, but when the rider is tired, the horse has to work so much harder. I did not want to wear her out. I had an objective to finish the race, but my first objective was always to protect the horse and be safe. So, at the 15-mile mark, I took the rider option. Chris and Thokkadís continued and finished the LD. If I had continued, neither of us would have finished on time. So, all in all, it was a good decision."

Jeff continues, "No one would have thought I would become a lover of horses, after so many years of just tolerating

them. Then I saw Roxie's face; now I'm a believer. My continuing gratitude goes to my sweetheart, Chris, who said, 'Just trust me.' And Chris has been patiently allowing me to develop over the ensuing seven years going from 'riding in the fetal position' to almost sitting up straight. It has really been a slow but steady progression of 'aha' moments, as I have learned more from Chris and from trainer Carly Zaayer at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky. However, it is clear that I need to get much better at this if I am ever going to do a limited distance ride at speed. I had done introductory rides in the past, and I need to take a step back and do those faster. In retrospect, I skipped a step. In any event, for me the objective is to enjoy the ride and protect the horse. One final comment: Don't let anyone ever tell you that horseback riding isn't a sport because the horse does all of the work!"

Several members of the Sirius Club are also in the Archers of Arvak Icelandic horse mounted archery team. The "Arvakis" recently held their first public performance in Eminence, KY, at the Fenrir Viking Festival on November 4-5. Sirius member Christine Stewart-Marks has taught the team from the ground up, and she acted as the announcer and field marshal. Members, including Carly Zaayer and Shari Wells, donned Nordic costumes and war paint to tólt and canter their Icelandics past the spectators, while target shooting with traditional bows and arrows. Will Wells served as a ground archer. The demonstration taught the crowd about the goals of mounted



Says Sirius member Jeff Marks, “Volcanic apocalypse? Hey, when I’m with my favorite mare, I have not a care.” (Don’t worry, the photo’s a fake.)

archery and showed off the suitability of Icelandic horses for the sport. Their smooth gaits and sensible temperaments are very valuable when riders must drop the reins and focus entirely on steadying their aim—often at speed! As a grand finale, Carly Zaayer finished the demonstration with a rousing beer tölt, much to the delight of the crowd. The show was a highlight of the festival, and the Archers of Arvak plan to return in 2024, hopefully with even more riders!

Sirius member Nancy Radebaugh and her horse Gunnar secured second place in an obstacle challenge at the Knox County Horse Park in Mt. Vernon, OH, on October 28. The event was timed, and their only setback was the remarkable speed of their rival’s horse! The challenge consisted of two parts. First, they navigated a series of trail obstacles, including backing through a maze of pool noodles, side-passing over logs in the mud, and retrieving a raincoat that was flapping in the wind hanging from a tree. Interestingly, they were paired with their rival, whose horse refused to go anywhere near the raincoat. Gunnar said, “Step aside, newbie. I’ll show you how it’s done!” The second half of the competition was in the arena, where Gunnar was flawless in completing every obstacle.

ST. SKUTLA

by Katherine Forrest

St. Skutla members have been enjoying a variety of activities with their horses, from leisurely trail rides to competitive distance events. Kitty and John Hall-Thurnheer have been exploring the trails bareback with their horses Jupiter and Cody, both from the Cornell University research herd. “They are the first horses John and I trained. We’re really thrilled with them,” reports Kitty.

Carrie Brindisi is building a strong relationship with her new mare, Ylfa from Cornell, after sending her to Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky for training with Carrie Brandt and Terral Hill. An older horse for starting, at age 10, Ylfa is showing that she can learn new tricks and is exploring R+ training as well as groundwork gymnastics as she finds her rhythm here in New York.



St. Skutla member Quentin Bartholomew and Ómur from Cornell.



St. Skutla member Katherine Forrest and Njóra from Cornell enjoy a rainy GMHA ride in Vermont. Photo by John Miller/Spectrum Photography.

Quentin Bartholomew sent her gelding Ómur from Cornell to Jessica Haynsworth at Mad River Valley Icelandic Horses in Vermont for training and is continuing to build on the foundation that Jess helped establish for this sweet pair.

Njóra (also from Cornell) and I had a super season of distance riding, starting with the Green Mountain Horse Association’s Spring Endurance and CTR rides, joining our first Vermont Endurance Ride and Drive Association event with the Silver Hill CTR 25, and wrapping up with GMHA’s Fall Endurance 30-miler on our second attempt—we finished the miles but were overtime in 2021.

The St. Skutla club will be bringing Terral Hill to New York in June for an Icelandic Groundwork Clinic, hosted by Sand Meadow Farm. For more information, see the link at taktur.horse/schedule.



St. Skutla member Carrie Brindisi and Ylfa from Cornell took lessons in liberty work at Taktur Icelandics.

THE HAND-PICKED HORSE

by Jennifer Bechard

“I’d been thinking about him for a while. All it took was going on a quest to find him.”

When it came to purchasing a new horse, Chris Willrodt’s initial criteria seemed quite reasonable: A reliable gelding. Between five and eight years old. At least 145 centimeters tall. Natural tölter. Well-balanced gaits. Commendable work ethic (providing energy as needed, but also capable of relaxing promptly upon request). A friendly nature toward other horses.

However, as discussions continued between her and her trainer, Alicia Flanigan, the list expanded significantly. Her “would-likes” turned into “must-haves,” and the search became daunting. Now, the ideal horse must not only meet the specified criteria, but also be chestnut, exhibit exceptional conformation, boast a flaxen mane and tail, showcase advanced training relative to its age, be proficient in all five gaits, and demonstrate a wide speed range in tölt.

Daunting search aside, Chris was confident that Alicia would find the horse and that the match would be perfect. Fire & Ice Icelandic Horses, Alicia’s secluded farm in Limington, Maine, is home to five



Chris Willrodt had a long list of “must-haves” and “would-likes” when she sent Alicia Flanigan to Iceland to find her dream horse. All photos by Jennifer Bechard.

of her personal Icelandic horses. But it is also a special place for Icelandic horses and their riders from across the region. From the spotless barn and well-footed

outdoor arena, to the beautiful trails through the surrounding forests, it’s an ideal place for Alicia’s talents to shine, as she helps her clients realize their Icelandic horse dreams.

Alicia spends part of each year living and working in Mosfellsbær, Iceland. While in Maine she provides training, clinics, and lessons; when she is in Iceland she focuses on competing and advancing her own education as a trainer, in preparation for attending the equestrian program at Hólar University. Last year marked a significant achievement for Alicia, as she not only qualified for but also competed in the Icelandic Championships, as the sole American representative. Proudly representing the US, Alicia achieved commendable total scores ranging from 6.4 to 6.8. When asked to talk about her accomplishments, Alicia remains remarkably humble, emphasizing her passion for Icelandic horses and the joy of contributing to their community, both in the US and abroad. She’s much more interested in talking about Chris’s quest for the perfect horse.



Chris and Heimir frá Dallandi getting to know each other at Alicia Flanigan’s Fire & Ice Icelandics in Limington, Maine.

THE QUEST

Chris has owned Icelandic horses for 18 years, but as a former endurance rider, she's ridden thousands of miles over her lifetime. After her move from California to Maine in 2020, she connected with Alicia for lessons and training for her two Icelandic horses, Sólfari and Andvari, and eventually enlisted the young professional's help to find her lifelong dream horse.

Alicia reflected on their journey together. "Chris and I have been working closely together for about three years, after our first time meeting at a clinic I was teaching in Maine. I've not only been providing lessons and training, but also taking care of her two Icelandic geldings, Sólfari and Andvari, offering them tune-ups along the way. Over time, I've gotten to know Chris well, both as a person and a rider.

"The moment arrived when Chris decided to search for a new horse, one that would ideally become her lifelong riding companion. We spent months discussing her preferences and creating a detailed list of criteria. Her requirements, ranging from age and size to appearance and temperament, were quite specific. Similarly, I had my own set of criteria, including



Heimir and Chris with trainer Alicia (center).



What makes a perfect horse? It depends.

training level and gaits, which I believed were ideal for her riding needs.

"When I returned to Iceland, I started reaching out to my contacts at reputable farms. My job in this process was to find her the right horse and to make the match. This meant scouring Iceland for options. I tried numerous horses and then narrowed it down to only the horses that checked off all of the necessary criteria for Chris to try them herself.

"Within that list, I had my personal pick," Alicia added, "however, I kept that to myself to remain neutral. When Chris came to Iceland to look at and try each of the horses, all that she would know was that the horse met her criteria. She could go fully on feel and decide which horse she liked the most and gave her the best feeling, knowing that every horse was within the strict criteria and budget she had given me."

MAKING THE MATCH

"As Chris's trip to Iceland approached," Alicia continued, "I scheduled trials with several farms, but we didn't get past the second horse on my list."

Horse #2 was Heimir frá Dallandi. "I had seen a clip of him online," Alicia said, "a couple months prior to when I was going back to Iceland. Despite the

time frame, I reached out, and from all the information generously provided, he sounded like a good potential fit. I explained to the trainer at Dalland that I understood that the horse would most likely be sold by the time we could come to Iceland. However, I appreciated their time and information, and they said to simply be in touch, as there was a possibility he could still be available by that time. Turns out, when I got back to Iceland he was still available, and I did go to try him. Immediately, he checked off all of the criteria, and I just knew he was the perfect horse. But Chris's trip to Iceland was still a few weeks out, so I scheduled trials on all of the horses in the lineup."

At Dalland, Chris was able to try Heimir both inside and outside. "When she came back from her rides, all that we discussed was sending him for a vet check, which I helped to facilitate," Alicia said. "Then, of course, we canceled the rest of our horse-trying appointments for the next two days. Instead, I suggested she take lessons on her new horse with his current trainer at Dalland to get to know him better and also to learn his training cues to set them off on the right foot.

"Chris had the dream of enjoying this horse over the summer in his homeland



Alicia watches as Chris tries Heimir's slow tölt.



Chris and Alicia gave Heimir plenty of time to acclimate to his new home.

in beautiful Iceland. So, she opted to send Heimir to the farm where I was training over the summer. It made for some beautiful memories and fantastic rides.

