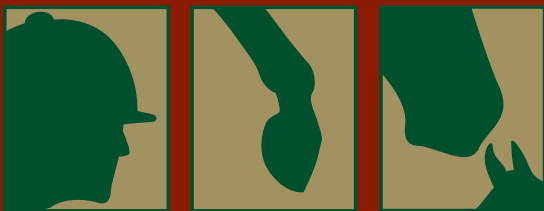


**HORSE SPORT IRELAND**

**WORLD-CLASS IRISH-BRED  
SHOW JUMPERS TASKFORCE**

**REPORT 2009**



**HORSE SPORT IRELAND**



## HORSE SPORT IRELAND

*Horse Sport Ireland wishes to thank each member of the World-Class Irish-Bred Show Jumpers Taskforce for their time and effort in attending each meeting. A special thanks to all those who were consulted with regard to this report, their professional views and innovative ideas have proven invaluable in the development of a policy to improve our show jumpers for the future.*



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## REPORT TO THE HORSE SPORT IRELAND BREEDING SUB-BOARD FROM THE WORLD-CLASS IRISH-BRED SHOW JUMPERS TASKFORCE

### INTRODUCTION

The World-Class Irish-Bred Show Jumpers Taskforce was appointed by the Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) Breeding Sub-Board to make recommendations with regard to the steps that are necessary to return Ireland to its place as renowned producers of world-class international show jumpers.

The taskforce members are as follows: Col Ned Campion (Chairman), Peter Leonard, Lt Col Gerry O’Gorman, Barry O’Connor, Paul Duffy and James Kernan.

The Taskforce has met on six occasions during its deliberations. The following are the Terms of Reference under which the Taskforce was initiated:

- To consider what steps are necessary to return Ireland to its place as renowned producers of world-class international show jumpers.
- To propose initiatives to improve the standard of horses being bred for show jumping in Ireland.
- To look at ways of improving how show jumping horses are produced in Ireland including the classes that are currently run for 4, 5 and 6 year olds.
- To offer views on proposed changes in the Irish Sport Horse Studbook rules and how they might impact on the breeding of horses to be world-class show jumpers.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Ireland produced the best show jumpers in the world. Horses like Gowran Girl (ISH), Boomerang (ISH), Ambassador (ISH) and later Ryan’s Son (ISH) and Mill Pearl (ISH), gave the Irish Sport Horse a reputation as a force to be reckoned with on the international show jumping circuit.



*John Whitaker and Ryan’s Son (ISH)*



*Eddie Macken and Boomerang (ISH)*

While our traditional Irish Draught-Thoroughbred cross was extremely effective for the production of show jumping horses throughout these years, with the increasing technical nature of show jumping tracks and the constant improvements in quality and athleticism of other continental breeds, the Irish Sport Horse (ISH) has been left behind. As breeders we took our eye off the ball. Perhaps we were lulled into a false sense of security. Only a few of the Irish Sport Horses can meet the demands and technicalities of top-level international show jumping courses and, as a result, Ireland's reputation as a producer of top-class show jumpers is no longer secure.

Ireland had the best show jumpers in the world, but most of our top-class show jumpers were sold abroad. The vast majority of our horses are bred by 'hobby' breeders who are provided with little guidance on breeding methods.

The rankings of Irish-bred show jumpers have dramatically declined in the WBFSH FEI Showjumping Rankings in recent years.

The table below shows a summary of the number of Irish Sport Horses that have been ranked in the top 50/100/200 in the WBFSH rankings since 2004.

