



# Friesian Forum:



## Shaping a horse-breed: The Friesian Keuring

Story and photos by Arnold Warmels

Every owner of a registered Friesian knows the word: “Keuring”. This foreign word from the Dutch language carries a mystique unknown to native breeds of the Americas, and sets Friesian owners apart in conversations amongst horse-owners. What is this phenomenon and why is this so important to talk about this in great length?

This article will describe some of the history, the reason and the protocol about this procedure and why it is important for developing and preserving the breed of the Friesian horse.

The history of the Friesian horse is believed to be traced back to historians of the Roman Empire, about 60 A.D. where the horses of the “northern tribes” showed much resemblance with the Friesian horse as we now know it. The best visual portrait is that in a painting from Don Juan of Austria riding an unmistakable Friesian horse called “Phryso” in the year 1568. One of the reasons that little changed over 450 years is the passion and stubbornness of a select group of Friesian breeders.

The Friesian breed has faced near-extinction a couple of times, but has managed to bounce back strong, maintaining the ideals loved and admired by many and meanwhile developing a sound breed for many horse owners to enjoy. The tool that the Friesian Register has used for the past 130 years is the individual inspection of a horse prior to be entered into the Register. As like any registry, improvement of the breed is the primary goal. The inspections determine what each horse can contribute to the breeding standard that is set forth by the Register. This inspection is called “The Keuring” and is conducted by approved inspectors of the KPFS, known in English as the Royal Friesian Horse Registry, located in Drachten, NL.

The Keurings are held yearly, usually in September, at several locations throughout the USA and Canada. Any registered Friesian



*Every part of the horse is individually rated during the conformation inspection.*

or foal is welcome to be presented to the inspectors where the horse will be rated on exterior, build and movement. The horses are shown as “plain” as possible, no artificial enhancements are allowed. The inspector wants to see the “true horse” for that is what has made it possible to develop the breed as it is today.

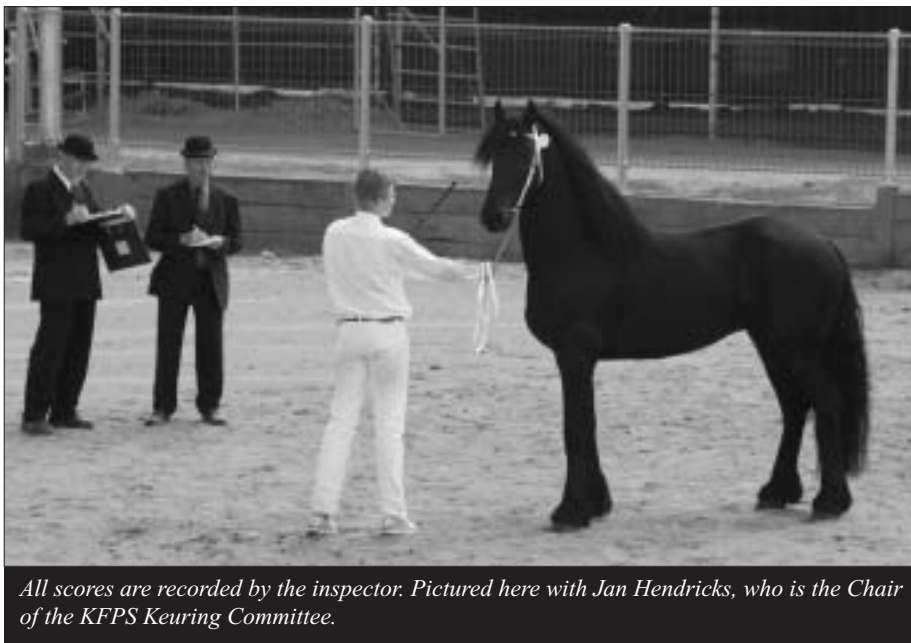
The Keuring, or inspections, has two parts: observing the horse’s exterior and then the evaluation of movement. The horse’s exterior is rated on 25 points including conformation, breed type, legs, walk and trot. These scores are listed on the Linear Score sheet, which is a scale of conformation quality, based on the average Friesian. The scores can be higher or lower. The conformation items on the Linear Score sheet are highly hereditary and are

therefore important for future breeding. During the second part, the horse’s movement is judged on the quality of walk and trot, where the horse is “walked and trotted out” in hand and judged on rhythm, reach, stride, balance and power.

The Keuring is not a horse-show! Of course it does resemble a halter class and a “sport-horse-in-hand”, although the attire of the handlers in “all-white” may strike some as odd, but it is primarily an inspection with a vision of continuing and developing the Friesian breed. The main difference is that a horse is judged against a breed-standard and not to other horses in the arena. Some joke that you can present a Friesian upside-down and the inspector will still be able to figure out the “true horse” and where its place in the



*The horse's height is measured and recorded. The height is subject to minimum and maximum requirements.*



*All scores are recorded by the inspector. Pictured here with Jan Hendricks, who is the Chair of the KFPS Keuring Committee.*

registry should be. The horse is not “judged” on grooming, turnout, tack, presentation, but on the horse itself, its natural conformation and movement. Of course, proper presentation will help the inspector as will preliminary training for handling, standing and running with the handler. Training will also improve muscles and movement.

The inspectors are held to strict guidelines set forth by the Friesian Breed Committee, who determine within the Registry what the

Breeding Standard should be. The inspectors are constantly updated with the latest changes in breed quality, genetics and pedigrees. The quality of the offspring is closely monitored and recorded to ensure that the breeding stock is meeting the breeding goals.

After the inspection process, all scores are filled out on the Linear Score sheet and the overall result (the “premium”) will later be printed on the (re-) issue of the registration

paper of the horse. Horse owners are welcome to discuss the horse with the inspector afterwards. This may help in determining what traits in their conformation can be improved in the planned offspring. Many use the outcome of the Keuring for the selection of a breeding stallion for their mares.

The inspection process has provided the Registry with an active role in the development of the Friesian horse, setting goals and guidelines, meanwhile tracking genetics by researchers and new technology. In the Friesian registry, it is possible to trace a newborn horse's pedigree back more than 100 years! With the Keuring, or inspection, the registry has set goals for a long-term future of the breed. With a track record of 500 years already, imagine what is possible for the future.

The Keuring is not unique to the Friesian breed; many European breeds have similar inspection programs in place. Examples are the KWPN, (Dutch Warmblood), Fjord, Hanoverian, Holsteiner, (and other German Warmbloods) and many more. Each Registry has information available about their inspection programs, breeding standards and requirements.

For this article, information of the KFPS (Dutch Register) was used. The FPZV (Friesche Pferde Zucht Verband) is the German Registry for the Friesian Horse and has a similar inspection program in place. The FPZV holds inspections (keurings) in the USA as well.

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*Arnold Warmels is a Dutch national, living in the United States for the past five years. He owns and operates Frysylan Valley Sport Horses where he continues to uphold the traditions and sports training programs set forth by the KFPS. He is a Certified Driver and trains all Friesians in his facility in Classical Dressage. Visit him at [www.frysylanvalley.com](http://www.frysylanvalley.com).*