“In the fall, I handled lining up the importation for Heimir. It was a sweet moment passing him off to the export company, as I knew the first leg of his life’s journey was starting. He flew over to the US, was quarantined with all the other imports at JFK airport, and then was hauled up to Maine. I assisted in talking Chris through how to slowly introduce him to his new world. They spent quality time together in the fields, bonding in the paddock while allowing him to check out his new environment, which is completely different than anything he was used to. Slowly but surely, after enough time of acclimation, he was able to get shoes on, and they were able to start riding together on US soil.

“Shortly after his arrival in the US, I made my way back to Maine as well. The new couple came to my farm to continue learning with me, ensuring that Heimir was adjusting properly, and that they were understanding each other under saddle. It also involved making sure everything was going smoothly and on the right track.

“It’s a wonderful feeling to make matches like this,” Alicia said, “and to

help clients find their dream horses. It’s not just about selling horses; it’s about finding people the horse that they are looking for and that is the right fit for them. But for this process to have worked out, it took dedication on both Chris’s and my end. Chris needed to be patient and willing to put the time into coming over to Iceland and trying these horses.

“It’s just as important that I, as the trainer, helped her verbalize what qualities she was looking for in a horse, as terms such as ‘willingness’ can be confusing and often misunderstood. It’s important to have a good understanding between the horse shopper and the one being shopped for, ensuring that we are both on the same page.”

THE PERFECT HORSE

“Since the first time I tried him,” Alicia concluded, “there’s never been a second of doubt in my mind that Heimir is the perfect horse for Chris. It’s a joy to see that proven true every day, and I wish them many happy miles and adventures together. It is my true passion to ride, train, and love this spectacular Icelandic



Alicia rides Heimir, ensuring that he is adjusting well to life in the US.



Alicia Flanigan and Heimir. “It’s a wonderful feeling to make matches like this,” Alicia says.

breed, and it is truly an honor to help others connect with them as well.”

Chris shared her personal feelings upon Heimir’s arrival in a post on the internet. Says Alicia, “Reading Chris’s post fills me with happiness, knowing that she now owns the horse she had dreamed of and that she is experiencing the exact emotions I hoped to share with her. Witnessing these meaningful connections come to life is genuinely magical.”

Chris wrote: “Ever since Heimir arrived, I’ve had a lasting inner peace. I’d been thinking about him for a while. All it took was going on a quest to find him. I had a clear picture in my mind of many qualities, including his chestnut color and silver in his mane and tail.

“Let me introduce you to Heimir frá Dallandi, my new eight-year-old Icelandic, imported from Iceland with the help of my trainer, Alicia Flanigan. Her deep knowledge of the Icelandic breed made him a perfect match for me and Sólfari. In his first few days here, Heimir was restless, often looking eastward—toward his homeland, maybe? Now, five weeks later, we’ve settled into a routine. He grazes for about two and a half hours in the early morning, perfect for watching sunrises. When I bring him in, we walk together without a lead or treats, making turns and stops, new liberty skills we’ve been learning together.

“My first ride on him felt exceptional. These initial weeks have been like a honeymoon with pleasant surprises. During one trail ride, I wondered how he’d react if he saw a deer. A few minutes later, a deer bounded in front of us, and he stood tall, watching intently. He’s the best teacher; he already knows. Now I can ride one horse and lead the other, switching saddles and horses seamlessly. They get along and groom each other when they graze. Heimir has a way of switching his energy on—proud and high-stepping, with clear and rhythmic gaits. Changing speed is effortless, thanks to his excellent training and conformation. And then, he can settle down. It’s such a relief to have him here. My search is over.”

STEPS TO FINDING THE PERFECT MATCH

by Alicia Flanigan

Know Your Client: The foundation of this journey lies in understanding the client, knowing what they want to use the horse for, and considering their horse knowledge and background based on their skill level.

Understand the Client’s Needs: It’s crucial to know the client’s needs in their equine partner. This involves being honest with oneself and the client about capabilities and expectations.

Create Criteria Lists: Working with clients to create a detailed list of criteria, addressing both personal preferences and my professional considerations. The criteria list becomes the guiding principle in my search for a horse.

Create Wish Lists: Clients are encouraged to create lists of “would like” features, such as size, gaits, age, temperament, and colors.

Establish Clear Communication: Both parties need to have a clear understanding of elements such as movement, temperament, willingness level, and other specific qualities. Clear communication between the rider, trainer, and buyer is essential.

Scout Out Potential Fits: After gaining a good feel for the client’s needs, I scout out reputable farms in search of potential matches. I consider various factors, such as age, size, appearance, temperament, and training level.

Implement an Unbiased Selection Process: Every horse on the list goes through an unbiased selection process to ensure it fits the criteria before my client ever sits on them. This ensures objectivity in the decision-making process.

Try Horses Personally: To ensure the horse meets my exacting standards, I personally try out potential matches. From this, I create a list of horses that fit the criteria.

Assist with Vet Checks and the Import Process: Once I find a potential match, my mother, Nikkisue Flanigan, and I collaborate to arrange the horse’s vet check and manage the export/import process. This includes aiding in the often stressful task of importing horses, particularly for first-time buyers. Our combined expertise ensures a smooth process, working seamlessly together to make it all happen.

Advise on the Acclimation Process: I actively participate in the acclimation process as the horse transitions into the US. This includes helping the horse and rider establish a strong bond, ensuring they begin on the right foot in their new environment.

Make Matches, Not Sales: My goal is not just to sell a horse, but to make a meaningful match. Experiencing the heartwarming stories of my clients and the joy their horses bring them, witnessing the bonding process upon arrival, and observing those initial steps under saddle after the acclimation period is truly special for me.

A HYPERMOBILE HORSE?

by Gabriele Meyer

When riding and training a horse, we frequently find ourselves in a situation where we need to avoid extremes. Whenever there is too much or too little of something, we try to find a happy medium: Our horse's speed needs to be not too slow, but not too fast either. His energy level should be appropriate, not too low, but nor should he be about to explode. Our horse should not be stiff, we rather want him to be flexible and supple, but not so much that he becomes unstable underneath us. Even our favorite gait, the tölt, could be described as the happy medium between trot and pace! Many of the situations we deal with when riding exist on a sliding scale or continuum, and it is up to the rider to determine where their own and their horse's happy medium lies—and then act appropriately to find it.

With my horse, I work a lot on flexibility. Not because he is super stiff, but to the contrary, because it is difficult for him to stabilize himself. I remember a moment during a riding lesson when my instructor asked me to ride down the centerline from C to A—a seemingly easy exercise, or so I thought. Turn before C, look at the big A sign on the opposite arena wall, lay out an imaginary line in front of you and follow that line with the horse's left legs staying on the left side of the line and the right legs on the right side. What can go wrong with that?

A lot, as I was about to find out. Once on the centerline, it felt like every single leg was moving in a different direction. And every time I tried to keep the horse moving on my imaginary line, he made a swerving movement to the other side. The more I tried, the worse it got: The straight line became a zig-zag. My teacher noticed the frustration creeping up on me, and said, "This is a very difficult exercise for any horse and rider pair, especially if the horse is hypermobile."

A hypermobile horse? I tend to read a good deal about horses, but I had never read or heard that expression before. And, as happens so frequently during riding lessons, we moved on to something else before I got the chance to ask. After the lesson, she explained, "We all love to ride horses with wide movements and a lot of push from behind. But the downside is that these horses are more difficult to balance, because their increased joint flexibility creates a certain amount of instability."

At least I was not the only one trying to make my horse stay on the centerline! This made me curious, and I went to do some research on it. In this article, I report on what I have learned about hypermobility, how it manifests in horses, and what that means for their riding and training.

The first thing I noticed was that there is not much research or information to be found on this topic specifically in horses. I had better luck in the human

medical literature and, because on a cellular level all bodies function identically, it is safe to assume that human findings can be applied to horses. I also broadened my search to include the German language area and discovered that awareness of this topic is quite high over there. I found ample serious articles and videos about hypermobility in horses in German. I also found a German physical therapist who is very familiar with Icelandics, and I am grateful she took the time to speak with me.

IN HUMANS

Hereditary hypermobility, also called hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS), is seemingly the most common hereditary disorder of connective tissue. It is inherited in an autosomal dominant manner; most patients with hEDS have an affected parent, and each child of an hEDS patient has a 50% chance of inheriting the disorder. However, the responsible gene (or genes) have not been identified yet.[1]

Many patients report activity-related pain in the connective tissue, which is often misdiagnosed as muscle pain. About 3% of affected people will suffer from chronic pain. Some people experience hypermobility in just one area or joint, for example, the thumb or the knee; in other patients it can be more generalized and might manifest itself in a range of different symptoms, from clicking joints and



These two Icelandic horses exhibit totally different movement patterns in trot under identical circumstances. The degree of stimulation, temperature, wind, footing, and all else that can determine movement were the same when the photo was taken on which this illustration is based. Drawing by Nancy Wines-DeWan.

frequent dislocations, general fatigue, very thin skin with the tendency to form stretch marks and varicose veins, or easy bruising. Even digestive problems like IBS and anxiety disorders have been linked to hEDS.[2]

While hypermobility is classified as a disease in humans, people with hypermobility often outperform in certain sports, such as ballet and gymnastics. In other sports, like, for example, soccer, however, hypermobile athletes have a significantly increased risk of sustaining injuries.[3]

AND IN HORSES?

There are medical conditions linked to heritable alterations of connective tissue, such as degenerative suspensory ligament desmitis (DSLDD), hereditary equine regional dermal asthenia (HERDA), and warmblood fragile foal syndrome (WFFS). The implications for a horse that was unfortunate enough to receive these mutations from both parents are quite drastic, and they spontaneously abort or have to be euthanized either after birth (WFFS), early in their lives (HERDA), or in middle age (DSLDD).

Clearly, this was not what I really was looking for. My horse is now 26, happily alive and sound. How about just hypermobility, as in “increased flexibility,” not debilitating disease?

No research has been done specifically on Icelandic horses, but I found plenty of information on this topic for warmbloods and Friesians. During the 1990s and early 2000s, their breeding goals were changed quite drastically to cater to the dressage competition scene. The modern “sport horses” were taller, lighter, and optically built more upright, and they had the big, floating gaits the judges wanted to see in the show ring.

