



LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS
Iceland Academy of the Arts

Product or Being?

Development of the Image of the Icelandic Horse

Gréta Vilborg Guðmundsdóttir

A document submitted to:

The Department of Design and Architecture, Iceland Academy of the Arts, in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design,
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Abstract

The objective of this research has been to examine whether and how the image of the Icelandic horse has developed through the years, especially during the last 20-30 years, and whether the image of a high-stepping competitive toelter horse has become the artistic image of the Icelandic horse. In other words, has the Icelandic horse, intentionally or unintentionally, been designed?

The impetus for the research is based on the repeated worries expressed in scholarly and magazine articles and which point to the goal in breeding and presenting the image of the Icelandic horse, and that the emphasis on specific characteristics of their features can conceivably make Icelandic horse stocks look too much alike and possibly that the ancient characteristics can disappear, which could affect general horsemanship..

In addition to studying the bibliography, 10 interviews were held with horsemen, both those interested, those working in the field and scholars, and a special search was made for pictures of horses demonstrating the toelt in the *Eiðfaxi* periodical which has been published monthly since its founding 35 years ago and the percentage of toelt pictures calculated for each issue.

The results of the research indicate that there is a discrepancy between the image of the Icelandic horse itself and the expectations of it. The toelter stance is obvious from about 1960 and seems to have its roots in the promotion of the American saddle horses. Photographs of horses in the typical toelter stance became later the main standard for the respect shown the horses and the ability of the horses as well as the ability of the trainers and jockies.

After reviewing the references and taking into account the results of this research it can be debated whether the promotion by Gunnar Bjarnarson of the Icelandic family horse on foreign soil about 1950 brought about a transformation in the development of the image of the Icelandic horse.

It is hoped that the results of this project will lead people to think about the important inheritance that the Icelandic horse represents: the results show clearly that more research is needed as well as a general review of the objectives in breeding and the basis of assessment. The research material will at the same time be used to publish a scholarly book about the Icelandic horse and its development which will take more account of the preservation of its nature and its role in the nation's inheritance, and will include pictures showing its characteristics and its nature.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Aðalheiður Auðunsdóttir, teacher of home economics and horsewoman. She has been the backbone of my horsemanship, my hugely influential mentor.

Acknowledgements

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Ástrún Davíðsson, tourist service representative in riding, Húsatóftir á Skeiðum

Mette Camilla Moe Mannseth, riding master and instructor at Hólar

Páll Tryggvason, horseman and psychiatrist, Akureyri

Sveinn Ragnarsson, dean of the College of Horses, University at Hólar

Hólmfríður Birna Björnsdóttir, horse farmer at Blesastaðir

Hugrún Jóhannsdóttir, riding instructor and horse farmer, Austurkot

Sigrún Sigurðardóttir, riding instructor, Reykjavík

Hjalti Gunnarsson, tourist service representative in riding, Kjóastaðir

And to my family endless thank-yous, you were all more or less involved in the research and the writing and the project that was shown at the graduation exhibit at LHÍ in Gerðarsafn, 12th April 2014.

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1 Preface

In many respects my life has revolved around horses and design.

The subject of my final project for the Master's in Design at the Iceland Academy of the Arts is the Icelandic horse.

The very first thing I drew was a horse. Not just a head and legs, like most children draw, but a horse. My confirmation present, the mare Toppa from the Hólmahjáleiga farm, formed the basis of my horsemanship, which has lasted now for 35 years. Since no one pursued riding in my family, I began as the proud owner of a horse in the youth stable in Gustur in Kópavogur, which was run by the town. Through the years I have become acquainted with nearly all the sides of horsemanship, have travelled over the country by horseback and ridden around the neighbourhood of the capital area. I have followed the changes in riding habits for the last thirty years, taken part in marketing by those involved, and attended a large number of courses connected with riding.

For 23 years I have worked as a graphic artist, idea-man and artistic director of advertising agencies here at home and in Copenhagen, together with running my own ad agency. It is therefore my intent to intertwine these two passions with my work experience into a book and picture show.

This idea has been with me for several years. When ownership and the availability of money became more widespread in the beginning of the century the moneymen became more important for horsemanship. A certain group that adorned itself with valuable assets also began to invest in breeding horses. This brought about a basic change in horsemanship. All the standards changed and it became more difficult for ordinary people to be equestrians. Riding for many is a passion and a way of life and I find it interesting to dive into this world that is so full of contradictions, history, emotions and scholarship. I see the opportunity to examine the image of the Icelandic horse in pictures and to try to shed light on why the high-stepping competitive toelter horse is now the main symbol of the Icelandic horse, why the same emphasis on external characteristics in human beauty contests may be transferred to the external characteristics prized in breeding horses, and why so much value is placed on how high the horse can lift its legs. It has also been interesting to research what influence this image has on the future and the future of horsemanship.

On the 15th of last November I gave a talk on the “Development of the image of the Icelandic horse” at the annual meeting of The Association of Icelandic Horse Breeders. The talk stirred interest and as a result I was asked to write an article on the topic in the Christmas issue of *Eiðfaxi*. In my conversation with one of Hólars teachers, he said that this new approach to examining the emphases in horse breeding and promotion of the horse is necessary in light of the diminishing number of recruits to horsemanship and the difficulty in selling horses, both in Iceland and abroad. Hólar is the heart of scholarship about the horse and I therefore stayed there for a week in January. I carried out interviews with several of the top horsemen in the country, pored over books about horses, followed a practical course and attended lectures.

The periodical *Eiðfaxi* has been the only contemporary mirror of horsemanship in Iceland for the last 35 years. I mined the pictures in the periodical as a whole and examined the development of the toelter stance and balance. What surprised me was to find in an issue in issue 10, 1979 a long-forgotten picture: the illustration of a horse that I had sent in when I was 13 years old. This horse is shown in the much-discussed toelter stance, standing erect and high-stepping. (fig. 1)



Fig. 1. Picture submitted to Eiðfaxi, 10th issue, 1979. Artist: Gréta V. Guðmundsdóttir, aged 13.

The world of horses is closed to people who are not involved in riding and I want to open a way for the general public to understand and enjoy what horsemanship means. I am convinced that a future without horses would be poverty stricken and a great deal indicates that the future does not hold a place for horses in heavily settled areas.

This thesis deals with the research as a whole, carrying it out and the results. It presents my concerns about the future of horsemanship in Iceland and my search for material to illustrate the image of the Icelandic horse, my worries about the welfare of the Icelandic horse, which are often forced into a form that sounds constrained. This thesis deals with my search for a better and more unusual way to present information about the horse pictorially.

I intend to use the results of my research in a book about the development of the image of the Icelandic horse, and how that image has mirrored Icelandic society through the centuries. My hope is that this work will lay the groundwork for a review of the image of the Icelandic horse and lead to using this as a frame of reference in preserving its nature, as well as good and more natural pictures of the horse for publication.

2 Introduction

This research report tries to examine whether and how the image of the Icelandic horse has developed, especially during the last 20-30 years. The guiding research question as to whether breeding is attempting to design the Icelandic horse into a new image led me to examine the one contemporary mirror of horsemanship for the last 30 years, namely, the periodical *Eiðfaxi*. After detailed examination the research question became fine-tuned as: How has the image of the Icelandic horse been developed and how has the high-stepping competitive toelter horse become its image?

