



I cannot thank the Dressage Foundation enough for the opportunity it afforded me through the Elysium Farm Fund Grant for U.S. Breeder Excellence. With this grant, I was able to attend the 2016 KWPN-NA Annual meeting that corresponded with the 2016 KWPN Stallion show in Den Bosch, Netherlands. What a fantastic experience it was!

My week began with a trip for the group to the beautiful KWPN Center located in Ermelo, Netherlands. This center was built in 2013 and is located just next to the Dutch Equestrian Federation – the KNHS. It is a fantastic facility where Dutch breeders can bring their horses for stallion approvals, mare tests and foal inspections. The goal is to provide a center where breeders can showcase their offspring, while at the same time helping facilitate access to the sport side via the KNHS. In fact, this facility will host the FEI World Breeding Dressage Championships for Young Horses for 2016-2018.



While at the KWPN Center, we were given a very informative presentation on the concept of Genomic Selection, specifically how it can impact determining OC Health in horses. OC, or Osteochondrosis, is the term used to describe abnormal cartilage and bone formation in a horse's joint as it grows. While many factors have shown to have an influence on whether a young horse gets OC, it can also be a heritable trait. In 2016, the KWPN hopes that all approved stallions will have a genomic breeding value that can help predict the possibility a stallion might have of passing on OC's to their offspring. This is a huge advancement to breeding and will help breeders worldwide make even better breeding choices for a healthier class of offspring.

In the afternoon the group was taken to the beautiful Dressuurstal Van Baalen. The Van Baalen family proved to be a wonderful host and treated us to a lovely presentation that highlighted their history, the facility itself and the horses/riders that they train. They presented several horses under saddle of various ages and levels of training. They discussed conformation, training approaches and rider influences. It was especially exciting to see some of these horses being presented by the young riders they have in their riding program.



The next day began a whirlwind of horse wonder with the KWPN Stallion Show in 's-Hertogenbosch. Wednesday and Thursday were the Second and Third rounds of Jumper Stallion Selections, followed by a fantastic Sport Program of jumper stallions – ranging from those just recently approved in 2015 through stallions trained to Grand Prix. Even a strict dressage enthusiast like myself can appreciate the quality and talent of these jumper stallions. As a breeder, it is a great opportunity to be able to see so many top quality horses presented at a single event. The stallions are grouped together based on sire, so it is easy to compare them with each other, and see what qualities and traits a particular stallion might pass along to its offspring. This is especially important for those of us looking to improve a particular aspect on our mares. The winner of the Jumper stallions was easy to determine. Among all the quality stallions, #284 - “In Between” (Toulon/Berlin) was one that really stood out in both conformation and jumping ability.



Just one of many stallions we were treated to in the sport program

On Friday and Saturday the Dressage Stallions were presented for the 2nd and 3rd rounds of the stallion approvals. It was a real treat to be able to see horse after horse presented in front of you. The overall quality of all of the stallions was high, with a few of them standing out as truly exceptional. As with the jumpers, the dressage stallions were grouped by sire (or grand-sire) whenever possible. The stallions were stood before the jury for conformation, then presented in hand, then allowed to move free. This format gave the audience an opportunity to really see the balance and athleticism of the horse. As with the jumpers, the winning dressage stallion was a clear standout. There was no denying that #359 – Igor (Apache/Vivaldi) was the winner! What a fantastic horse.



#359 – Igor (Apache/Vivaldi)

The dressage days were sprinkled with presentations of the Gelder Stallion approvals (champion sired by Iron Springs Farm stallion Uno Don Diego), Harness Stallion presentations and a sport program of under saddle dressage stallions ranging from those newly approved in 2015, up the levels to stallions competing at Grand Prix. We were able to watch presentations from riders that many of us only get to read about like Hans Peter Minderhoud on the fantastic young stallion Dream Boy (Vivaldi/Ferro), Edward Gal on Glock's Zonik (Zack/Romanov), Madeleine Witte on Charmeur (Florencio/Jazz), just to name a few. Not to mention that the KWPN-NA members were given special headsets that gave us access to English translations and commentary, along with comments and visits from special guests like KWPN judge Bart Henstra.



Edward Gal on Glock's Zonik

Attending this event was extremely beneficial for me as a breeder. First of all, it offered me a venue to meet with many other North American breeders and riders of the KWPN-NA. I was able to use this opportunity to talk to them about their experiences with various stallion and mare combinations, to learn from them as to what their customers are looking for in a future dressage prospect, and also find out from the riders what they are hoping to get out of a successful dressage horse. It helps me make sure that my breeding goals are in-line with what riders in our market here in the U.S. are looking for.

This event was also incredibly informative. It is often difficult to find scenarios inside the United States where so many high caliber horses, many of international quality, are presented over and over. This type of environment helps you train your eye to conformation and athletic ability. Most importantly, it gives the breeder huge insight into current breeding trends. These young stallions are a reflection as to what the market is looking for in dressage horses of the future.

Lastly, by attending the stallion show, I feel even more confident that I can continue to make solid breeding choices with my own breeding program. I have a more defined vision of what stallions will cross well with my own mares. I also better understand where to set my breeding goals. It is by keeping my vision in focus that I will be able to breed horses that can successfully move through the pipeline towards the top of the sport. I am so thankful that the Dressage Foundation has helped pave the road for me to achieve continued success in my breeding program.