

# What do Evaluations Mean to the Breed?

By Pat Wolfe

Fjord horse evaluations have been going on for over 100 years. If you buy a Fjord from Norway you will find every one of his or her ancestors has been evaluated. The scores and ratings are kept in a stud book and today that information can be accessed online.

The Fjord we have today is the outcome of thousands of these evaluations. Evaluations have allowed the Norwegians to keep the breed pure and to control the type of animal needed in their country. Fifty years ago a good number of horses were of the draft type. They were needed on the farm. Today more people are riding and driving their horses in the show ring, so the type has changed to a more elegant, fine-boned, ground covering horse. What the Norwegians have not changed is the Fjord temperament and overall appearance.

Here in North America we have the riding, driving type, the all-purpose type and the draft type Fjord. Contrary to what many people believe, evaluators do recognize all three types. A well-proportioned draft type Fjord will score the same as a well-proportioned riding, driving type Fjord. There is no discrimination in evaluation scores based on type.

Here's how the evaluation process works and why it is so important as a tool for the buyer and the breeder.

There are seven score sheets filled in during the evaluation process: Riding, Introductory and Advanced; Driving, Introductory and Advanced; Draft, Introductory and Advanced; Conformation and Movement.

The most noteworthy score sheet, however, is Conformation and Movement. If you don't have the form, you won't get the function. In other words, if your horse is not well put together, he can't do his job, driving, riding or draft, as well as he could if his body was better put together.

"Conformation and Movement" is comprised of nine categories for a total of 100 points: head, 10 points; neck, 10 points; body, 10 points; forelegs, 10 points; hind legs, 10 points; movement at the walk, 10 points; movement at the trot, 10 points; overall impression, 10 points; and type, 20 points.

Taking their time, the judges examine your horse and make a determined consideration of certain detailed items listed under each of these nine categories. For example, under "head", the judges have eight items they must take into account in awarding a score. These are length (proportional to the body), eyes (large, expressive), ears (small, truncated), forehead (wide, slightly dished), throatlatch (clean), jaws (strong, wide), nostrils (large), and bite (proper occlusion). On the Conformation and Movement score sheet alone, there are, in total, 49 specific areas of the horse which the judges examine.

Over all of these categories you must average 8 out of 10 to get the top award of an over 80 score. It takes a top quality horse to get an 80 and above. Remember when you check American evaluation scores, our red ribbon is their blue ribbon.

As I stated, most horses with high scores on the Conformation and Movement test, especially on the Movement section, also do well in Riding, Driving, and Draft, the three performance tests.

The Performance Tests score sheets tell a mare owner an awful lot about a perspective stallion. This can be seen in the Introductory Driving Test. The categories are behaviour; movement at walk and free walk on long rein; movement at the trot; quality of transitions; halt/ stand/ rein back; submission; impulsion; and body position. As in the Conformation and Movement score sheets, there are many items that judges examine under each of these headings.

So what does an evaluation mean to the breed?

An evaluated horse with a score of 80 and above in Conformation tells us this horse has been approved as an excellent specimen of the Fjord breed. An 80 in Performance tells us the horse has something between his ears, has the ability to move well, and is willing to learn from and work for his or her handler. Scores between 70 and 80 also indicate you have a very good horse. All these things are important to know and that's why evaluations are so important!

Evaluators are trained professionals. Practically every year there is a judges' clinic held in one of the countries evaluating Fjord horses. I attended one clinic in Denmark where nine countries' judges were present.

Looking over the score sheets of a Fjord you are considering, or checking out the evaluations of various stallions to find the right match for your mare, is like looking in "Consumer Reports". You use that tool when you buy a new car. Why not when you consider a new horse?

Recently when I bought three mares in Denmark, I used this system and it worked very well. The Danes have all their evaluation scores on the Web. I was able to look up a horse I was interested in and there I could find the scores of that horse and the scores of all her ancestors. Having a look at the father is really enlightening because you can then look at all his offspring, not just the mare you are interested in. The same thing goes for the mother. You can see what they have thrown, and what your young mare may turn out like. Having evaluations, and then making the scores available, is a great tool for a buyer and for a breeder.

Postscript: Out of interest, here's what happens in many European countries.

In Norway, 200 stud colts may be born in one year but by the time they are three year olds, only 10 to 12 will be licensed as breeding stallions and the rest are gelded. At five years old these 10 or 12 stallions are tested for conformation, free jumping, draft work and riding after going through a six week training program. At the end of this testing, five or six will be kept as stallions and the rest gelded. This way, only the best reproduce. One stallion can produce hundreds of babies in his lifetime whereas a mare is limited to one a year.