The discussion covers the general worries of horsemen that the emphasis on competition has had too great an influence on breeding objectives and the possible unforeseeable consequences in the future, as well as that the disappearing connection with the natural characteristics of the Icelandic riding horse can play a part in the fact that the number of new recruits to riding is diminishing.

2.1 Problem statement

The image of the Icelandic horse has changed hugely in the last 20 years and people are not in agreement on the objectives. Many articles have been written by professionals and laymen alike on where the breeding and promotion of the Icelandic horse are headed. Among the points made is that horsemen are people of different origins. They are divided into two groups that seek a lifestyle based on different premises. On the one hand is the group that enrolls in competitions and shows and on the other hand those who ride as a pastime and emphasise the enjoyment of being outdoors and their pleasure in being in the company of horses. Both groups are important. The question has become whether Icelandic horsemanship has become divided into these two groups, each headed in its own direction.¹

Many Icelandic horsemen and lovers of the Icelandic horse are worried about the over-emphasis that is placed on competition. A specific form and appearance can be a factor in making the Icelandic stock too much alike. What is the model that is looked for and what influence will make the symbol of the Icelandic horse a high-stepping toelter

¹ Anton Páll Nielsson and Guðrún Hulda Pálsdóttir, „Erum við á réttri leið? Draumaásýnd íslenskrar reiðmennsku“, *Eiðfaxi*, June, 2012, p. 38-41.

horse? The emphasis on this symbolic appearance has even become so dominant that it has affected the well-being and health of the horse. Research by Dr Sigríður Björnsdóttir even shows that sores in the mouths of horses used for competition are common and often serious.

Constructing this narrow image of the international competitive toelter horse creates the danger of losing the valuable abilities of the Icelandic horse that had developed over 1100 years. The main characteristics of the Icelandic horse that make it in demand are, among others, its frugality and friendliness, vigour and endurance. Considering its size it is unbelievably strong and compares well with other horse breeds. In an endurance ride over the breadth of the USA in 1976 the Icelandic horse ended in the first row along with Arabian riding horses. Its good qualities also include that it is sprightly, cheerful, willing, sure-footed and has several gaits. It has coats of different colours, in fact all the known horse colours except three can be found in Icelandic horse stocks.²

The horse appears in the art of the country and has become a part of the image of the nation. It may be counted as one of the nation's prized possessions, as Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson stated in their book on the Icelandic horse.³ However, with changes in the emphases this image of the horse may be slowly and surely watered down. It is not clear what or whether something else will take its place.

² Ingimar Sveinsson, *Hrossafræði Ingimars*, Uppheimar, Reykjavík, 2010, p. 58.

³ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, Mál og Menning, Reykjavík, 2004, p. 20.

3 Literature review

In this chapter the references that trace the image and history of the Icelandic horse are reviewed. In the first chapter basic theories of how man shapes nature to his advantage are inspected along with the influence of predetermined views and their effect on man's taste. The subject of chapter two is the history of the Icelandic horse along with the question of what makes the Icelandic horse. In the third and fourth chapters the history of breeding of the Icelandic horse, at what time in that history selective targets in breeding were set and what influenced those targets. Then the subject of competition is inspected; where the paradigm shift in the image and standards in appearance of the Icelandic horse originates from along with speculations about the globalization of the species. Finally Bourdieu's theories are reviewed in context with what is considered beautiful and how man forms views on what aesthetic targets are set in breeding.

3.1 Basic theories

Man distinguishes himself from nature and possesses the power to alter it to his advantage. The Icelandic horse, which has accompanied man for thousands of years, has been affected by that power and sculpted in various ways which hundreds of distinctive horse breeds bear witness to.

Power over life is embodied in the right to exterminate it, the power over death. The transition is question do not consisting in letting live or taking a life, rather it becomes life itself. Controlling life, how it is lived. This new type of power deals with two poles: "The discipline of the body and the structure of beings form the two poles that power over life has organized itself after. ... The discipline of the body for example takes place in schools, military bases and factories. The discipline strategy comprises of partitioning space of time and surveillance. ... The goal of the power over life is to increase performance and output of individuals and the community and it has close ties to the uprising of capitalism."⁴

Bourdieu's theories of the habitus are well fit for examining the connection between subjective measures and taste, which is often used as basis in horse judging, as regulations about preferred build and posture are very subjective.

⁴ Hjörleifur Finnsson, „Af nýju lífvaldi“, *Hugur*, 15. árg., Reykjavík, 2003, p. 176-195.

„The concept *habitus* refers to an acquired schema that distinguishes thought, sense, behavior and dispositions of a person. *Habitus* is deeply rooted in man as a consequence of years in dwelling in the particular living conditions that characterize his surroundings.“⁵

3.2 The image of the Icelandic horse in historic context

The qualities of the Icelandic horse mentioned above, such as form, size, character and gait are factors that have developed throughout the ages. As a result the question arises as to what should be preserved and if rather anything should be added?

The Icelandic horse has a long history and it's life is intertwined the life of the nation. It's existence and image takes note of the current state of country and nation at each point in time. This has become the subject of many works of literature and in the book *Hestur í lífi þjóðar*, Anna Fjóra Gísladóttir sets history in context with the life of the equine.

In the Icelandic Eddas, which originate from before the Viking- and Iron Age, the horse is a holy animal. Sleipnir, the stallion of Odin is so agile that it has eight feet. Men bore talismans, *kingur*, with pictures of horses; they were both symbols of fertility and poetry.⁶

The first settlers brought with them their best horses around the year 900. Those were their favorite horses and most likely just as strong mentally as physically to be able to endure such a difficult journey, sailing over the Atlantic Ocean in open Viking ships. The Icelandic horse breed stems from these horses and has not changed much over the past 1100 years. The Icelandic horse is considered one of the oldest and purest horse breeds worldwide. No mixing with other breeds has occurred since the settlement of Iceland. The horse was a symbol of wealth and power for chiefs and men could be killed for touching it. When the chief died the horses were buried along with their owners in riding gear so they could accompany their masters into new worlds.

Without the Icelandic horse it would have been impossible for Icelanders to inhabit the land and it has been named “the most needed servant”.⁷ The first hundred years after the settlement the horse was viewed as a status symbol and men preferred owning few good horses to many average ones.

⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Almenningsálitid er ekki til: Atvik 11*, Omdúrman, Reykjavíkur Akadéman, Reykjavík, 2007, p. 8.

⁶ Anna Fjóra Gísladóttir, Ívar Gissurarson, Marietta Maissen and Pétur Behrens, *Hestur í lífi þjóðar*, Max Indermaur, city of publication, 1986.

⁷ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 80.