This change was brought about by the targeted selection of breeding stock. As a team of geneticists from the universities of Parma (Italy) and Upsala (Sweden) writes, “There is evidence that warmblood sport horses are strongly selected for performance, mainly for the dressage and show jumping disciplines. Several of the traits under selection favor a high degree of joint mobility, smooth and supple movements, and elastic gaits in dressage horses, and extreme athleticism and power in show jumping horses. The clinical characteristics of hypermobility in horses

are not comprehensively described, but there is a consensus that some horses are extremely flexible, supple, or even hypermobile.”[4]

The renowned trainers Klaus Schöneich and Gabriele Rachen-Schöneich of the Center for Anatomically Correct Horsemanship in Germany concur: “The modern horses of almost all breeds, whether warmbloods, Iberian or Icelandic horses, are hypermobile, i.e. excessively mobile, and at the same time have enormous driving power in the hindquarters.”[5]

Barbara Schulte, a horse expert in Germany, has created videos that explain the situation in detail; they are dubbed into English and can be found on YouTube. [6]

WHERE IS THE PROBLEM?

To answer this question, I contacted Ellen Bettina Wolff, a retired physical therapist in Germany and now an educator and author. Having been aware of hypermobility since the early 2000s, she is one of the pioneers in the field. She has several videos on YouTube that are worth watching (though they are in German).[7]

Bettina explained that the cause of hypermobility is thought to be a genetic alteration of collagen. Collagen is a protein found throughout the body, human or animal. It is the main component in connective tissue, which has many functions; the ones that first come to mind are skin and ligaments.

Collagen is also the main component of fascia, a tissue type that supports, connects, or separates all other types of tissues in the body. Fascia is often described as flat sheets of stringy connective tissue. (If you have ever prepared a roast in the kitchen, you will have seen these white sheets separating individual muscle strands.) Besides dividing muscles, fascia also provides support to intestines, organs, and nerves.

It’s important to know that weak collagen will affect not only the tendons and ligaments, but the whole body, because connective tissue and fascia are literally everywhere.

On the functional level, if a horse is hypermobile, the tissues of its passive holding structures (ligaments, tendons, and fascia) are too flexible, have too much give, and are therefore less strong.

As a result, the muscles, joints, and bones have to work harder and be stronger to compensate for the shortcomings of the connective tissue; otherwise, the structural integrity of the body cannot be maintained.

And because all the joints in the body are affected, the weakness of the holding structures also includes the joints between individual vertebrae. For this reason, it may be difficult for a hypermobile horse to stabilize its spine.[8]

Dr. Selma Latif of the Veterinary Hospital in Zürich (Switzerland) specializes in back problems of sport horses; she writes, “Modern sport horses’ hypermobility manifests itself in many different ways: hypermobility is a sliding scale. While some horses can exhibit hypermobile leg joints and a seemingly normal back, others might have stable leg joints and a weak back.”

She emphasizes that, to avoid injuries, hypermobile horses have to be trained very carefully and slowly to allow for the formation and strengthening of specific muscle groups.[9]

More on the training later, let’s first find out how to identify a hypermobile horse.

DIAGNOSIS IS DIFFICULT

Because hypermobility is considered to be a spectrum disorder, it is rather difficult to diagnose. For us humans, there is a standard test, the so-called Beighton score. This scoring system consists of a series of five simple tests, like the ability to bend over with straight knees; to bend the elbows or knees backwards; to bend the thumbs to touch the forearm; and to bend a little finger more than 90 degrees backward. The highest possible Beighton score is nine points; if a person scores four or more, they are likely to have joint hypermobility. Although this seems straightforward, there is a lot of discussion in the medical research community about details and modalities.

Diagnosis in horses is even more complicated because of the many different manifestations of hypermobility. For horses, no standardized test has been developed so far. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the condition itself is mostly unknown among both horse owners and veterinarians. Receiving a diagnosis will prove difficult unless a horse owner has



When performing a flexion test (left), the front legs of a hypermobile horse can be bent higher than the elbow. When holding up a front leg of a hypermobile horse, the knee (carpal joint) can be rotated outward and the hoof can be pulled all the way inward to touch the other elbow. Photos by Gabriele Meyer.

access to a skilled physical therapist, such as Bettina Wolff, or a veterinarian who is aware of the condition.

Bettina walked me through a list of visual characteristics she would typically look for when called in to evaluate a horse for hypermobility:

A first indication is frequently that the fetlocks drop more than usual during the stance phase. (See the bottom illustration on page 32.)

For more information on this, see reference [10].

When performing a flexion test, the front legs can be bent higher than the elbow. “(See the photos above.)” As a side note, Bettina adds that if a vet does a flexion test on a hypermobile horse for a lameness exam, they have to make sure to really bend the leg all the way, not just as much as they are used to in more normal horses.

When holding a front leg up, the knee (carpal joint) can be rotated outwards and the hoof can be pulled all the way inwards to touch the other elbow.

The horse might show balance problems when holding a hoof up for cleaning or the farrier.

After standing still for a while (for example, when tied during grooming) and then turning the front to be led away, one of the hind legs may stay put and twist

while the front end steps around. (See the top illustration on page 32.)

The front legs might stand camped under, with the chest leaning forward, leading to the appearance of topline syndrome.

Bettina also explained that hypermobile horses are also hypotonic, meaning their muscle tone is lower than average. These two states—hypermobility joints and hypotonic muscles—go hand-in-hand, which can create problems with the horse’s back in at least two ways. First, the horse needs to actively engage his abdominal muscles to counteract the rider’s weight; otherwise, the back sags, leading to back pain or even a kissing spine. Second, a general low muscle tone creates a problem with the suspension of the barrel between the shoulders. The withers sink downwards between the shoulder blades. This can happen because a horse’s trunk has no bony connection to the shoulders; instead it is suspended by the so-called thoracic sling, which acts as a hammock for the torso. A compromised thoracic sling creates a host of postural and riding issues; this symptom is called topline syndrome, and I would recommend reading more about it.

Finally, Bettina said, one might see the imprint of the saddle panels in the back muscles when removing the saddle after a longer ride.

TRAINING A HYPERMOBILE HORSE

Hypermobility horses may appear a bit clumsy under the rider and can have problems with their proprioception. They tend to brace their backs to stabilize themselves. They may fall on the forehand and rush, as they find it more difficult to stabilize themselves going in a slower tempo. It is generally agreed that, before a hypermobile horse can carry a rider safely and effectively, he needs to be able to have control over the range of motion of his flexible joints and spine. For that, he needs a strong core and an understanding of good posture.

At an educational event at the Equitopia Center in California, I met Dr. Karin Leibbrandt from the Netherlands; she is the author of the book *Compassionate Training for Today’s Sport Horse*. [11]

Karin specializes in rehabbing warm-bloods used for sport. She has noticed that many hypermobile horses have to drop out of regular training programs at a relatively young age, due to lameness and rideability problems. To keep these horses healthy, she has found this training approach successful (for details, please see her book):

Hypermobility horses are late-bloomers, physically and mentally, they should not be started early. Their muscles must compensate for the lack of stability of the connective tissue. This takes a lot of time, and the horse needs to be trained for balance. The training must ensure that the horse’s bones are stacked up as correctly as possible, so that the horse does not lose so much strength trying to compensate for imbalances.

In contrast to the torso, there are no muscles in the horse’s lower legs (front knee and lower, and hock and lower, respectively). Here, stabilization depends on tendons and other connective tissue structures. It is therefore no coincidence that the pastern support system frequently fails in a hypermobile horse, leading to dropped pasterns (see the bottom illustration on page 32).

Prevention is key: One should not let things go wrong and then have to rehabilitate. Once there is some degree of tendon damage, new and additional injuries may be generated due to compensatory movement patterns.

The horse should have a reduced training load, but during his non-working

WHAT ABOUT ICELANDICS?

Although I first heard the term “a hypermobile horse” while attempting to ride my Icelandic down the center line, I was not able to find any research on hypermobility that was done specifically on Icelandic horses.

I reached out to the USIHC Breeding Leader, Virginia Lauridsen, with some questions about hypermobility and the official breeding goals for the Icelandic horse, and she put me in touch with Heimir Gunnarsson. “He is one of the most respected breeding judges in the world,” Virginia said, “and is on the FEIF breeding committee.” Virginia also volunteered to bring my questions up at the FEIF Breeding Leaders Meeting in February.

Heimir replied, by email, “These are excellent questions,” and noted that his answers “are, of course, much more my personal thoughts rather than official statements from FEIF.”

Gabriele: Three of the FEIF breeding goals are health, durability, and longevity. Selectively breeding to obtain horses with long legs and big movements may have unintended consequences with regard to their training and health, as can be seen in the warmblood world, where health and durability have become compromised. How about Icelandics? Are our breeders focused too much on the gaits? Can breeding for big movements still be compatible with our overarching goal of health and longevity?

Heimir: It is all a question of perspective, though there is, of course, some limit that should not be exceeded. As it is the only breed in the country, the Icelandic horse was used in the past as a draft horse, as well as a riding horse. Individuals that were short-legged and heavily built, and perhaps better suited as draft horses, were quite common. When there was no need for draft horses in the country any more, the breeding goal became quite clear: to put emphasis on the type of Icelandic horse better suited as a riding horse. The goal was simply that the legs should be longer than what the average was at the time.

I actually think that, on average, we are still not in any danger regarding the lightness of the trunk or the leg length. We do not want the horses to be too small, and we do want them to be proportional, regarding height and length. Horses that

might have legs that are considered too long are not proportional and are not rewarded at breeding shows. Horses that are both long-legged and proportional, however, are just simply tall Icelandic horses and can be very valuable in breeding.

There are still quite a lot of too-small horses in the population, and with a mare like that it is valuable to have the option to breed with a stallion that is tall and proportional (with longer legs), hoping for an offspring that is an average of the parents.

Of course, the most important aspect of any breed is that the individuals should be useable. If we would not enjoy riding the horses, then very few people would keep them or breed them and the breed would most likely end up going extinct. That is why the main focus in breeding is on the riding abilities (useability). If we go back only 20 years, then it was much more difficult to find horses that were smooth and clear-beated in the gaits. Stiffness, lack of mobility, and poorly balanced horses were actually quite common problems for most riders, resulting in different types of injuries in the horses.

The average Icelandic horse has, since then, become better balanced (fewer horses are built in a down-hill balance), with more suppleness in the body. That leads to horses that are easier for the average rider to ride in good balance, leading to less strain and a better life for the riding horses.