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009*</b>
Top 50	3	1	1	1	1	1
Top 100	5	4	3	2	1	2
Top 200	9	5	10	8	1	3

*\*Please note that 2009 only shows results up to and including 31/05/09.*

#### ***Number of Irish Sport Horses competing at Nations' Cup Teams at RDS Dublin 2002-2009***

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>NO. OF ISHS</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>
2002	4	Ireland (2)	Great Britain (1)	Switzerland (1)
2003	3	Ireland (2)	Great Britain (1)	
2004	1	Ireland (1)		
2005	2	Ireland (2)		
2006	3	Ireland (3)		
2007	2	Ireland (2)		
2008	0			
2009	1		Sweden (1)	

However, it is not all bad news. Ireland is a nation of horse lovers, and there will always be a market for top-class performance horses. Ideally, we should be producing show jumpers for our Nations' Cup riders and horses capable of competing at the very top level in international show jumping. Ireland finished in joint fifth place in the 2009 Meydan Nations' Cup League and the Irish Team had major success in the League this year, winning in Falsterbo, Sweden with an inspiring performance.



*Ireland's winning FEI Meydan Nations' Cup Team at Falsterbo, Sweden 2009*

The Taskforce is convinced that this country possesses the ingredients necessary to restore our ability to mount our world-class riders on worthy horses to compete at the highest level and thereby to support a healthy non-thoroughbred horse industry for the agri-sector. We should learn from M.V. O'Brien and Coolmore and the successful European sport horse studbooks.

To achieve this vision, we need a concerted effort and above all, the co-operation of all the relevant constituent affiliate members of Horse Sport Ireland.

'Níl neart go cur le ceile'.

We make the following recommendations:

- 1. BREEDER EDUCATION**
- 2. COMMUNICATION**
- 3. PRODUCTION METHODS**

## 1. BREEDER EDUCATION

A priority for next year should be to increase the amount of information available for breeders which will help them make better, more informed decisions. This should occur through three channels - direct education, formal education and one-off education.

### *How will breeder education be implemented?*

#### 1.1 DIRECT EDUCATION

- Through producing a DVD aimed at breeders to provide them with advice and information to improve Sport Horse breeding and production in Ireland. This DVD may be modelled on the Teagasc Dairy Advisory DVD. It is intended that this DVD would be made available to all breeders within Ireland. It has been noted that the standard of knowledge amongst people producing young horses is not adequate and that there is a lack of knowledge of breeding lines that are producing top-level competition horses. Through direct education it is hoped to improve the knowledge of successful bloodlines and the use of modern breeding technologies.
- It has been acknowledged that the Pony Club provides a solid foundation for riders. The ingredients are there. Evidence of this is the number of top-class riders competing at international level.

#### 1.2 FORMAL EDUCATION

- Through third-level courses. The following are a sample of third-level equine courses available at present:
  - University of Limerick – four year Equine Science degree with a practical element.
  - NUI Maynooth – four year Equine Business degree course with a small practical element.
  - University College Dublin – four year Animal Science-Equine course scientifically based with a small practical element.
  - Enniskillen – Bachelor of Business in Equine Studies course with a practical element.
  - Gurteen College – three year Equine Business course run in association with Athlone I.T., with a large practical element.
  - Teagasc – two year Advanced Certificate in Horsemanship and Horse Management course provided at Kildalton College and awarded by FETAC, with a large practical element.



- Skillnets, which is funded by the Department of Enterprise & Employment, runs 10 week FETAC accredited courses, linked with Teagasc for “Training the Young Horse”. A “Competition Horse Management” course was also developed but it didn’t attract enough participants. In future it is hoped to have these courses promoted by the top riders who come from a similar background within the industry.
- All of these courses focus on a different angle of the industry but all will take in the area of equine breeding in some form as decided by the college itself. It is proposed that there should be an increased awareness of breeding among course participants with an aim to have all of these courses tied together to achieve a similar overall education of the breeding sector, possibly through one day seminars and educational visits from industry experts.
- It is also proposed that a programme should be put in place to provide a short-term (8 to 12 weeks) course that would cater for individuals outside of the formal education sector. This course would provide expert tuition on the subject of sport horse breeding. It would provide the information required for breeders to progress within the equine breeding industry with an increased awareness and knowledge of all the factors within the sector. While this course would be available to any individuals wanting to take part, it would be anticipated that it would also be made available and promoted to secondary school students so that individuals could participate in the programme during their transition year (fourth year). On completing the course they would have a greater knowledge of equine breeding which would help them progress as they go forth with their careers on completion of their secondary education. An incentive programme would be put in place to encourage participation and individuals would be recognised for their involvement in the course. Recognition may be through a FETAC award if this is possible.
- It is also recommended that a two year course could be developed with similar benefits to the Teagasc Green Cert., for example stamp duty implications and inheritance benefits. It is vitally important that the course links in with the industry and the student must go on work placements where he/she can gain practical experience in professional breeding methods.

