

Out Scored?

Good or Bad Changes?

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Breeding horses have been judged for scores since 1950, when Gunnar Bjarnarson was the horse breeding advisor in Iceland. He implemented that horses were judged according to a scale of scores, where each score was given for certain qualities, and they were weighed differently – according to importance. Scores were divided into two groups: conformation and rideability. This was the beginning of horse breeding using numerical values. This system has been modified several times over the years to try and weigh the most important factors.

In 2000, slow tölt and gallop were also judged, but the score for these gaits were not directly included into the calculation. Instead they were used as a threshold where a minimum score had to be reached for the total tölt and gallop scores to increase. The threshold between slow tölt and fast tölt was 1.0 (two points), and in order to get a 9.0 for tölt the slow tölt had to have a score of at least 8.0. To reach a 9.5 or 10.0 for tölt, the slow tölt had to score at least 8.5. There were no thresholds set regarding gallop.

In 2010, another modification was implemented when the weighing for the following factors were changed: pace changed from 9% to 10%; willingness and character changed from 12.5% to 9%; and walk was raised from 1.5% to 4%. In addition, the threshold was adjusted, which has led to some strong controversy. The initial threshold was reduced to 0.5 (one point) between slow tölt and fast tölt as well as between canter and gallop.

These threshold changes seriously affected the scoring, especially that of the young horses, because carriage and impulsion are built up with increased training. So younger horses suffered from these changes more than

older, more trained horses. Different types of horses also have different types of gallop, and it is natural that the slow gallop of a 5-gaiter has less suspension. Young horses with wide movements often have more difficulty showing slow gaits, which brought their scores down considerably.

It was also difficult to realistically interpret the judgments, because a horse that scored more than the 0.5 (one point) between slow and fast tölt did not have their fast tölt score truthfully recorded. Instead they scored no higher than 0.5 over the slow tölt score they received. This was very misleading and no longer showed the breeders a realistic picture of the horse's abilities.

The goal of breeding must be to get the most correct assessment of each horses' talents as soon as possible. If the changes made led to needing more training to achieve this goal, then we were getting further away from judging the actual natural talents of the horse. A breeding judgment is not a competition and should not be judged as such. It is an assessment of each horses' abilities and its genetic talent. Therefore the threshold was revisited at the past FEIF meeting on February 28th, 2011 in Austria, and it was decided to revert the threshold back to the original 1.0 (two points) between slow tölt/fast tölt and canter/gallop.

Unfortunately, the new weighing of the scores is having an especially strong impact on 4-gaited horses, and caused their scores to go down considerably from the previous scoring. When we examine the scores that horses received under the old system, and compare them to the scores they would have received under the current scoring system, then it becomes very clear that the majority of scores would be lower.

Nearly all horses judged now under this new system will receive, on average, lower scores than they would have under the old system, but 4-gaited horses are affected by this change more than 5-gaited horses. Furthermore, this

Right: Eldjárn frá Tjaldhólum, a highly judged 4-gaited horse. Under the new scoring system, his scores would have gone down by 0.16.

Below: Gígjar frá Auðsholtshjáleigu, a highly judged 5-gaited horse. Under the new scoring system, his score would also have gone down by 0.16.



change will ultimately affect the BLUP as well as the lower scoring will be reflected in those scores. We will see whether this new weighing system is going to improve the breed.

Considerations that could raise a problem

Some concern has been expressed that the increased value for pace will push the riders to force pace when the horses are either not quite ready, or don't easily pace, which can damage the horse and present an ugly picture. Furthermore, it is questionable if the increase in the walk score actually affects the other gaits. Many great breeding horses scored between 6.5 and 7.5 for walk, but achieved extremely high scores for their other gaits. This might be due to the fact that the horses are pushed and are more ready to go at breeding shows, and therefore shorten their strides in anticipation.

It is important to understand that breeding shows are held to assess which horses are best suited to improve the stock. It must be possible to assess the natural talents of each horse and to differentiate between poor, average and great horses.

The threshold and scoring need to periodically be reviewed as changes to the values can strongly affect this goal. It is important that all changes are carefully considered and that mistakes are corrected as soon as possible. ●

Comparison of old & new judgements:

4-Gaited Horses

	Old	New	Difference
Krákur frá Blesastöðum 1A	8.40	8.23	-0.17
Rökkvi frá Hárlaugstöðum	8.48	8.31	-0.17
Eldjárn frá Tjaldhólum	8.85	8.69	-0.16
Borði frá Fellskoti	8.48	8.33	-0.15
Kjarni frá Auðsholtshjáleigu	8.30	8.16	-0.14
Álfur frá Selfossi	8.69	8.55	-0.14
Auður frá Lundum II	8.46	8.35	-0.11

5-Gaited Horses

	Old	New	Difference
Gígjar frá Auðsholtshjáleigu	8.78	8.62	-0.16
Glotti frá Sveinatungu	8.88	8.74	-0.14
Aðall frá Nýjabæ	8.97	8.87	-0.10
Kvistur frá Skagaströnd	8.79	8.71	-0.08
Ómur frá Kvistum	8.85	8.77	-0.08
Ágústínus frá Melaleiti	8.74	8.66	-0.08
Seiður frá Flugumýri II	8.39	8.35	-0.04

- In order for a 4-gaited horse to receive first prize for rideability under the new scoring system it would have to score: Tölt 9.0, Trot 8.5, Pace 5.0, Gallop 8.5, Spirit 8.5, Form 8.5, Walk 8.0
- In order for a 5-gaited horse to receive first prize for rideability it would have to score: Tölt 8.0, Trot 8.0, Pace 8.0, Gallop 8.0, Spirit 8.0, Form 8.0, Walk 8.0