The topic of hypermobility has come up regularly in the past years. It has been discussed with various veterinarians who are experienced with Icelandic horses, and the conclusion has been that it does not seem to be a problem in the population. We do, of course, see horses today with quite extreme shoulder movements, and they are (if supple and well-balanced) still rewarded at breeding shows. That is simply because these horses are still valuable for the breeding, as we still have quite a lot of individual horses that are on the opposite side and lack mobility. Here it is important to keep in mind that the extremes are not the goal. But the extremes do help us to bring the average horse closer to the goal, and that is why they are rewarded at breeding shows.

Here is an example of how this works: In the 1980s, the average Icelandic horse had hooves with flat soles and low and

weak heels. So the goal became, quite simply, to improve this trait by rewarding horses for having high and thick heels, as well as deep soles. In a remarkably short time, the average hooves in the Icelandic horse population improved quite a lot in this aspect, and we reached the point where it seemed that we were going too far, in that the extreme (too high heels) was becoming too common. Then the judges’ guidelines for the breeding shows, as well as the breeding goal itself, were rephrased to make it clear that too much is considered a flaw.

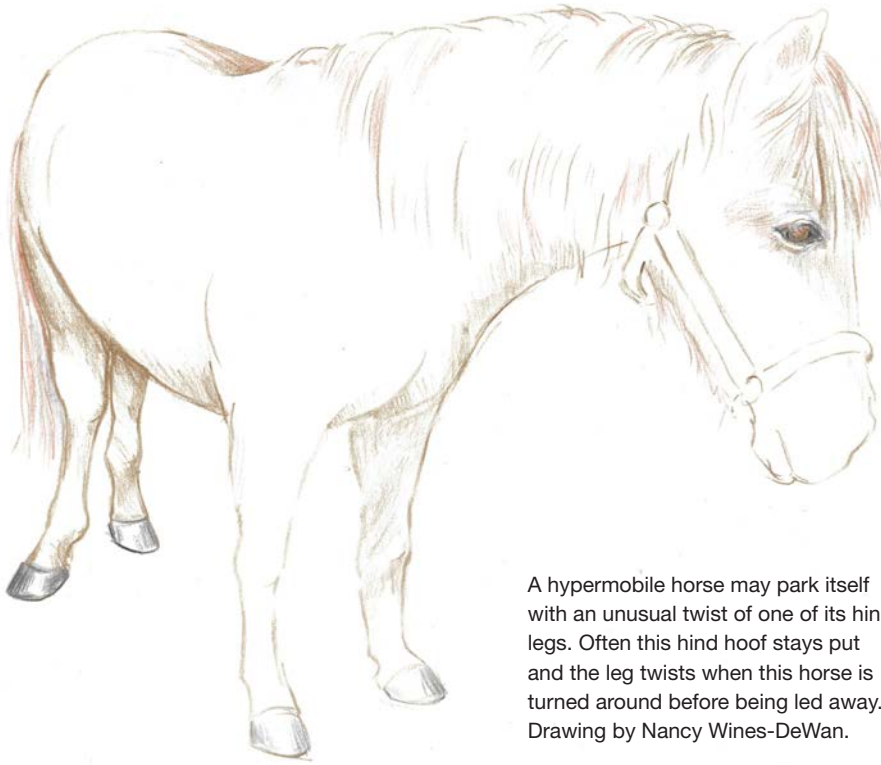
Perhaps we will get to the same point with leg length and mobility in the future, but currently we are not there.

Gabriele: Do we have statistics on injuries and other conditions that render Icelandic horses unrideable? Did the incident rate of injuries change in the last 20 years?

Heimir: Unfortunately, we do not have complete statistics from veterinarians on injuries they treat in Icelandic horses. We do, however, have quite good data on the average age at death and on the reasons why horses are euthanized. In Iceland, the most common cause is, for example, bad temperament! In Sweden, where there are approximately 30,000 Icelandic horses, the most common cause is laminitis. In Sweden, we do also get statistics from insurance companies regarding the treatments that are reported to them. Only 15 years ago, the most common treatment for Icelandic horses was for inflamed pasterns in the front, usually due to down-hill balance when ridden, perhaps in combination with bad shoeing. The frequency of inflamed pasterns has decreased significantly, and currently the most common treatments for Icelandic horses in Sweden are for laminitis and accidents.

Gabriele: Does FEIF feel that hypermobility is an issue at all, and do they intend to support research on hypermobility?

Heimir: FEIF does not currently see hypermobility as an issue in the breed and is not pushing for research to be done in this area for the time being. However, any initiative from scientists regarding research on the Icelandic horse is always supported by FEIF.



A hypermobile horse may park itself with an unusual twist of one of its hind legs. Often this hind hoof stays put and the leg twists when this horse is turned around before being led away. Drawing by Nancy Wines-DeWan.

hours, he must be able to move around as much as possible, so that the connective tissue is constantly exercised. The horse should have three to four training sessions per week, and each session should be short.

Fascia also responds to good nutrition. Therefore, all environmental factors have to be optimized. Hypermobile horses are especially sensitive to stress and are sometimes unpredictable, as they can go rather suddenly into panic mode.

All movement is created by flexing joints, via the action of muscles pulling on bones. The skeletal muscles in control of this movement come in two types. The superficial muscles are further away from the joints and near the skin. These muscles are big and are often visible from the outside; they are responsible for creating power and large movements. The deep muscles are postural muscles; they are responsible for supporting and stabilizing the joints. These are the muscles that need to be strengthened in any horse, but even more so in hypermobile horses.

An effective approach to doing this strengthening is to work with a seesaw or to let horses explore unstable surfaces, such as Sure Foot pads or similar balance pads. Riding slowly on uneven terrain and over different surfaces will exercise the deep muscles as well. However, Bettina warns, care must be taken that the horse has sufficiently developed his stability

through in-hand work first. Otherwise the horse will use his hypermobility as a strategy to navigate the uneven footing, which would be counterproductive for his training.

Generally, Bettina adds, hypermobile horses should be ridden with moderate leg movements to reduce the strain on their joints. But, she warns, this doesn't mean riding them with low energy, which should be avoided, because they do need energy to create a certain amount of tension to carry themselves properly.

TAKEAWAYS

Hypermobility is the twin of big movements: You can't have one without the other. It is not a disease, it is a body type, expressed in many shades, and there is no such thing as a typical hypermobile horse. Hypermobility is complex and not well understood and, at present, horse owners and veterinarians alike are generally not aware of this condition.

High and wide movements are made possible by the increased stretchiness of all of the horse's connective tissue. As a result, his fascia, tendons, and ligaments are less robust. These horses also have a decreased muscle tone. Because of the latter, hypermobile horses have more problems holding up their thorax to create a healthy movement pattern. This needs to be addressed during their training; exercise level and intensity have to be

adjusted to account for it.

Coming back to my own horse, for the first years I had him he was difficult and at times unpredictable. I was advised more than once to sell him and find myself a better horse. So, riding straight on the centerline was actually the least of my worries. I only mentioned it because it was an aha-moment for me. My trainer's little remark about his hypermobility made me realize that at least some of the rideability problems we had encountered early on were maybe not behavior issues after all; they may rather have had their origin in the fact that his body needed more time to develop. His frequent "I don't want to" attitude might have been an "I can't do that" plea.

As Nancy Wines-DeWan wrote in the *Quarterly* in 2008, "Understanding our horse's talents, abilities, and limitations is important for any owner or rider. This is simply good for the welfare of our horses. When we know what these limitations are, then we can work with our horses in a way which helps them to learn, but does not require them to do what they may be physically incapable of accomplishing." [12]

Extravagant movements can be an asset or a liability, depending on what the job description of the horse entails. For horses whose purpose is to shine on the competition track, big movements are a plus, no doubt. But if we decide to own such a horse, we also have to take a good look at our skills and our athleticism. Do they match the abilities of the horse? And



A first indication of hypermobility is frequently that the fetlocks drop more than usual during the stance phase. Please note that, while it looks similar, this should not be confused with DSLD, which is a disease affecting the tendons and connective tissue and not connected with hypermobility. Drawing by Nancy Wines-DeWan.

do we have a support system in place in case we need help keeping such a horse healthy and happy?

Lacking training facilities and the opportunity for competitions in most parts of the country, the main job for our Icelandic horses here in the US is more likely to be a pleasure horse: well-trained, level-headed, with good basic gaits, an enjoyable tölt, and just the right amount of go and whoa. His job is to work and play in the arena, carry his rider on lengthy trail rides over various terrain, and hopefully do all this for many years. In this scenario, big movements can still be fun, but they may not necessarily be the rider's first priority, given the complications they can come with. Here too, we need to find our happy medium.

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Here, Gabriele is evaluating Askur's front legs. The range of motion of the leg is determined by the range of motion of its individual joints: coffin, pastern, and fetlock joints, knee, and elbow.

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Askur in his younger days, demonstrating his hypermobility while racing his pasture mate.

RIDE LIKE A PRO

by Lynn Wiese

What if I told you there was a way to become a better leisure rider? Have you ever thought about participating in an Icelandic horse competition, but were too intimidated or overwhelmed to pursue the thought? What if there was a way to ease these fears? Or, for current competition riders, what if I told you there was a way to improve your scores?

The secret? It's education. Learning more about the horse's gaits, movements, and faults, what judges are looking for, etc., opens the gate to increasing your riding and training skills.

To help fill the need for this kind of education, the USIHC is sponsoring a new four-part webinar called "Introduction to Icelandic Horse Sport," to be offered for the first time in April 2024. (To register for the webinar, go to <https://icelandics.org/introduction-to-icelandic-horse-sport>).

The course content was created by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson (who was the chief judge at the 2023 World Championships and frequently judges shows in the US), in cooperation with Jana Meyer and Alexandra Pregitzer (who both hold the USIHC Sport Judge B license), and based on discussions between Þorgeir and Martin Nielsen, a professor at the University of Kentucky and former member of the USIHC Board.