The subject of the gait of horses is not especially mentioned in medieval sources – though their abilities are praised. Judging from many stories from that time horses were greatly respected and the stud valuable to the rider. Men did not own many horses at that time – it was sensible to keep fewer because of the long winter. Therefore even more went into picking individual horses.⁸

Kings and chiefs recognized the importance of the horse therefore names and theories connected to horses are widespread in verse. Along with changes in everyday life of the nation the role of the Icelandic horse changes from being a status symbol to becoming a commercial product. Colder climate in the years 1200-1900 and regular hardships with natural disasters in 1600-1920 caused the Icelandic horse to decrease in height by 10 cm since the settlement. The natural disasters also took their toll on the equine population, especially in *The Mist Hardships* in which the population dropped by 30%.⁹

Despite these hardships the Icelandic horse retains its respectable status through the ages. Icelandic poets sometimes write especially about horses and the East-fjord poet Stefán Ólafsson (1619-1688) is considered the first to have done so.¹⁰ With the rise of Romanticism the Icelandic horse becomes more prominent and is shown in poems and stories as small, strong, sure-footed, noble, proud, brave, resistant, with an incredible ability to adapt and tolerance for harsh weather and cold. When the nation's battle for independence begins in the nineteenth century stories develop about horses that challenge storms and harsh nature to obtain freedom or return home again. Icelanders, oppressed by Danish authorities, identified with those stories of freedom. An example of this is the saga that Grímur Thomsen (1820-1896) wrote about the poem *Skúlaskeið*. There he tells about a convict that owned an exceptional stallion that gave his life to help him escape. The poem had a place in the minds of common folk, for them it symbolized the revolt against Danish authorities.

Skúli was sentenced to death in Althingi, but was able to escape from there. He was followed by a great number of enemies; but his horse was so fast that he got far ahead of them. ... When Skúli returned home the horse fell down and died out of exhaustion. In honor of the horse he held a collation and made grave for it. (From the folklores of Jón Árnason)¹¹

Despite a picturesque image in sagas and poems in the nineteenth century Icelanders were low in spirits after living through multiple catastrophes over thousands of years. For

⁸ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 24.

⁹ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 38.

¹⁰ Kristinn Kristjánsson, *Íslenskar bókmenntir 1550-1900*, Iðnú, Reykjavík, 1996, p. 55.

¹¹ Sigurgeir Magnússon, *Fram um veg*, published by the author, city of publication unknown, 1992, p. 10-11.

common folk life meant subsisting on little, food for the equine was not a priority and most of the time it had to sustain itself in summer and cold winter. Only the most indispensable horses were fed.¹²

In the time of the industrial revolution further changes in the life of the equine take place when it becomes an export, sold away to work in dark mines.

In the time of the Industrial revolution changes in employment occur in Iceland as elsewhere and the Viking horse and the romantic equine gave way for the workhorse. It was in that time that Icelandic horses were exported by the thousands to work in dark coal mines in Europe.¹³

By the end of the nineteenth century men begin to set targets in breeding for workhorses and tow horses with the aim to improve yield with new types of harnesses. Runólfur Sveinsson headmaster in Hvanneyri set the first guidelines in breeding of the Icelandic horse.¹⁴ Men did not agree on the targets set in breeding nevertheless it was the beginning of an exchange of views that led to an increasing interest in restoring the prestige of the Icelandic horse.

3.3 The tow horse's physique

Runólfur Sveinsson headmaster in Hvanneyri was well educated in animal husbandry and his main subject of teaching was breeding of livestock. In 1941 he described the prerequisites for the build of the Icelandic tow horse in the following way:¹⁵

Good physique of a tow horse characterized in brief is the following: Neck is of average length, rather short, muscular, but with a sharp boundary along the shoulder. The thorax is deep and wide and the ribs convex well away from the spine. The chest is broad, the back short, horizontal, stiff and muscular. ...The loins are long, wide, muscular and not very slanted. The thighs are deep, i.e. the muscles are well developed and reach far down the leg. The feet are rather short, straight with a decent clearance between them, thick and rear legs should rather be positioned behind the horse than under the abdomen. Front legs are straight. The hooves point forward, are large though not flat.¹⁶

¹² Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 164.

¹³ Anna Fjóra Gísladóttir, Ívar Gissurarson, Marietta Maissen and Pétur Behrens, *Hestur í lífi þjóðar*, Max Indermaur, city of publication unknown, 1986, p.10.

¹⁴ Bjarni Guðmundsson, *Frá hestum til hestafla*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Bjarni Guðmundsson, *Frá hestum til hestafla*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Bjarni Guðmundsson, *Frá hestum til hestafla*, p. 24.

Men debated whether the Icelandic horse should be bred as two separate breeds (species). Theodór Arnbjörnsson, horse-breeding consultant since 1927-1939, was one of those that influenced the subject the most. He promoted that the Icelandic horse should be bred as one breed.¹⁷ One can say that this conclusion was maintained since no further discussions about breeding two different breeds of the Icelandic horse have surfaced.

In the time of mechanization the workhorse lost its role and general disinterest in horsemanship and breeding became widespread. In his book, *Hesturinn þinn*, Vignir Guðmundsson examines the disappearing value of the horse as the “most needed servant” and a new role. By giving it a new function as a partner on travels and as a delightful companion in the business of urban life the breed existence will be ensured and Iceland will not be without horses in the future.¹⁸

Farmers that moved to the city and kept loyal to their favorite horses could not properly separate themselves from them when they laid down their farms. These men often had almost no work for long periods of time and could themselves make hay and for their horses during summer, they got access to small spots near roads in the vicinity of Reykjavík, e.g. in Mosfellssveit. Then they constructed small shacks for the horses somewhere. This did not cost much and they took care of the horses themselves.¹⁹

At the dawn of the 20th century men set the base rules for Icelandic horse breeding and in 1926 new laws, on the subject of selective horse breeding, were set.²⁰ In the book *Hestar*, from 1931, Theódór Arnbjörnsson, horse-breeding consultant describes different horse breeds where it's obvious what epitomes are sought after. The description of the Arabic horse is romantic and accurate.

The forehead is wide and of the same width at the top and base, a small indent is on the nasal bridge by the corners of the eyes. The nostrils are expanded and seem even more so as a result of the indent on the nose. The eyes are bright and vivid yet alluring and no horse is considered to have as beautiful eyes. The neck is slim, arched and elegant. The back is short and well formed. ...The mane is silky and the tail fine. The chest is deep and convex, the body cylindrical and short. The feet are exceptionally delicate and dry ... The hooves are so excellent in shape that nothing else compares. The skin is so thin and finely haired that the veins are visible. Despite the great beauty of the Arabic horse some small defects are common, e.g. turned out feed, rather short shoulders etc., which is caused by the fact that Arabs value the heritage of the horse over looks and therefore

¹⁷ Bjarni Guðmundsson, *Frá hestum til hestafla*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Vignir Guðmundsson, *Hesturinn þinn*, Bókaútgáfan Skjaldborg, Akureyri, 1973, p. 124.

¹⁹ Vignir Guðmundsson, *Hesturinn þinn*, p. 124.

²⁰ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 206.

sometimes ignore flaws.²¹

Theodór quotes an old publication about equine conformation, by Ólafur Stephensen, governor, from 1788. There an attempt is made to encourage Icelanders to better their horses by breeding. This description is quite similar to the description of the Arabic horse. Still it is not until 1923 that documentaton of the Icelandic horse's heritage (*Ættbók Búnaðarfélags Íslands*) is initiated.²²

Until the first record of the pedigree it can be said that natural selection controlled the Icelandic horse breed. As an example stallions and unneutered colts wandered free north of the country and horse pedigrees were registered through matrilineality.²³

3.4 Competition takes control

Previously the tölt, one of the hallmarks of the Icelandic horse today, was not appreciated. Emphasis was put on a sure-footed, reliable and strong and riding horse that could endure the harsh weather of a harsh country.