### 1.3 ONE-OFF EDUCATION

- Through educational visits to/from expert breeders and producers of sport horses overseas. These visits would be organised with the goal of allowing participants the opportunity to gain a valuable insight into how respected breeders overseas view horse breeding, their facilities and the manner in which they operate their breeding procedures. The importance of good breeding management and mare/stallion selections would be highlighted to participants



and they would gain an increased awareness and knowledge of the role of the breeder and how to complete these tasks efficiently.

#### 1.4 INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS

- It was strongly felt that the breeding sector and the competition sector are currently operating separately with little or no linkages. It was felt that increased links and communication between these two sectors are vital to increase and encourage the amount of breeder involvement within the industry. This will have the additional benefit of increasing awareness and creating a 'buzz' about the future of Sport Horse Breeding in Ireland.

## 2. COMMUNICATION

There is an information gap between the breeder and end users of Sport Horses in Ireland. While many breeders haven't changed their breeding protocol, the market and competition arena have changed dramatically, thus breeders need to keep up with the market if they are to succeed in the future. The root cause is the lack of breeder education and information which needs to be addressed.

### *How will improved communication measures be implemented?*

#### 2.1: Publications

- It is recommended that a monthly newsletter would be published in the form of a magazine. This publication would have all the information from the horse world in Ireland and would contain information on both the breeding and performance sectors, detailing upcoming events, recent results and other articles of interest to individuals involved in the Sport Horse industry. Information from HSI affiliates would also be included. Advertisements could be contained within the magazine which would create some revenue. It is intended that this publication would be of interest to a large section of individuals involved in the Sport Horse industry and that it would become a valuable resource. While initially the publication would be available in magazine format, this would be reviewed after a period and the use of an internet version may be considered depending on the predicted uptake of this facility.
- A template for the information that should be available for animals for sale will be modelled on the Thoroughbred industry sales catalogues, with dam lines being shown extensively and details of approved stallions being available in the back of the catalogue. As of next year a print out page should be available from the IHR database which will have the necessary details for the sales companies. Having advisors at sales and the information available from this database would increase breeders' knowledge and therefore they would purchase quality animals that would breed good performance foals.
- Another area where additional information is also required is through start lists at events. It is recommended that in the future all pedigree and breeder information should be provided on start lists and presented as part of the event commentary.
- It was also suggested that a glossy book with details of stallions and mares could be produced and sold at the annual breeders' week. It would be extremely important that accurate statistics would be available for this. This publication would allow those attending to easily follow the course of events over the weeks and have all relevant information available to them.

## 2.2: WEBSITE

- This will become an invaluable tool and one which breeders will find essential for keeping up to date on the latest information. A database which can publish results and get accurate and timely information for breeders is essential. Once phase two of the database is complete the information on performance and progeny will be available publicly on a phased basis, which will enable breeders to make informed decisions.

## 2.3: SEMINARS/DEMONSTRATIONS

- It would be recommended to hold seminars in order to educate people/breeders as to what breeding standards are now required, in particular with reference to what the stallion/mare inspection process is looking for and what the process involves on the day.
- It is also important to hold seminars particularly focused on teaching the young breeder as this is critical to the future of Sport Horse breeding in Ireland. As the RDS is a huge event in the Irish calendar every year Horse Sport Ireland would aim to hold breeding seminars during this time. It would be hoped that highly respected show jumpers and other professionals would become involved which would raise the profile of these talks and communicate the message to a wide audience effectively.
- As there are four full-time people working with Teagasc in the equine section who have direct contact with breeders/farmers already, it is hoped that HSI and Teagasc could collaborate further on a regional basis in order to reach a greater audience.