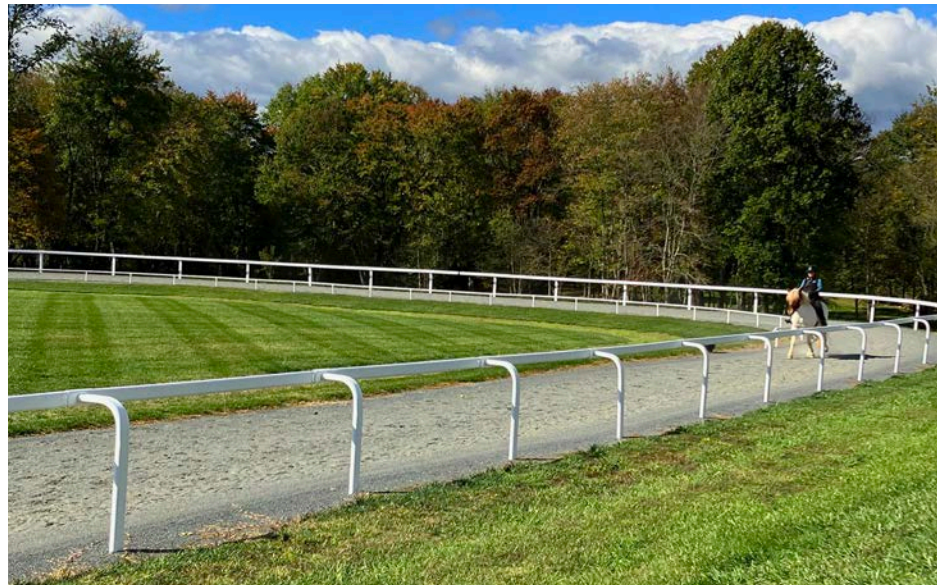
The course, which will be presented this first time by Alex and Jana, is broken into four modules:

Module 1 (April 5 at 7 pm EST)—Introduction, History of Icelandic Horse Competition, and About the Gaits.

Module 2 (April 7 at 5 pm EST)—FEIF General Rules and Regulations, FEIF Sport



Judge Alex Pregitzer (left) and scribe Leslie Chambers. Scribing is a great learning opportunity for anybody interested in competition.



Marjorie Lewis and Ljúfa competing in a schooling show on the oval track at Montaire in Middleburg, VA. During schooling show classes, riders receive coaching while they ride or personalized feedback afterward. Photo by Alex Pregitzer.

Rules, and USIHC Show Rules.

Module 3 (April 14 and 5 pm EST)—Judging Guidelines.

Module 4 (April 14, following Module 3)—Introduction to Scribing and Conclusion, with Q&A.

Each module averages one and a half to two hours of classroom time. A significant portion of the course is self-study, which includes reading assignments, reviewing study materials, and evaluating performance videos. The time required for self-study will vary, depending on your individual goals. For those who want basic information, you may find several hours of self-study adequate. For students who want to pursue becoming a judge, you may invest much more time.

So, who can benefit from this course? Though the primary goal of the webinar is to provide general information for those interested in learning more about Icelandic horse sport competition, the course is a prerequisite for the next USIHC Sport Judges Seminar, and which students can be certified as National Sport Judges. Beyond that, I think there's something to be gained by almost any Icelandic horse rider.

MODULE 1

If you're a leisure rider with no interest in showing, Module 1 will teach you to

recognize the gaits and the faults within each gait. The instructors will show videos with examples of each gait (Walk, Trot, Tölt, Canter, and Pace) and point out the weaknesses and strengths of each ride. Recognizing the gait and its errors is the first step in fixing them.

Module 1 also discusses the history of Icelandic horse sport competition and the status of the sport in the United States.

MODULE 2

As well as understanding the gaits, riders who want to show need to understand the competition rules and regulations that are specific to Icelandic horse sport. Module 2 provides the information you need to know prior to showing. The FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations) General Rules and Regulations document is 69 pages long and is jam packed with an expansive array of topics, each of which are broken down into minute detail. Don't be intimidated by this! For this Module, the instructors have selected the most pertinent information and simplified it. It's here that you'll learn about required shoeing, legal/illegal tack, what happens if you go off the track or dismount on the track, and other specific scenarios.

The instructors also review the FEIF

Sport Rules in Module 2. These sport rules are another lengthy document, topping out at 98 pages, full of specific details about showing the Icelandic horse. Again, the instructors focus on the most important factors you need to know. The oval and pace tracks are described, and you will learn about the requirements needed to host the different levels of shows. A detailed description of each class is outlined. This is particularly handy when you want to choose a class to compete in.

For example, let's say that you are able to tölt your horse around the arena or track on a loose rein (not an easy thing to do). Well, there's a class that you may excel in called T2 Tölt. It measures the horse and rider's ability to stay in the tölt gait on a long, loose rein. Here's an excerpt of the FEIF Sports Rules about the T2 Tölt Test:

S2.8.2 T2 Tölt

This test is performed on the oval track.

S2.8.2.1 Preliminary Round

Riders compete individually. The rider has three rounds at their disposal to show the following gaits in the following order:

Sections:

1. *any speed tölt*
2. *slow, steady, and calm speed tölt; return to walk and change rein*
3. *slow to medium speed tölt, holding both reins in one hand, clearly showing no rein contact with the horse's mouth.*

Each section may be shown only once, for one round. The marks for section 3 will be

doubled.

S2.8.2.2 Final Round

The finalists show the required sections, including rein changes, as instructed by the speaker, as described in S2.3.2.

T2 Tölt is not the only Loose Rein Tölt class. If you know the FEIF list of classes well, and know where in the rule book to find these descriptions, you are well equipped to make the best choice of class for you and your horse. For example, if your horse does not have much energy when ridden on the track alone and does better with other horses, you might want to enter the T4 class, which has the same requirements as T2 but is a group class, with more riders on the track. Or perhaps your horse is not yet ready to tölt a whole round with a loose rein and/or has difficulty tölting at a slow speed? Then you might want to choose this class instead:

S2.8.6 T6 Tölt

This test is performed preferably on the oval track.

S2.8.6.1 Preliminary round

The test is ridden in groups of up to five riders, preferably on the oval track. The horses show the sections as instructed by the speaker, as described in S2.3.2. They start on the rein as set in the starting list.

Sections:

1. *any speed tölt; return to walk and change rein.*
2. *slow to medium speed tölt, clearly showing*

no rein contact with the horse's mouth on the long sides. Reins may be held in both hands, but must be clearly slack. Handling of the reins on the short sides is neither rewarded nor penalized.

S2.8.6.2 Final round

The finalists show the required sections, including rein changes, as instructed by the speaker, as described in S2.3.2.

In this class, the speed is more forgiving, and the distance shown with a loose rein is shorter. These are things to consider when choosing which class to enter, and can make a huge difference in the outcome.

Don't want to compete in an arena or on a track? Well, there's a class for you called the TR1 Trail class. FEIF has established a wide array of activities that can be used in the trail class test (the exact list is up to the show organizer). Could you see yourself doing any of the following?

- Open gate from horseback, go through and shut it
- Poles on the ground, the horse must step over them
- Water, must be ridden through
- Bridge (min. width 90 cm, min. length 1.5 m) must be ridden over
- Circle of sawdust (diameter around 5 m), let the horse wait in the circle, the rider must go outside around it (ground tying)
- Poncho or something like it placed on a pole: take it from one side, ride at least 5 m, and put it down on the other side
- Barrels, ride in slalom in tölt or trot
- Leading of the horse



Judges and their scribes under the tents at Léttleiki in Shelbyville, KY. A World Ranking show requires a minimum of five judges. In the US, two can be national sport judges; three have to be FEIF International Sport Judges. Photo by Alex Pregitzer.

- Mount and dismount horse
- Walk with loose reins, min. 40 m
- Canter, min. 100 m on one rein, no sharp bends
- Load into a trailer: The trailer must be of a solid construction with a non-slippery floor. The horse must be led into the trailer and stand there min. 10 sec. quiet; unloading
- Gate with ribbons (width 90 cm, height around 1.9 m) must be ridden through/ under
- Step backward out of a lane of poles (about 5 m long)
- Seesaw/Wippe (min. width 90 cm, min. length 1.5 m) must be ridden over
- Labyrinth of poles lying on the ground, must be ridden through in walk
- Drag something along (e.g., a filled sack)
- Riding through a narrow gap in a wall or fence
- Polo over a certain distance
- Softball transport (min. 5 balls)
- Super slalom around 4 poles, distance of 80 cm to 1 m, 4 m width



Antje Freygang competing in a P2 speed pace class at Montaire. In this class, judges are positioned at four spots along the straight track to determine if the horse is in flying pace at all times. All rides are timed electronically and the time determines the score. Other pace classes look at the quality of the gait and the transitions. Photo by Valerie Durbon

- Slalom around barrels without touching reins

Additional trail tests, suitable for Icelandic horses, can be added. Having competed in the trail class, I can tell you that it's fun, but challenging. What the trail class taught me is that there are many things I encounter as

a pleasure rider that I could do a lot easier, or deal with better, if I took the time to train my horse (and myself) to specific cues.

The FEIF Sport Rules also has an appendix of drawings. Not sure what a Seesaw/Wippe requires? Well, there's a diagram to explain it, if you know where to look. Other diagrams help you understand the track layout and how to maneuver on the track, so that you can practice well in advance of the competition.

A review of the USIHC Show Rules rounds out Module 2, and will teach participants the differences between schooling shows, National Ranking shows, virtual shows, and World Ranking shows. It also discusses rules that are specific to classes in the US and provides information on the eligibility of riders and horses in the different classes. For those of you who would love to dip your toe into the world of competition without leaving your farm, participating in a virtual show might be a great start!

MODULE 3

If you're looking to improve your scores or become a sports judge, then you'll find Module 3 extremely valuable. This module teaches you an understanding of the judging guidelines, including the specific measures ("firewalls") that must be met to attain a certain score level.

You can use this information to recognize your performance weakness(es) and work to improve them. Let me give

TÖLT – slow to medium or any speed

General: The horse should go in an even four-beat rhythm, which runs fluently through the horse. In slow speed tölt the neck should be arched and the back active and rounded, the whole topline being without tension. The hindquarters are well engaged, and the movements of the front part are light and free. In fast speed tölt the horse should lengthen its strides and the head and neck can become more extended than at slow tölt, the whole topline still being strong and without tension. The horse should move in balance, with strong and active back, active hind quarters, with suppleness and fluid movements.