It is possible to say that struggle for survival made endurance the most necessary trait of the Icelandic horse. Despite that people also noticed the other abilities of fine horses. Amble horses were best suited for ladies that sat in sidesaddles. The gallop was best for man and horse on long journeys. Tölt was almost not noticed until the previous millenium. There is no doubt about that horses had it in them the whole time, but it was considered and called fine jog. Some talked about an almost-gait in horses.²⁴

Horse breeding became better established with the emergence of a new horse-breeding consultant, Gunnar Bjarnason, who took over in 1939, and a new chapter in advancement of the Icelandic horse as well as development of its image. The Farmers Association (*Búnaðarfélagið*) since then establishes the policy that only riding horses should be bred and that an attempt will be made to create a market for them overseas.²⁵ The emphasis on good riding horses continued and in 1950 the first National Competition of the Icelandic horse, *Landsmót*, was held. Gunnar Bjarnason created the guidelines for the judges, which became a base for the Icelandic horse's image.²⁶

²¹ Theodór Arnbjörnsson, *Hestar*, Búnaðarfélag Íslands, Reykjavík, 1931, p. 11.

²² Theodór Arnbjörnsson, *Hestar*, p. 7.

²³ Þórarinn Helgason, *Fákar á ferð*, Búnaðarfélag Íslands, Reykjavík, 1973, p. 8.

²⁴ Þórarinn Helgason, *Fákar á ferð*, p. 8-9.

²⁵ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 207.

²⁶ Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 207.

With an increasing number of Icelandic horses abroad an international organization was founded to promote the Icelandic horse in Europe. The organization, FEIF, was founded in 1969. Its first task was to hold a European championship for Icelandic horse associations, which took place in Germany 1970.²⁷ The first Icelandic Horse World Championship was held in Sweden 1991 and it's now held every other year. That, along with *Landsmót*, which is also held every other year, is considered the peak of horsemanship.²⁸

Ever since the Farmers Association, under the leadership of Gunnar Bjarnason, invoked in 1952 the strategy to market the Icelandic riding horse abroad men continued with those efforts. During the seventies, SÍS (*Samband íslenskra samvinnufélaga*) made an effort to increase sales of the Icelandic horse and financed presentations held at international exhibitions, like Equitana.²⁹ There men quickly found out that the competition was tough. They began comparing the Icelandic horse to other breeds and speculating what should be changed in order for it to receive additional attention at exhibitions. One of our best known and seasoned rider, Reynir Aðalsteinsson, wrote about his experience of Equitana in *Eiðfaxi*.

Another example of the rising popularity of the Icelandic horse is that when we started these shows we dispensed very little time, only 5 to 7 minutes, once per day. Now we have three shows per day, including the evening show where only the best programs were shown and entrance fee was 30DM. ... I did not really feel too good about riding there on my little pony among these tall horses, but that feeling disappeared if the horse was at least average by our standards, that was the only difference.³⁰

With a growing emphasis on competition, shows and professionalism a great change took place in riding and the Icelandic horse. Demands of composition and abilities become great and much waged to obtain targets with the aim to succeed in competitions. The main priority has become to breed horses suited for competitions, strong willed, high stepping tölters, that can win championships. The competition is tough and the image of the Icelandic horse undergoes change.

²⁷ Gísli B. Björnsson, Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 308.

²⁸ Gísli B. Björnsson, Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 310.

²⁹ Gísli B. Björnsson, Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, *Íslenski hesturinn*, p. 302.

³⁰ Reynir Aðalsteinsson, „Staða íslenska hestsins erlendis“, *Eiðfaxi*, Reykjavík, 1979, 5. tbl., p. 12.



Fig. 2. Two riding horses: Icelandic and American Saddlebred.

The publication *Eiðfaxi* has been the main contemporary indicator of horsemanship for the past 35 years. The magazine was first published in 1977. In some of its articles it shows that not all are content with the development that takes place in horsemanship. There it is for example set forth that men want to fight to preserve the smooth gait of the Icelandic horse that characterizes the true Icelandic equine. These horses are at a disadvantage on account of so called plank-tölt horses, high stepping horses with a gait that is aesthetically pleasing but difficult for the horse to maintain. Kristbjörg Eyvindsdóttir describes her doubts about breeding targets complying with the needs of the majority of horse buyers in Iceland. They are looking for a good tölt horse that is smooth, supple and is easy to handle. Often strong will means strong temper. A temperament that an ordinary rider cannot handle, but is considered necessary in shows and competitions. Kristbjörg raises the question whether we are authorized to make breeding this homogeneous and breed only those traits that fascinate. Diversity must be present, variety in colors, abilities and conformation.³¹ Sigrún Sigurðardóttir, riding instructor, points out that in breeding the character of the horse must be number one, two and three and after that pure tölt. The change has taken place the last 30 years that it is harder for the average rider to ride pure

³¹ Er hrossaræktin á réttri leið?, Kristbjörg Eyvindsdóttir, *Eiðfaxi*, nóvember, 2012, p. 44.

tölt. One can speculate what may have caused this change?³² Sigurbjörn Bárðason has said that we can learn much from our communication with foreign Icelandic horse enthusiasts, nevertheless Icelanders should be at the forefront in taming and training our Icelandic horse.³³

3.5 Where do the models come from?

Generally it is claimed that the Icelandic horse is the only breed with a natural and free tölt. There are other horse breeds that are known for tölt i.e. the American Saddlebred. It is possible to evoke tölt in other horse breeds and men go to great lengths to make the horses fit a certain form on tölt in competitions, using all kinds of gear. The description of the Saddlebred horse points a serious dilemma. To obtain a lateral ambling gait weights are put on the hooves and let grow to an abnormal size and the grooves of the hooves sores. Furthermore, an operation is performed on the tail to achieve a higher position. Now it is not possible to distinguish between horses that are naturally “gaited” and those that have had “help.”³⁴ Icelandic horsemen have observed this development and pointed out the danger that’s involved in using breeding to please inexperienced riders and viewers that don’t know any better.³⁵

The American artist Georg Fred Morris (1873-1960) is one of the best known horse painters of the 20th century. He is renowned for visualizing the change and glorification of the American Saddlebred. In 1952 the book *Portraits of Horses* was published. It is considered by many the fundamental book on horses of that century.

Many of Morris’ pictures show the symbolic tölt pose and it is likely that these pictures influenced those that constructed the image of the Icelandic horse at the time as the American Saddlebred was known for its beauty and majestiness.

³² Interview Sigrún Sigurðardóttir by Gréta V. Guðmundsdóttir.

³³ Sigurbjörn Bárðarson, *Á fáksspori Umhirða, þjálfun og keppni*, Eiðfaxi, Reykjavík, 1982, p. 10.

³⁴ Rostock, Andrea Katharina, Walter Feldman, *Hesturinn og reiðmennskan*, Marietta & Pétur, Höskuldstöðum, Breiðdalsvík, 1990, p. 328.

³⁵ Einar Öder Magnússon reiðkennari og Telma L. Tómasson, „Tindrandi hljómfall í sporinu“, *Eiðfaxi*, May, 2012, p. 28-32.