## 2.4: BREEDERS' WEEK

- This would occur annually and would be held at the same time of year, allowing breeders to be informed and available, with the aim of having a similar status to stallion inspections in other countries. During the course of this week Horse Sport Ireland would hold its stallion inspections, mare inspections, seminars, etc. It would be a breeding week where breeders could attend inspections and seminars and show jumping classes for older horses. It would be a good platform for educating the breeders and ideal for marketing/networking to take place.

### 3. PRODUCTION METHODS

#### 3.1: FOAL TO 3 YEAR OLDS

One of the major concerns of the Taskforce is the limited amount of quality stock available at present within the country.

It is vital that the breeder is educated in selection methods when mating a mare and stallion. How this can be implemented is largely dealt with in the topic of **‘Breeder Education’**.

The choice of the stock in breeding is of paramount importance to the improvement of our show jumpers. This is where it all begins. The success of the progeny depends solely on the compatibility of the mare and stallion. The breeder must have the ability to realistically assess the broodmare and evaluate the mare’s strengths and weaknesses before they begin thinking about breeding from her. The stallion selected for covering must complement the mare’s strengths and compensate for her weaknesses. As much information as possible that is available on both animals needs to be gathered and studied thoroughly, so the breeder can make as informed a decision as possible.

The mare inspections/assessments which HSI is planning to implement as part of its proposed breeding plan will form the basis by assisting breeders to identify the conformational strengths and weaknesses of the mare as well as her performance horse breeding potential.

The Taskforce recommends that a template be drawn up of possibly 10 questions that the breeder should answer before deciding to breed the mare. This template should be available from the website [www.irishsporthorse.com](http://www.irishsporthorse.com) and also by request from the HSI Breeding Department. The template should include questions such as:

- What type of horse do you wish to breed?
- Does your mare have a performance record? To what level has she competed?
- What has she bred previously?
- Has she bred quality stock capable of competing at 1.30m/1.40m?
- Has she bred quality stock capable of competing at international level?
- What are the mare’s conformational strengths/weaknesses?
- Does she have a good temperament and is she willing to work?
- What level has the stallion competed to?
- Have you seen the stallion compete? Does he have a consistent performance record?
- Does the stallion breed quality performance stock?

- What level have his progeny competed to?
- Evaluate his strengths and weaknesses. Eg. Conformation, movement, temperament, jumping technique. Do they complement/compensate for your mare's strengths/weaknesses?

It was suggested that the Sport Horse Breeders Skillnet could further develop the current mare and stallion assessment course. The course should include a section on meticulous evaluation of a horse's way of going and its jumping technique stage by stage, for example: canter, reflexes, take off, scope and temperament.

The Taskforce recommends that the owners of the highest ranking breeding and performance stallions in the WBFSH rankings should be invited to have their horses approved by the Irish Horse Register (IHR) so that the owners of high performance mares in Ireland will have easy access (in terms of registration) to the top performance stallions in the world.

It is also recommended that all information should be available for the top 20 stallions on the Irish Horse Register as soon as possible, i.e. competition results, accessibility, covering fee, number of coverings, etc. It is of paramount importance that the breeders do their own research before mating a mare and stallion.

The Taskforce also recommends that HSI organises tours for breeders to attend Stallion Shows, Young Horse Championships, Nations' Cup Series shows and sales both at home and abroad with professional advisors present. These tours would prove an invaluable educational tool for breeders.

### 3.2: MARE AND STALLION CLASSIFICATIONS

It is widely felt that the current inspection marking system is too broad and 'general'. For example, under the current system there is just one mark for the athleticism of an animal, one mark for movement. With the introduction of the linear scoring system in the near future the marking system will be dramatically improved, however, this is subject to extensive training being implemented.