	0	0.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9	9.5	10
Riding skills / Connection	Poor performance						Low average performance			High average performance			Good performance			Excellent performance					
	Rough riding (warning by yellow card) Very poor riding skills, serious lack of cooperation, very poor connection						Some clear faults in riding Problems with the connection <i>The seriousness of the shortcoming should influence the mark</i>			Generally good riding style Horse generally submitting to the riding aids			Harmony Very good connection Excellent riding								
Beat / Balance	Very poor beat, frequently losing the gait, very uneven strides						Beat or balance problems			Acceptable beat, occasional balance problems			Good beat, balance and rhythm even strides, gait consistency								
Suppleness / Relaxation	Very much stiffness or tension						Stiffness or tension Constrained in movements			Predominantly / reasonable supple			Very supple, elastic Unconstrained								
Outline / Movements	Very poor outline, very short and frequent steps, very little energy, little engagement						Frequent steps, flat movements, clear faults in outline, lack of energy			Some faults in outline, average movements and roominess			Outline without considerable faults, roomy and high movements, energetic, good impulsion, good back bearing, good engagement, self-carriage								
													Much expression								
Execution	Only half of the required distance or time shown												Required speed								

A page from the 2023 FEIF judging guidelines shows the "firewalls." The judges take key elements into consideration to make a well-balanced, objective, and fair assessment that does the entire performance justice. Firewalls prevent the good qualities of one element from compensating for shortcomings in other elements.

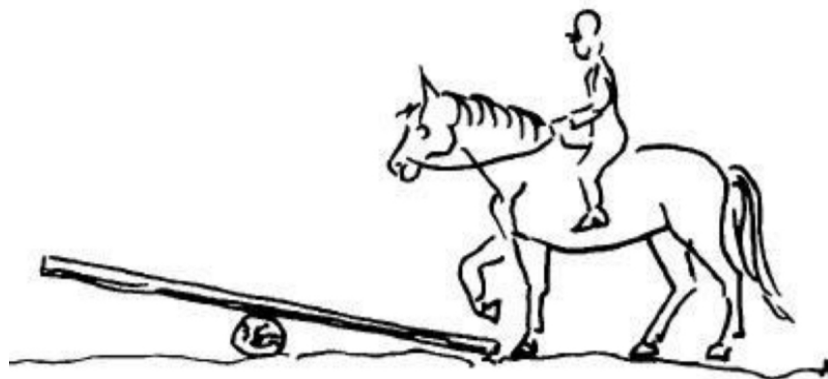
you an example. Let's say that you are participating in a tölt class where you're allowed to go any speed. According to the guidelines that the judges will follow, if you are riding a horse that tends to be very stiff and has a pacey tölt, then you may have trouble getting past the first indicated firewall. If that's the case, you can expect your score not to exceed 3.0.

On the charts the judges follow, thick black vertical lines indicate the firewalls. To cross a firewall, the rider must perform better than the action described. The better the performance, the more firewalls can be crossed, leading to a higher score.

The content of Module 3 also prepares those participants who want to further their Icelandic horse sport education and become a sport judge. The content focuses heavily on viewing video examples of poor, average, and good performances, which is vital to developing a good feel for the appropriate scores.

MODULE 4

The last module introduces scribing, that is, taking notes for the judges. For people who would like to become a certified



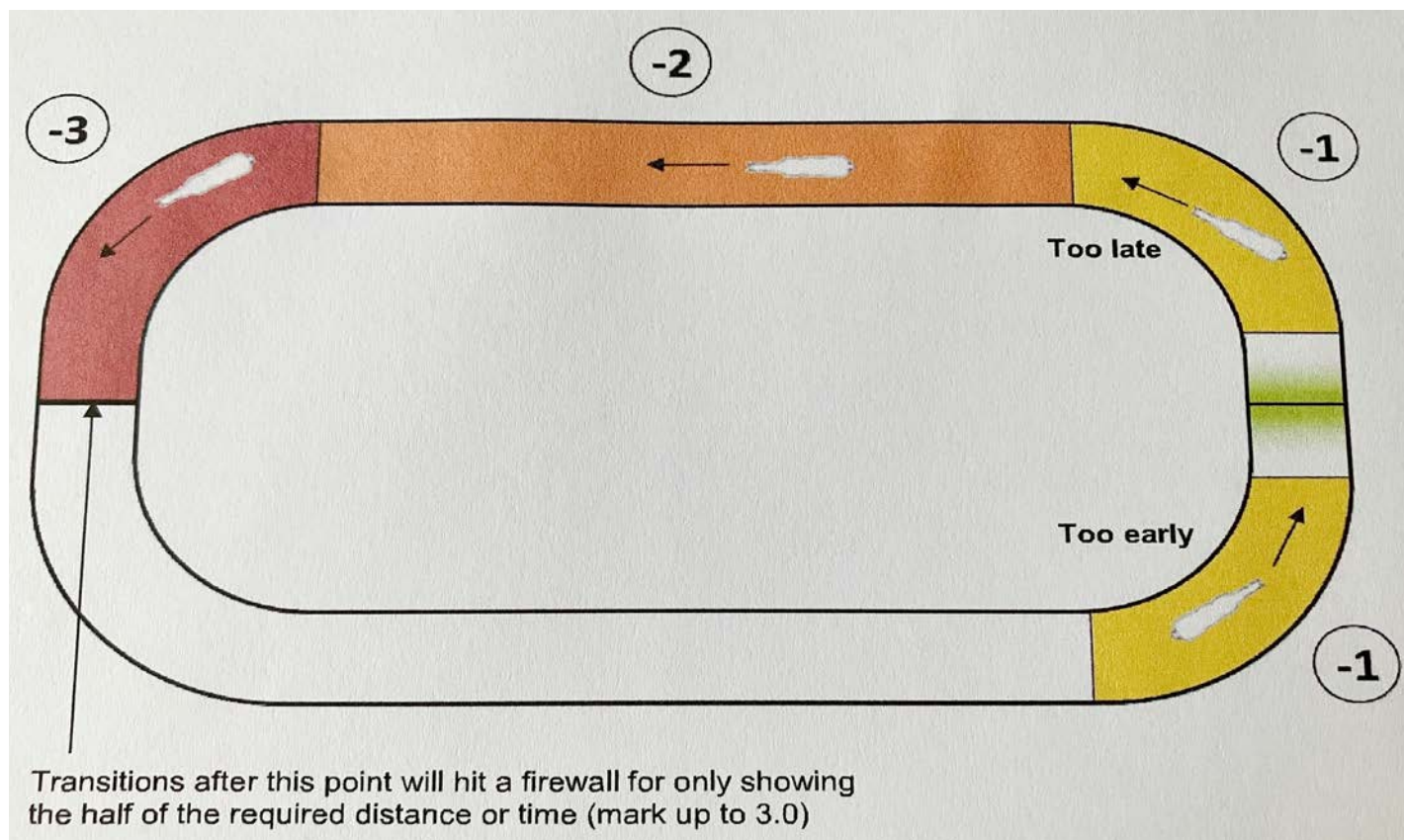
The FEIF Sport Rules also include ideas for trail and obstacle classes, including diagrams to help show organizers see how to set up tests suitable for Icelandic horses. Not sure what a Seesaw/Wippe requires? Look at the diagram! (You don't have to ride it bareback.)

National Sport Judge, scribing for an experienced judge is one of the ways to gain the experience needed to pass the judging exam. This course will prepare you with explanations and study assignments, pointing out what parts of the rules and regulations you need to study.

How do you benefit from scribing if you're just a leisure rider who might occasionally show? When I was new to the world of Icelandic horses, I would volunteer to scribe at the various competitions. I did this because I got to sit with a certified judge for

hours, and they were usually quite generous with their information about why they were giving a certain score. To me, it was fascinating to learn the nuances between a poor performance vs. good performance vs. a great performance.

Taking all four modules of "Introduction to Icelandic Horse Sport" is a wonderful way for you to have the same experience—without having to leave home. I think you will be fascinated too. To sign up for the webinar, go to <https://icelandics.org/introduction-to-icelandic-horse-sport>.



On the oval track, the transition from one gait to another should take place in the middle of the short side or at the speaker's command, depending on the class. If a transition is too late or too early, the judges must deduct points. Participants will learn about these and other deductions in the Introduction to Icelandic Horse Sport webinar.

JOIN THE RIDE!

“My main hobby with my horses is trail riding and exploring new areas, so a virtual ride from coast to coast sounded very appealing to me. I loved the idea of building teams to get further along the trail together, and I have made new friends all over the country through this wonderful community!” So said Claudia Sihler, who has homes in Alaska and Arizona, when asked as the Leisure Rider of the Month for June 2023 why she had joined the USIHC’s Sea 2 Shining Sea Virtual Ride.

Said Brigit Huwyler of Connecticut, the May Rider of the Month, “I loved the idea of a virtual distance ride, where I keep track of how much I actually ride. I think it motivates me to ride, especially since I am part of a team. We encourage each other to record our rides and to come up with creative ways to ride even when the weather is bad.”

“What a great community building tool!” said Heather Skopik of California, December’s Rider of the Month. “It’s a wonderful program that encourages riders of the most amazing breed to bond near and far, to get to know one another, and to participate in a fun exercise. It’s a truly great way to encourage one another and to challenge yourself to spend more time with your favorite horses.”



Michelle of South Island, RI, was the November Rider of the Month. Photo by Steve Miller.



The Sea 2 Shining Sea Leisure Rider of the Month for October was Shawn Jackson of Garrettsville, OH.

TWO NEW TRAILS

Sea 2 Shining Sea (S2SS) is a yearlong virtual ride on Icelandic horses organized by the USIHC Leisure Committee. Each year explores a new route through America. This year’s 4,000 mile ride follows two historic trails: the Appalachian Trail, from Georgia to Maine, and the Oregon Trail, from Missouri to Oregon.

Said Leisure Committee Chair Janet Mulder, “On the S2SS Facebook group we’ve been proposing and discussing routes for some time. This year both of the routes chosen were recommended by 2023 participants. Doing a north/south route is a change from the east/west ones we’ve always done in the past. We hope to highlight more parts of the country and to include more members. We also try to make the route distance something achievable. It’s been interesting to see how some years we have ridden many more miles than in other years. I hope this year’s distance will be a good length for most.”

According to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (<https://appalachiantrail.org>), “The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, measuring 2,198.4 miles in length in

2023.” The exact length changes year to year, as footpaths are rerouted. “The Trail travels through 14 states along the crests and valleys of the Appalachian Mountain Range, from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain, Georgia, to the northern terminus at Katahdin, Maine.”