Fig. 3. American Saddlebred toelter horse. Photog. Georg Ford Morris.

The treatment of the Saddlebred is marked by restraints and interference of congenital abilities. It seems that a certain restraint is used on the Icelandic horse to obtain a head posture that biologically does not suit the horse, as Pétur Behrens points out:

Some Icelanic judges were of the opinion that the horses head should be almost vertical, even on tölt. Most felst that the highest score could be awarded even if it was not so, if the neck was properly raised and the bend of the neck sufficient. ... “The demand for this vertical head posture on tölt had not been heard of before. Head posture is rarely considered, except in the obedience competitions of the big European galloper. Even though some tölt horses can keep this posture at a certain speed it should not be set as a target. I think this posture is harmful for the horse as well as aesthetically undesirable.”³⁶

Dr. Sigríður Björnsdóttir, veterinarian at *Matvælastofnun*, has criticized bridles for competition horses that is used to obtain a certain “look” in a toughening race to achieve perfection.³⁷ Sigríður inspected the health of competition- and show horses both in *Landsmót* and *Íslandsmót* 2012, in total 201 horses. The results were disgraceful as injuries were found in up to 56% of the horses before finals, whereof 16% were severely injured. Horses competing in tölt stood out in that group with a high frequency of injuries.

It is clear that injuries in the mouth are the main threat to the welfare of horses that are entered in competitions or breeding shows. No sign is visible of improvement in these matters despite extensive discussions on the matter for the last year.³⁸

³⁶ Pétur Behrens, „Rýnt í hestablöð“, *Eiðfaxi*, 1992, 10. tölubl., p. 32.

³⁷ Sigríður Björnsdóttir, *Fyrirlestur um áverka í munni keppnishesta*, 2012.

³⁸ Heilbrigðisskoðun, *Klár í keppni 2012*, Heilbrigðisskoðanir keppnis- og sýningarhrossa á Landsmóti

The cost of breeding horses for competitions is great and the aims in breeding seem to be to serve an offshore market as the price for such horses can be sky high. Less emphasis is on general riding horses and the image of the Icelandic horse as a riding tournament competitor prevails over other aspects. With the cultivation of expensive horses bred for competitions horsemanship gradually becomes a sport for the wealthy. The risk in this is that with increased cost of the sport we tread a unprecedented reduction in the number of leisure riders in the future. Will the Icelandic horse become the next Saddlebred, only for show on the track on a good day?

3.1 Is the Icelandic horse being globalized?

It seems that the embodiment of the high stepping tölt competition horse has become a symbol for the Icelandic horse. Its image is shown as a lightly built, high stepping, horse of great excellence with a vertical head posture.

Wherever we look this striking image is predominant. In part the altered perception of the equine can be traced to the emergence of new photographic technology where it's easier to capture the "correct" stance of the horse. The lift of the front legs has increased by several degrees and a vertical position of the head is obtrusive so front legs nearly strike the jaw. This is a symbol of that the horses value is largely considered in how high it can raise its front legs. That stance is thought to show a skilled rider on a pristine horse. Target achieved. Most photographs, gift items, trophies and many works of art show the horse in this way. So overwhelming is this icon that it almost resembles brainwash. The horse has to fit this form else it is worthless. As stated above standard riders and beginners sometimes cannot handle this type of horse. Usually the foundation for this form is in years of taming and control of professional riders. Does that mean that horses suited for the average rider are inferior or less attractive than horses bred for competitions?

In a recent study done by the Department of social sciences at the University of Iceland the brand of the Icelandic horse in Germany was examined. The study brought to light that a discrepancy is between the image of an Icelandic horse that is bred in Iceland and one that is bred in Germany. Participants would affiliate

Icelandic horses bred in Iceland with freedom, strength, pride, spirit and colors and an Icelandic horse bred in Germany with versatility, friendship, competition, beauty and tölt.³⁹

3.2 What is beautiful?

A slim figure, long legs, long hair and a beautiful face result in a high score in the beauty pageants of humans. That what is considered beautiful in humans seems to have permeated the perceptions of beauty in horses because horses with a long mane and tail, high legs and shapely head obtain a high score in horse shows.



Fig. 4. Mare given high marks for her behaviour.

In a summary of judging guidelines in “Model fitness” subjective measures emerge regarding beauty and build. Posture must for example be beautiful, physique shapely and feminine, moderately muscular, toned and the shape harmonized. Skin tone should be passably tanned.⁴⁰

³⁹ Tinna D. Kjartansdóttir og Friðrik Eysteinnsson, *Vörumerkjaryni þarfasta þjónsins í Þýskalandi*, Ingjaldur Hannibalsson ritstýrði, erindi flutt á ráðstefnu Þjóðarspegilsins í október 2012., p. 8.

⁴⁰ Einar Guðmann, *Móðelfitness – reglur og framkvæmd*, Fitness.is



Fig. 5. Model fitness competitive body.

Here fashion and zeitgeist govern the choices of the judges because these are not quantitative factors. The factors that govern the verdicts of horse competition judges are more detailed yet no more subjective than the ones that govern ratings in model fitness, as can be seen in the following table.

It is curious to seek out models for beauty evaluations for the Icelandic and what shapes the preference of horsemen. Is it the established theories of the golden selection that forms it or rather fashion and trends? To find answers to this question it is necessary to go into philosophical speculations though no definite conclusion can be obtained.

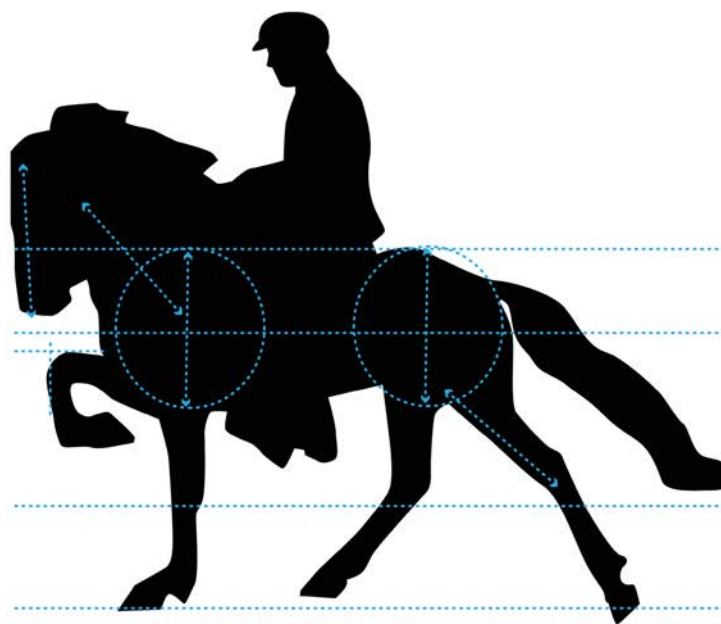


Fig. 6. Correct form.