It was also proposed that HSI attempts to source high performance mares within Ireland and abroad that could be encouraged to enter the Irish Sport Horse studbook with the hope of significantly enhancing the breeding mare herd in Ireland. The following selection criteria were suggested for these mares:

- International performance mares
- Dams of high performance horses
- Full or half sisters to high performance horses
- Mares that have produced progeny capable of competing successfully to 1.40m

Some research has been carried out to identify mares on the Irish Horse Register which have jumped 1.40m. 156 mares have been identified which are less than 19 years old and have competed to this level. Only five of these mares have progeny competing at 1.40m. These are listed on the following page.

<b>NAME OF MARE</b>	<b>IHR No:</b>	<b>YEAR OF BIRTH</b>	<b>SIRE</b>
Echo Beach	2725216	1997	Clover Echo
Sillot Eve	2361468	1994	Sillot Hill
Paddys Baby	9528636	1992	Clover Hill
Cruise Hill	2050587	1991	Cruising
Lady Caroline	9519785	1990	Profit Warrant

Under the new HSI Breeding Policy there will be a star rating system introduced which will identify Elite mares such as those listed above and highlight the importance of these mares in breeding performance horses.

This Taskforce recommends that the Elite mares are identified and information regarding the world's leading sires should be made available to their owners. Where possible HSI should investigate facilitating access to obtaining semen from these stallions for Elite mares in Ireland. Access to these top stallions has been identified by breeders as being difficult to obtain at this time.

### **3.3: ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION**

Currently only 13% of the breeding mare herd in Ireland is covered through A.I. This is extremely low compared to the use of this method on the continent.

As a long-term goal, the Taskforce recommends that a central independent A.I. station should be established for equines which could be explored in order for breeders to access semen from high-performance stallions both here and abroad. There are already a number of established Bovine A.I. station sites in Ireland and it could be possible to negotiate the storage of semen on these sites. There are also existing links between certain veterinary practices throughout the country and distribution sites which are also worthy of further investigation.

When selecting a stallion, breeders in Ireland are strongly influenced by the accessibility of a stallion i.e. where the stallion actually stands and how far the owner will have to travel with the mare in order to have her covered. The option of an A.I. station for equines and an efficient distribution service would minimise the need for the mare to be moved off site for covering, thus giving the mare owner far more options when selecting a stallion.

### **3.4: NETWORK OF PERFORMANCE CLASSES**

It is strongly recommended that HSI introduces a network of classes ranging from foal/yearling showing classes right up to the Irish Sport Horse Studbook classes for 5 and 6/7 year olds, in preparation for international performance classes.

The Taskforce strongly recommends the establishment of new show classes for the progeny of performance mares (i.e. mares that have a performance record) and the development of showing classes for top-quality performance-bred foals, yearlings and two-year-olds and three-year-olds. From there, the animals could proceed as four-year-olds to the performance classes and then into the 5 and 6/7 year old Studbook classes. Such appropriate classes should be established and sponsored by HSI with a prize fund substantial enough to entice breeders to keep and produce performance-bred horses in Ireland.

## **4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. BREEDER EDUCATION**

#### **1.1: DIRECT EDUCATION**

- Through producing a DVD aimed at breeders to provide them with advice and information to improve Sport Horse breeding and production in Ireland.

#### **1.2: FORMAL EDUCATION**

- It was noted that several third-level equine courses are available at present but their breeding curriculum may not be in the same direction as the national breeding policy so there is the potential for different goals / outcomes. This should be examined.
- It is proposed that there should be an increased awareness of breeding among the participants on these courses with an aim to have the content of all these available courses similar in order to achieve a similar overall education of the breeding sector.
- To attract participants to Skillnets, which runs 10 week FETAC accredited courses and is linked with Teagasc for “Training the Young Horse”, it is recommended that top riders who come from a similar background within the industry promote this course.
- It is also proposed that a programme should be put in place to provide a short-term (8 to 12 weeks) course that would cater for individuals outside of the formal education sector.
- It is recommended that a two year course be developed for the equine industry with similar benefits to the Teagasc Green Cert. course.