Fun facts on the Conservancy’s website include the number of footsteps needed to hike the whole trail—“roughly 5 million”—and the elevation gain, which is “equivalent to climbing Mt. Everest 16 times.” The Trail goes through six National Parks, eight National Forests, and two National Wildlife Refuges. Along the way, the Conservancy says to look out for “black bears, moose, porcupines, snakes, woodpeckers, and salamanders. Some plants you may encounter include jack-in-the-pulpit, skunk cabbage, and flame azalea.”

The Oregon Trail is a National Historic Trail managed by the National Park Service. According to its website (<https://www.nps.gov/oreg/index.htm>), “A National Historic Trail is a long-distance route that follows and commemorates a historic path of travel that changed the history and character of the US.” In this case, the creation of Oregon resulted in Great Britain ceding Oregon

Country (present-day Oregon, Washington, and part of Idaho) to the US in 1846.

“More than 2,000 miles of trail ruts and traces can still be seen along the Oregon National Historic Trail in six states,” the Park Service notes, “and serve as reminders of the sacrifices, struggles, and triumphs of early American settlers.” The first version of the trail was blazed in 1803 by Lewis and Clark, though, of course, as the Park Service adds, “American Indians had traversed this country for many years.” A journey in 1810 took 10 months to complete.

HOW TO JOIN

The Sea 2 Shining Sea ride over these two trails began in Springer Mountain, Georgia on January 1, 2024. Each checkpoint along the way counts for 200 miles or about 50 hours of riding. The actual distances between locations may be more or less than 200 miles, and you can join or leave the ride at any time.

You can participate in S2SS as an individual or a team of up to six riders. Registration is online at www.icelandics.org (under the “Ride” tab), which is also where you log your hours. The website converts your time riding to distance at 4 miles-per-hour, since keeping track of time is easier for everyone to record.

Riders who complete the Appalachian Trail can then go on to explore the Oregon Trail for the second half of the virtual ride,



Heather Skopik of Alta Loma, CA, was the December Rider of the Month.



The route for the 2024 S2SS ride virtually follows the Appalachian Trail, then the Oregon Trail.

which will end on December 31, 2024 in Oregon City, Oregon. If you or your team reaches Oregon City with time to spare, well, just reverse your route for another 4,000-mile challenge!

Riders must be USIHC members throughout the ride, and the horses used must be Icelandic horses, either fully registered (in any FEIF member country’s registry or WorldFengur) or having obtained a participation number from the USIHC after being DNA verified.

Riders must also be leisure riders. You participate by riding or driving your Icelandic horse however you like, so long as you are not being paid for your time. Also, groundwork (lunging, liberty, etc.) and watching or auditing other riders at lessons or clinics do not count.

Check the USIHC website (<https://icelandics.org/sea-2-shining-sea-ride>) for more information, and don’t forget to join the Sea 2 Shining Sea Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1866794093559110/>), where everyone is encouraged to share photos and stories about their rides.

RIDERS OF THE MONTH

To help the Sea 2 Shining Sea participants get to know each other better, all riders have their names put in a hat for a random drawing to determine the Rider of the Month. Each month a different name is drawn, and each quarter they are mentioned in *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*.

The riders chosen for the last quarter of 2023 were Shawn Jackson of Garrettsville, OH, Susan Matheke of Block Island, RI, and Heather Skopik of Alta Loma, CA.

Shawn has two Icelandic horses and was encouraged to join the S2SS ride by his wife, Jaime (who was Rider of the Month in September). Among his goals as a rider is to ride his horse in as many states as possible. He en-

joys going to new places and seeing beautiful scenery, he said. He learned about Icelandic horses on a trip to Iceland. “We rode and fell in love with the breed.” In addition to trail riding, he and his horses enjoy and do well at obstacles and sensory clinics.

Susan owns 22-year-old Tryggur. “My two riding companions, Susan Gibbons and Amy Keeler, suggested that we join the S2SS ride. We have been team members and are now riding individually. I truly enjoy the new theme each year and also noting my progress toward the goal. I am 77 and Trygger is 22. We are both, thankfully, hale and hearty and are very lucky to live on a beautiful small island. We do not have wide open trails, but we do have a wide sandy beach, trails through greenery, many dirt roads, a ring for training, and a small jump course. When I am trail riding, I try to balance clear training with relaxed enjoyment. I want to keep learning and also keep Tryggur learning. My immediate goal is to ask clearly and have Tryggur respond.”

Heather owns four Icelandics, ranging in age from 21 to 36 years old. She has ridden them in Icelandic competitions, Western rodeo, hunt tests, and trail trials, and taken part in Sheriff Patrol Mounted Assistance, riding lessons for children, and therapy horse demos. “After a major medical setback, I am blessed to be able to interact with my horses still,” she said. “A lot of my miles are done walking alongside my horses, which has been the best therapy ever. I transitioned from walking with a walker to a cane, and now with the help of my horses’ manes I hike the trails for miles and gain strength daily.” She looks forward to the time when she can go trail riding again.

When asked why she likes trail riding and the S2SS program so much, she replied, “First and foremost, I enjoy spending time with my horses, being out in the fresh air and exploring new trails. Living in California, there are very few inclement days that prevent riding. We have so many tree tunnels, shallow creeks, and even ocean beaches to ride, all within about 30 minutes of where I live. I am lucky enough to have miles of wilderness trails in a National Park out my back door. Really, the list of what I don’t enjoy about trail riding would be much shorter—like getting the trailer stuck in the sand at the beach. Then again, that just made the trip a day longer, so, really, what’s the down side again?”

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

OF THE HERD

The Icelandic horse reflects a resilience that inspires me to face life's challenges with grace and strength. For me, riding these horses is truly a heartfelt journey. I was born with a congenital heart defect that has led to numerous surgeries and, most recently, being listed for a heart transplant. Riding has become a metaphor for navigating my own journey—a reminder that true strength lies in power, gentleness, and trust. Through the bond forged with these incredible beings, my life has been infused with a profound sense of connection and simplicity.

Three years ago, amid the challenges of the pandemic, I moved from Brooklyn to upstate New York. Passing by farms with horses every day, I dreamed of riding again, reminiscing about my childhood summers at camp. A particular challenge I faced as a child was posting when riding trot, leading a friend to suggest the Icelandic horse for their smooth tölt. Researching the breed, I thought finding an Icelandic horse to ride would be daunting. To my surprise, I discovered my new home was just ten minutes away from a herd of Icelandics, Heleen Heyning's West Wind Farm in Meredith, New York. My next concern was finding an instructor who would welcome me, given the pandemic, my lack of experience, and my heart failure. Those fears vanished when Cindy Dunne came into my life. With her patience, kindness, and encouragement, in September of 2020 I started to ride. Cindy, I'd be lost without you. Your grace and support mean the world to me. Thank you.

Two years later, Freyja from Four Winds Farm joined my family. Our story began in spring 2021, when I rode in a clinic at Thor Icelandics in Hudson, New York. Kristjan, Johanna, and Thorunn: I'm deeply grateful you matched me with Freyja. She is my companion and my courage. You raised a beautiful horse who has a character all her own. Every time I close my eyes and envision my future, it's of years ahead with Freyja. The sound of her rhythmic cadence, her dancing in tölt, calms my mind and my heart.

Heleen, Cindy, Brigit, Peggy, Amy,

Hanne, Inez, Martina, Leslie—as I like to call them, “The women of West Wind”—words will never suffice to express how much you mean to me. Your openness in embracing me reflects the pure heart of the Icelandic horse. You are a testament to the transformative power of shared passion and support, of true community and being “Of the Herd.” You've taught me the meaning of tenacity and made me believe I can achieve anything.

As I await the call for a heart transplant, this community has become more than a distraction—it's a lifeline, a source of strength and joy during the uncertain waiting period. For myself and my husband, Keith, the Icelandic horse community has become an anchor in the storm. You've made us feel we are not alone. We are now part of the herd.

—Samantha Tuttlebee, New York

STILL TÖLTING AT 78!

I went to Iceland to ride for the first time in 2001, and have been back every year since, except for two Covid years I missed. I rode on the beach at Snaefellsnes, around Hekla, to Thorsmork, and places in the North, all on multi-day rides with a loose herd.



Jean Goldfine is all smiles after a muddy trek in Iceland.

Now I'm happy to do three-hour rides at Polar Hestar, near Akureyri, where they know me and the horses that I will like. Fast tölt jolts my back, but I can enjoy slow or medium speed tölt on Hending, Krummi, Brynja, or Hjortur, pictured here. He has retired from the longer tours, but can carry a rider easily. Look at his huge shoulder and hindquarters! When you sit on him, you know you are going to have a strong, giving tölt, and no funny business.

I love the way the picture shows a real horse: muddy, strong, alert. My face tells you how much fun we had that day.

—Jean R. Goldfine, Maine



The women of West Wind Farm in Meredith, NY, make Samantha (center, in plaid) feel like part of the herd. Do you have a herd? Tell us at quarterly@icelandics.org.



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Membership Application **Membership Renewal**

Individual Individual Three Year Individual Lifetime Family Junior Junior Lifetime

Name:

Address:

City: State: Zip Code:

Phone: Email:

I am a United States Citizen and/or my primary residence* is the United States.

**Primary Residence - must reside in the US for a minimum of 6 months and one day per calendar year to be eligible.*

I prefer **not** to receive a copy of the *Quarterly* magazine in the US Mail.

Regional Club (optional):

If you have selected a **Family Membership** please complete the following for the second adult and any children to be included in the membership (use the back of the page to add more family members):

Name	Year of Birth (juniors only)	Email (optional)

Farm Listing Paid members of the USIHC may opt to include a farm listing on the Congress' website (www.icelandics.org) and printed in *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*. There is a \$110.00 annual fee for the farm listing in addition to your membership fee.

Farm: Owners:

Address:

City: State: Zip Code:

Phone: Email: Web:

Membership Fees & Restrictions	
Individual	\$60/year \$150/ Three Year Membership \$1200/ Lifetime Membership
Family	\$80/year Two adults and unlimited children (under 18 years) living in the same household. Adults can vote.
Junior	\$50/year or \$280/Lifetime membership One child (under 18 years). Not eligible to vote. Lifetime membership is valid until 18.

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W/C Fund Donation: (optional support for the World Champion team)	\$.....
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Please make checks payable to "USIHC" and mail to the address below:

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Your membership expires on the anniversary of your payment except for Individual Lifetime Memberships.