It is doubtful that there exists such a thing as universal rules for beauty in horsemanship, despite standardizations in judging guidelines. What one person considers pleasing in conformity or stance another may not. Therefore it is worth considering whether this is an individual taste where each and one has a subjective estimate of what makes a beautiful horse. This can be connected to the community or class that the person comes from. The philosopher Bordieu showed that man's taste is not completely an individual trait but shaped by society. Preference depends on social status.⁴¹ On one hand there is a civilian taste that is a product of a life of luxury and on the other hand there is a common taste that represents taste derived from necessity and is a product of bleak economic and cultural conditions.⁴² In context with the history of the Icelandic horse and the hardships it has endured since the Icelandic settlement it is not surprising that its image changed when it stopped being a working horse and becomes a leisure and show horse. Our ancestors' preference in the Icelandic horse has undoubtedly been different from that of breeding judges today and possibly they would have criticized the most prized mares and stallions of today.

It is possible to ponder civilian taste and common taste in regard to changes in the Icelandic community and the increasing gap between the rich and commons in horsemanship. In the last decades of the 20th century wealthy foreigners bought prized Icelandic horses and transported them overseas. Icelanders also benefitted from improved

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Almenningsálitid er ekki til*, p. 42.

⁴² Pierre Bourdieu, *Almenningsálitid er ekki til*, p. 20.

breeding and by the end of the century there was no lack of good Icelandic horses. Rouges were rare and training had changed from what it had been before. In the inflation in the beginning of the 21st century more Icelanders were willing to pay much for highly ranked stallions. Stallions that had unique appearance character and rose high above the common horses of hobby riders. Stallions that stood out. Bordieu claims that products, that previously were a commodity of a selected group, become mundane when they become public property. A product loses its rarity and distinctiveness when the number of consumers that want and have access to it grows.⁴³ According to Bordieu it can be concluded that expensive, strictly bred horses are connected to civilian taste that comes from an abundance of luxury and the need for social status. On the hand leisure horses are connected to the commoners taste of necessity – in this case the need for outdoor activities and benefits that come from the bond between man and horse.

Bourdieu shows that the aesthetic view of Kant is not universal but rather a fine description of “civilian” taste that is the offspring of plentiful living and is characterized by the carefree views of the aristocracy on life’s necessities. This civilian aesthetic of freedom is the opposition of the “common” taste that bears witness of necessity, a taste for beauty that arises from bleak economic and cultural conditions.⁴⁴



Fig. 7. Is taste created while young?

⁴³ Pierre Bordieu, *Almenningsálitíð er ekki til*, bls. 55.

⁴⁴ Pierre Bordieu, *Almenningsálitíð er ekki til*, bls. 20.

Here is an excerpt out of a regulation about origin and breeding from *Reglugerðarsafn Alþingis 948/2002*:

Head, rank 9,5-10: Very beautiful and fine head. Ears are thin and delicate, moderately closed and in right position. The eyes are large, open and lively and well set. The skin is thin and the coat is fine. The jaws are thin and appropriately shallow with a sufficiently wide gap between them. The line of the nose is straight and nostrils open.

Neck and shoulders, rank 9,5-10: Long, very fine neck, excellent bend of the neck, the neck slims beautifully from the body. High and well sculpted shoulders.

Back and thighs, rank 9,5-10: Unique excellent formation of the line of the back. Back is soft and resilient, moderately long, broad and muscular. The thigh is beautiful, long, moderately steep and full. Thighs are long and have good muscle fullness. The tail is beautifully positioned.

Consistency, rank 9,5-10: Impressive overall structure. The horse is tall with cylindrical, long and light body. Its front is sufficiently high and of the right proportions.

Mane and tail, rank 9,5-10: Beautiful mane and tail. Thick and long mane with a long forelock.

According to the above description it seems that the image of the competition horse overshadows the image of the Icelandic family horse. There the reason may lie for the decrease of newcomers in horsemanship. Horsemanship has become too complex and only for professionals.

Is there forming a perforation in the image of the Icelandic horse and is that image possibly changing? Is this a natural development? This strong natural horse is made to fit a human made form. Is something precious and irreversible being ruined?

3.3 Summary

According to these references the image of the tölt competition horse has taken over as a predominant symbol for the Icelandic horse. I found my conclusion on the many articles that have been written on the subject by both professional and leisure horsemen over the last 30 years. Targets in breeding and rating of appearances are subjective and the standards for conformation have become exaggerated and a disadvantage for the Icelandic horse. Furthermore the views of those I have interviewed show signs of worry about this development among both professional and leisure horsemen.



Fig. 8. Photograph: Ólafur Magnússon, ca.1925. Vonarstræti. Reykjavík Photographic Collection.



Fig. 9. Photographs: Ólafur Magnússon ca.1925. Vonarstræti. Ljósmyndasafn Reykjavíkur. Various photographs from the periodical Eiðfaxi.

4 Methodology

4.1 Aims of the research

The objective of this study was to find out whether the competitive toelter stance has become the dominant symbol of the Icelandic horse and whether its presentation in the periodical *Eiðfaxi* mirrors those changes. The opinions of horsemen about these changes were also researched.

4.2 Research framework

Data acquisition was supported by a qualitative questionnaire, pictorial material examined in books about horses and the systematic examination of *Eiðfaxi* to calculate the proportion of toelter stance pictures compared to other pictures (descriptive statistics).

4.3 Research questions

In poring through the bibliography the guiding question was whether the image of the Icelandic horse had been designed. During the bibliographical search I kept in mind the following research question: How had the image of the Icelandic horse developed and the picture of the high-stepping competitive toelter horse become its symbol? In order to assess the opinions of horsemen the following questions were asked:

1. What, in your opinion, is the image of the Icelandic horse?
2. Has the Icelandic horse changed in the last 20 years and if so, how has it changed?
3. Has the image of the Icelandic horse changed in the last 20 years?
4. How would you describe a typical Icelandic riding horse?

4.4 Research methods

In order to get an answer to my research question I pored through issues of *Eiðfaxi* as it is the only contemporary mirror of horsemanship in Iceland for the last 30 years. I read through 327 issues (1978-2012) and mapped the articles that dealt with the deliberations of horsemen, both professionals and laymen, about the horse's image and breeding objectives. Many references to these articles can be found in section 3 above.

Many books were published on horses and horsemanship in the twentieth century and I especially sought material from books by consultants to former horse breeders and those who most influenced horse breeding during that century. These sources reveal the personal opinions and tastes of those who laid down the lines for breeding Icelandic horses in the twentieth century, where the written descriptions were more detailed than today now that pictures have taken over the role of description.

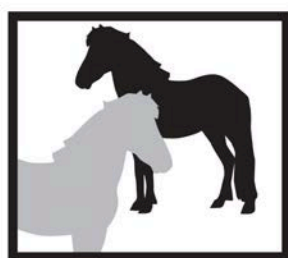
The library at Hólar in Hjaltadalur is a treasury of scholarly works on horses and I lived there while I explored the books and held the interviews in January 2014. I found the book *Visual Research, An Introduction to Research Methodologies in Graphic Design* useful in some respects for my own research.

4.4.1 Photographic review

Can we assume that the high-stepping competitive toelter hose has become the symbol of the Icelandic horse? To find an answer to this question I examined the change in the percentage of pictures depicting the symbolic toelter stance and other pictures of horses in *Eiðfaxi*.

PHOTORESEARCH

How many tölt position pictures are in Eiðfaxi magazine
1978-2012 (327 issues)



A horse is in the picture.