#### **1.3: ONE-OFF EDUCATION**

- Through educational visits to/from expert breeders and producers of Sport Horses overseas, with the goal of allowing participants the opportunity to gain a valuable insight into how respected breeders overseas view horse breeding, their facilities and the manner in which they operate their breeding procedures.

#### **1.4: INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS**

- Increased links and communication between the breeding sector and the competition sector are vital to increase and encourage the amount of breeder involvement within the industry.
- Increased linkages from sporting affiliates in the provision of national and international performance data.



## **2. COMMUNICATION**

### **2.1: PUBLICATIONS**

- It is recommended that a monthly newsletter would be published in the form of a magazine.
- A template for the information that should be available for animals for sale will be modelled on the Thoroughbred industry sales catalogues, with dam lines being shown extensively and details of approved stallions being available in the back of the catalogue.
- Detailed start lists.

### **2.2: WEBSITE**

- This will become an invaluable tool and one which breeders will find essential for keeping up to date on the latest information.

### **2.3: SEMINARS/DEMONSTRATIONS**

- It would be recommended to hold seminars in order to educate people/breeders as to what breeding standards are now required.
- It is also important to hold seminars particularly focused on teaching the young breeder as this is critical to the future of Sport Horse breeding in Ireland.
- HSI could collaborate further with the four full-time people working with Teagasc in the equine section who have direct contact with breeders/farmers already.

### **2.4: BREEDERS' WEEK**

- This would occur annually and would be held at the same time of year, allowing breeders to be informed and available, with the aim of having a similar status to stallion inspections in other countries.

### **3. PRODUCTION METHODS**

#### **3.1: FOAL TO 3 YEAR OLDS**

- One of the major concerns of the Taskforce is the limited amount of quality stock available at present within the country. It is vital that the breeder is educated in selection methods when mating a mare and stallion.
- The Taskforce recommends that a template be drawn up of possibly 10 questions that the breeder should answer before deciding to breed the mare.
- It is suggested that HSI arranges educational tours to stallion shows, young horse championships, sales and Nations' Cup series abroad so that breeders can see the level of dedication required to produce an international show jumper.

#### **3.2: MARE AND STALLION CLASSIFICATIONS**

- It was proposed that HSI attempts to source high-performance mares within Ireland and abroad that, if eligible, could be encouraged to enter the Irish Sport Horse Studbook with the hope of significantly enhancing the breeding mare herd in Ireland.
- This Taskforce recommends that the Elite mares are identified and information regarding the world's leading sires should be made available to their owners. Where possible HSI should investigate facilitating access to obtaining semen from these stallions for Elite mares in Ireland. Access to these top stallions has been identified by breeders as being difficult to obtain at this time.

#### **3.3: ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION**

- As a long-term goal, the Taskforce recommends that a central independent A.I. station should be established for equines which could be explored in order for breeders to access semen from high-performance stallions both here and abroad.

#### **3.4: NETWORK OF PERFORMANCE CLASSES**

- It is strongly recommended that HSI introduces a network of classes ranging from foal/yearling showing classes right up to the Irish Sport Horse Studbook classes for 5 and 6/7 year olds, in preparation for international performance classes.
- The Taskforce strongly recommends the establishment of new show classes for the progeny of performance mares (i.e. mares that have a performance record).

## 5. APPENDIX

Formal Education: additional information for the following courses:

- University of Limerick – Bachelor of Equine Science
- NUI Maynooth – Bachelor of Business Studies or Bachelor of Business Administration
- University College Dublin – Bachelor of Agricultural Science in Animal Science-Equine
- CAFRE Enniskillen – Bachelor of Business in Equine Studies
- Athlone I.T. & Gurteen College – Bachelor of Business in Equine Studies
- Teagasc Kildalton College – Advanced Certificate in Horsemanship and Stud Management



***Nations' Cup Team, Aachen, 1979. Four Irish Sport Horses (ISH). Let's do it again!***

*Paul Darragh – Heather Honey; Capt. Con Power – Rockbarton; Capt. John Roche – Maigh Cuillin; Eddie Macken – Boomerang; Col Ned Campion, Chef d'Equipe (in front).*