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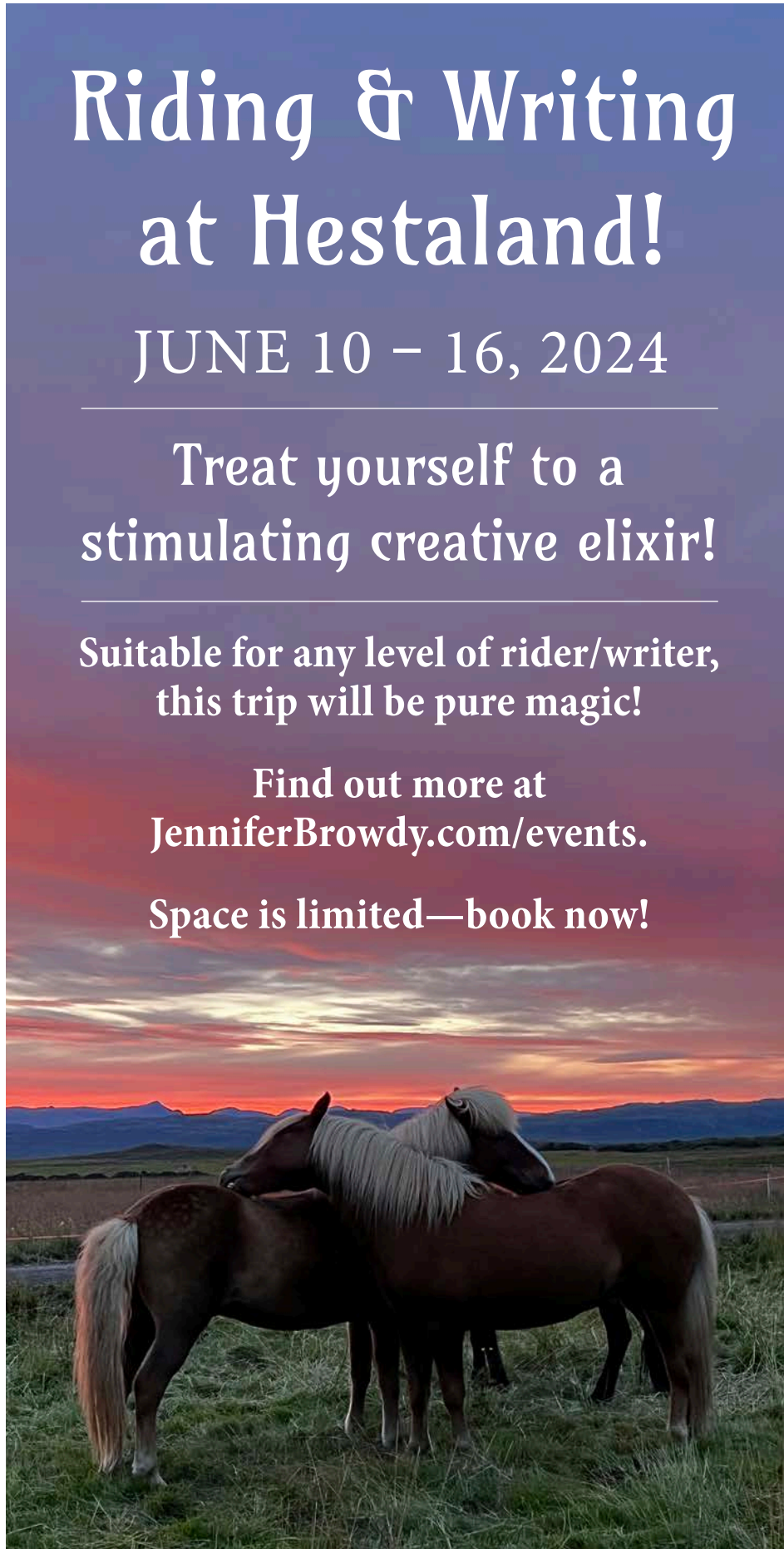
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Mariposa, California 95338
(707) 486-8733
lauraelinstrong@gmail.com

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www.granitepeaksranch.com

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www.coloradoicelandics.com

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coralie@tamangur-icelandics.com
www.tamangur-icelandics.com

Tolt Mountain Ranch
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dowdingtom@gmail.com

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www.harmonyicelandics.com

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www.fourwindsicelandics.com

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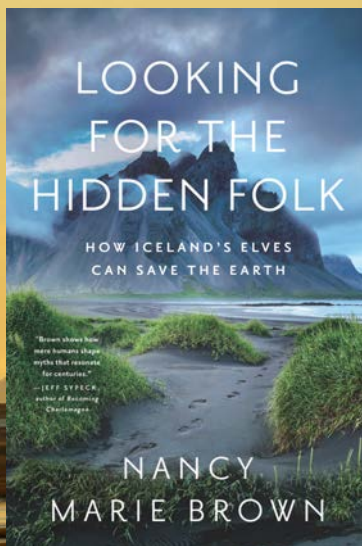
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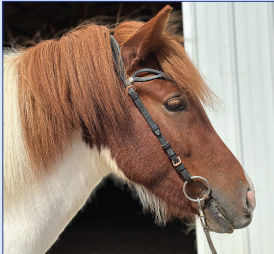
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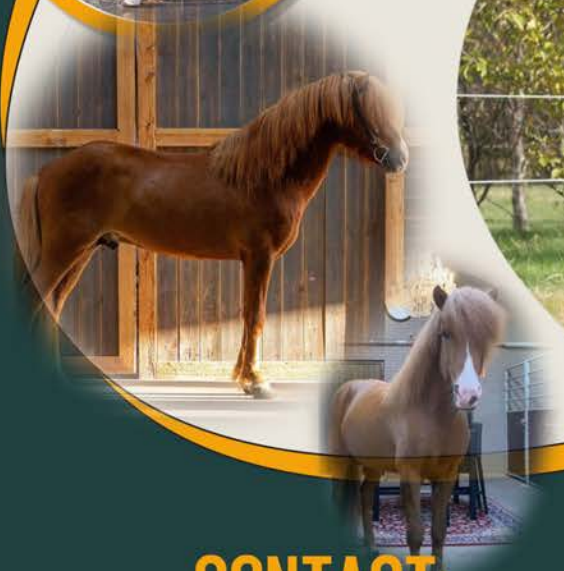
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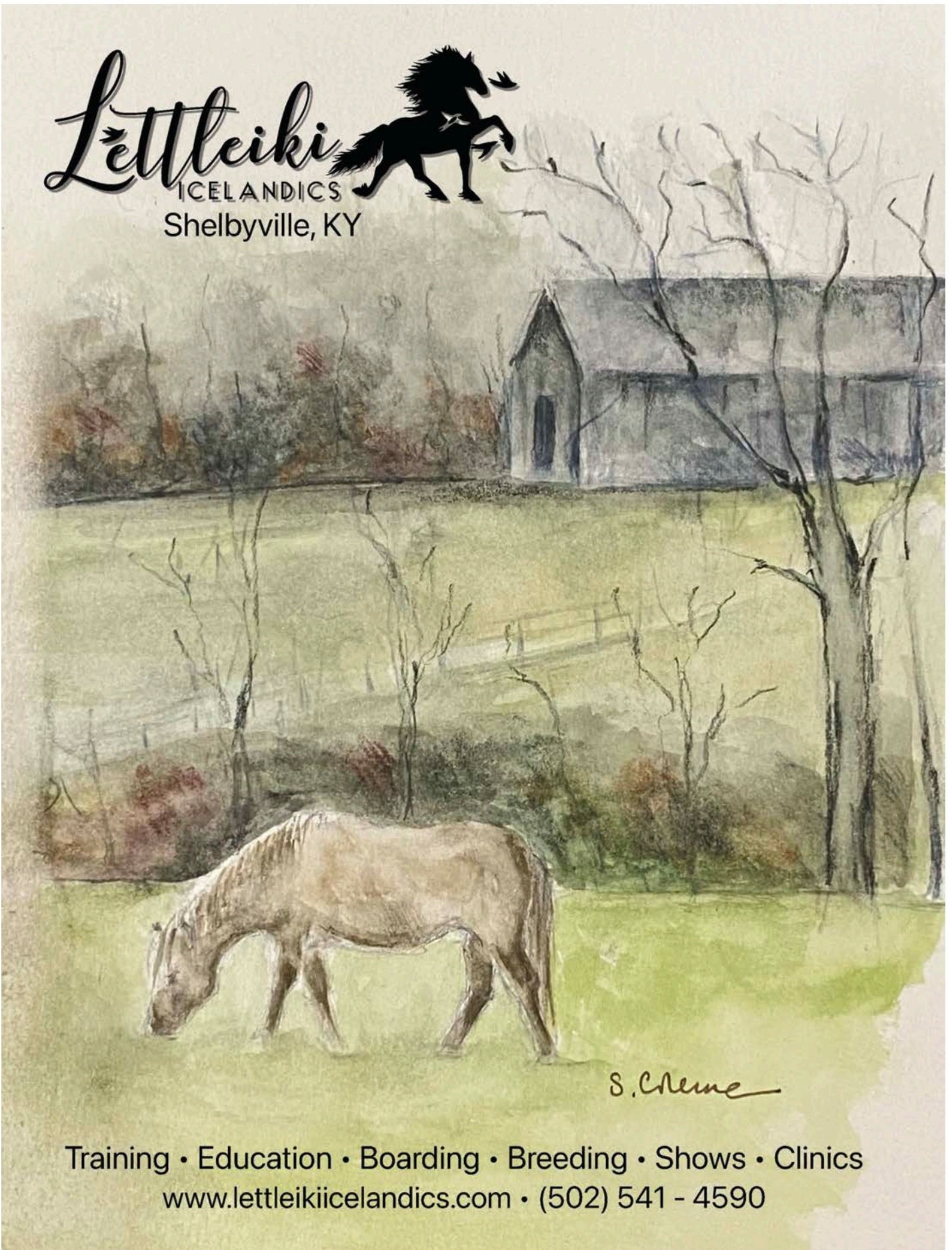
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CONFORMATION	8.53	RIDDEN	8.63
Head	8	Tölt	9
NWS	9	Trot	9
Back&Croup	8	Pace	8
Proportions	8.5	Gallop	8.5
Legs	8	Spirit	8.5
Joints	8	Gen.Impr.	8.5
Hooves	9	Walk	9
Mane & Tail	9	Slow Tölt	8
TOTAL	8.59		



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