(x ? = _)



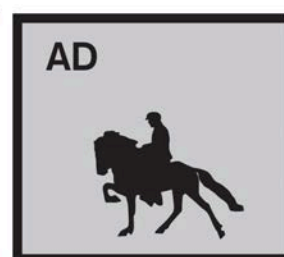
Picture of a horse in tölt position. Left or right foot in highest position.

(x ? = _)



A cover photo of a horse in tölt position.

(x ? = _)



An ad with photo of a horse in tölt position.

(x ? = _)

Fig. 10. Photographic research in Eiðfaxi.

I counted all the horse pictures in *Eiðfaxi* for 1978-2012, a total of 327 issues. There were pictures with all the articles of horses showing the toelter stance from the side, as in the above examples. I also counted how many advertisements included this specific side view

of the horse and how many of the periodical's covers I entered the figures in Excel and noted the place and date. There are limits to photographic techniques and access to photographs during the different time periods as digital photography made increasing inroads at the turn of the century. Digital photography makes it much easier to get the "right" picture of horses, i.e. very high-stepping and erect. The results were entered into Excel, with the time and number, and the percentage calculated.

In addition to the methodology provided by the photographic studios I made use of the methodology from principal publications, *Inquiry by Design*, by John Zeisel, Chapter 13, *Archives*, pp. 311-330 and *Creative Research* by Hilary Collins, Part 3, "Managing the Research Process: Photography", pp. 140-141.

4.4.2 Interviews

In order to find out the opinions of horsemen about the image of the Icelandic horse I interviewed 10 horsemen, both professionals and others interested. The interviews were qualitative and consisted of an informal chat and questions which I recorded on Iphone 5. The interviews took place in the homes of the horsemen, in their stables or at their workplaces and lasted for anywhere from a half hour to a full hour each. The following questions were asked:

1. What, in your opinion, is the image of the Icelandic horse?
2. Has the Icelandic horse changed in the last 20 years and if so, how has it changed?
3. Has the image of the Icelandic horse changed in the last 20 years?
4. How would you describe a typical Icelandic riding horse?

In choosing the interviewees I emphasised having the widest group and spoke to both professionals, enthusiasts and scholars in the Association of Horse Breeders. The interviewees included the foremost jockey in the country, a scholar of horse science, the owner of a much-rewarded breeding establishment, instructors and horse enthusiasts.

For carrying out the interviews I relied on the methodology in the following publications: *Inquiry by Design* by John Zeisel, Chapter 10, *Focused interviews*, pp. 227-257 and *Creative Research* by Hilary Collins, Part 3, "Managing the Research Process: Interviews", pp. 134-137.

5 Findings

In my research on how the image of the Icelandic horse has developed it is possible to follow this process pictorially in the periodical *Eiðfaxi*. The use of the toelter stance was also more pronounced after the turn of the century and this can be traced to some extent in the newer digital photography as well as to the changed landscape of horsemanship with the intrusion of moneymen into the field.

As can be seen in the graph below, the number of pictures of the toelt increased slowly up to the turn of the century and then rose to new heights.

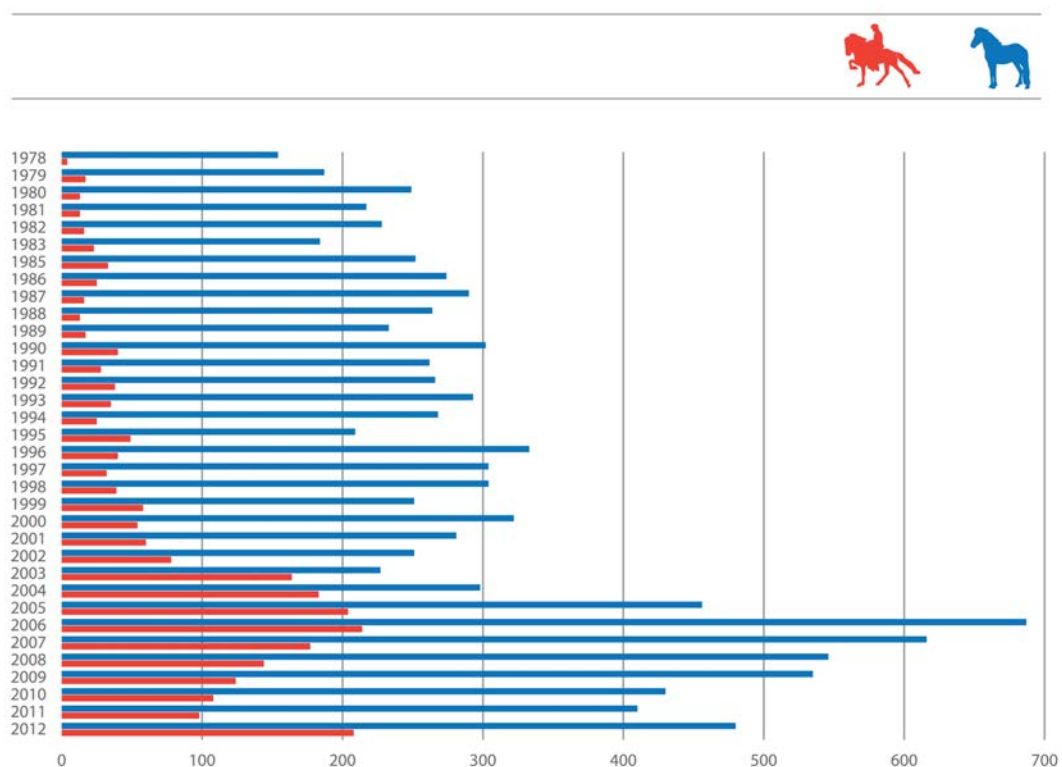


Fig. 11. No. of toelt pictures in *Eiðfaxi* 1978-2012. Red columns show toelt stance, blue other pictures of horses

In 2003-2006 the proportion of toelt pictures was as much as 70% of all the pictures in *Eiðfaxi*.

At this time the expansion of the economy was greatest and money streamed into the field. There is a strong demand for stepping high and almost all the stallions are shown

in the symbolic toelt stance.

The Icelandic riding horse is disappearing and the value is all reckoned in high-stepping, appearance and form

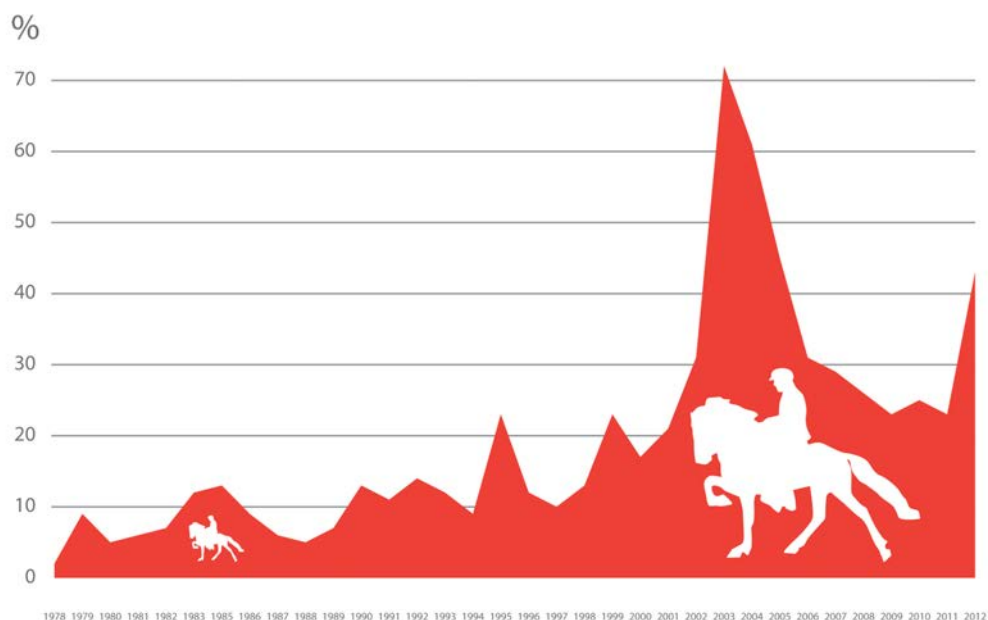


Fig. 12. Percentage of toelt pictures in Eiðfaxi 1978-2012.

The reason for the higher number of toelt pictures in *Eiðfaxi* at this time may be sought in the environment that was created in 2002-2007 when investors bought into the breeding establishments and money flowed into the field. The dominant emphasis was placed on the outer form of the horse. After the recession in 2008 the proportion dropped to about 25% but rose again in 2011-2012.



Fig. 13. Pictures of the tolt from Eiðfaxi, on the left in 1979 and on the right in 2010

The interviews reported in the periodical show clearly that enthusiasts and professionals in horsemanship share the same worries about the image and breeding objectives of the Icelandic horse. These worries are that the concentration is on a competitive horse, ignoring the unforeseeable consequences. Horsemen are generally in agreement that, given the breeding guidelines, the horse that is aimed for is a beautiful horse, high-stepping, slimmer and finer in appearance. They are also breeding out mischievous and dangerous horses. But in the same way all share worries that great emphasis is placed on competitive characteristics and high-stepping. To get this high-stepping ability it is necessary that the horse has a certain character that the general rider cannot cope with. The high-stepping toelter horse therefore is not suitable for the average rider nor for the increasing number of foreign tourists who want to enjoy riding their own horse out in Iceland's impressive natural environment. The interviews also revealed that with the present breeding objectives we are losing those traits that best characterise the Icelandic horse, traits that do not turn only on gait and appearance. It is doubtful that it is realistic to try to blend the wished-for appearance and will of an Arabian riding horse with the energy and ability of the Icelandic horse. The result will no longer be Icelandic. Professionals in the field say that the drive for this is vanity, the need to exhibit the horse, and money. A certain lack of concern for the horse itself, and everything is permissible to shape it into a fixed form. The group within horsemen that develop competitions hold the key positions and the marking system is actually a pricing system. Horsemen who come from abroad say that it should not be forgotten that the horse was an integral part of Icelandic culture and history. One trainer

said that it is often harder to direct a horse with the highest prize around his neck and even that they are more difficult to get to simply use the toelt gait. In this way the goal of appearance may possibly be operating against ability.

5.1 Summary of findings

The image of the Icelandic horse has been tied too much to an international symbol of competitiveness. This image does not fit the Icelandic horse, is remote from nature, and an irredeemable mistake can result if the horse's natural characteristics are bred out and lost for the future.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The image of the competitive toelter horse has just about ridden over most pictorial material that can be found about the Icelandic horse. The form that the horse must attain is a symbol constructed to serve competitions, financial value and vanity. The symbolic picture of the horse can be found not only in the mass media, in periodicals and on websites but has also been taken up as the only true form of the horse depicted in souvenirs, clothes and logos for companies or other associations connected with horsemanship. This constructed symbol has its counterpart in other horse breeds, especially American saddle horses, where the emphasis is on the outer form.

While breeders compete to breed horses that are most likely to go far in the ring, the average rider looks for “a horse that everybody tries to find”, a horse that is almost impossible to get, a horse that is beautiful, obedient, willing, has endurance and is a real toelter horse. The image of many of the Icelandic horses is one of an erect, high-stepping toelter horse with good deportment, but the truth is that few horsemen can ride such a horse that comes out top in competitions today. To achieve high marks in competition takes a clever jockey who can ride a stubborn and hard-to-control horse.

It is clear that the image of the Icelandic horse is only descriptive of a small part of horsemanship in Iceland - competition. Breeding objectives are based on breeding horses that will win the highest marks. The large market for the general rider, which is an increasing source of income for the horse-related tourist industry, needs a different type of horse, a completely different image. My research has certainly revealed this chasm in horsemanship and I call on those involved to rethink whether it is not time to re-examine the breeding objectives. I also feel it is necessary to review the image of the Icelandic horse and create an image based on its natural traits, a truer image of the horse. I propose that this image be examined on the world media and that FEIF play a large role in the construction of this new and more viable image.

6.1 Between man, horse and dog lies a secret bond

My interviews with horsemen showed that everyone is agreed that generally people are taken with the high-stepping riding horse with a good appearance even though too much emphasis on these traits means that the horse's ancient traits are becoming lost, traits that mean something completely different than winning competitions in the ring. We have a duty to preserve those traits that have developed in our horses over the last 1100 years and which helped the country to survive the hardships of weather and terrain. Traits that include likability, sensitivity, some kind of inner element that make the horse a trusted friend, sure-footed, strong, courageous and with endurance. How shall we make a picture of this image? That is a worthwhile and exciting project.

6.2 The transparent image of the competition horse

In order to present the dominant descriptive influence of the demands on the horse for appearance I decided to make a full size transparency of the image of the Icelandic horse. The model is the sculpture of Krákur at Blesastaðir carved from marble and erected at Blesastaðir at Skeiðar. Krákur from Blesastaðir is a top stallion, the winner of many awards, and the perfect model for a transparency of the horse. Alongside the transparency of the horse an art show was projected onto the wall.

The art exhibit shows how we, as humans, have constructed the horse into a certain form. We support with breeding regulations the scale decided beforehand as to what is the most beautiful. This scale is very subjective, for example, what a horse with a head mark of 9.5-10 should look like: "Very free and delicate head. Ears thin and delicate suitably closed and well set. Large, open and sensitive, lively eyes and beautifully framed." The art exhibit of the horse shows the demands for development of this form, the taming of the body and the transfer of human physical fitness over to the horse. The requirements for high marks could just as easily apply to competition for human model as for breeding horses.

The transparency of the horse is the conclusion of my research. It is in the recognized toelt stance, very high-stepping with its head high, tail and mane dressed, but in other respects empty and the viewer sees through him. He flies like some godly being, transparent and

majestic, but without any contact with the natural world which is the true origin of the Icelandic horse through his 1100 year history. The transparent horse points strongly to the toy horse but at the same time conforms to the requirements for form that are demanded. Looking at the transparency of the horse awakes mixed reactions. He is beautiful and catches attention but this empty image leads us away from its natural traits, its prehistory and feelings that are not easy to measure or translate into a specific scale of marks.



Fig. 14. The transparent image of the horse. The author's graduation project in Gerðarsafn.

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