

# FRANCE, LAND OF CHAMPIONS: BUT WHAT IS THE SECRET?



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The year 2023 will have given way to 4 International Endurance Championships: 3 World Championships (Seniors, Juniors & Young Riders and Young Horses), and a European Championship.

Although they competed on different soils, sand and stones of the Emirates desert at Boutheib (UAE), the flat and galloping tracks of Padise (Estonia) and Ermelo (Netherlands), the steep and technical terrain of Castelsagrat (France), French

endurance horses shone everywhere. The Société Hippique Française (SHF, french association dedicated to young sport horses) set out to find out why these horses are so good and so consistently at the top of the rankings, and not only under the saddle of French riders.

French horses very regularly top the endurance rankings, and 4 criteria stand out to explain these performances: genetics, breeding / feeding methods, training

/ valorization and «a little something extra than others do not have».

Different experts have spoken and do not have exactly the same perception of this phenomenon.

# 1 GENETICS: THE ULTIMATE WEAPON... OR A RELATIVE ONE?

**Genetics and crossbreeding are factors for success. But can we rely only on genetics?**

**Christèle Derosch**<sup>1</sup> is categorical: «Genetics alone is not enough. Without genetics, you can't have the best; good horses yes, but not the best.»

**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> sees genetics as "an asset, but it only plays a role of between 10 and 30% maximum in performance, and it will depend on the criteria considered to enter into the performance. 20% is a good average.»

Listening to **Marion Wasilewski**<sup>3</sup>, we understand the importance of genetics in the choice of horses: «Bahrain really buys horses on papers. After Darco la Majorie was crowned World Champion in Boutheib earlier this year, we went to Christian Manoha's (Haras de la Majorie - ed.n), and we bought 5 Baltik des Ors (Persik and Zulus origins - ed.n). We also bought Darco's own brother. We hope they'll perform as well as Darco! Genetics has really made it possible to develop horses, particularly in terms of heart rate: we can now get horses into the vet in 1.5 - 2 minutes! And it's the breeders who have made this possible by working with genetics to get a better heart.»

«When a horse is presented, the first thing you look at, is the *bloodline!*» comments **Guilherme Santos**<sup>8</sup>. « After that, you watch videos, you

*watch them run to see how they move. At the vet-gate, you see horses go by and you say to yourself «look, this one is better». Then after, you look to the pedigree. We always look at the families.»*



## No French endurance without Persik?

Persik: the indispensable Sire behind so many champions!

Everything actually started with him when the Parc des Cévennes imported this stallion to improve its broodmare band: the park needed horses to maintain its wide spaces. And it was here that one man changed the course of endurance racing history: Yves Richardier.

His discovery of the legendary Tevis Cup race on television gave him ideas. Living in Florac, he realized that all the

conditions were all there to «manufacture» horses able to cover long distances. He then somewhat «grabbed» the grey stallion. Under the saddle of Jean-Marie Fabre, Persik won the first 2 editions of the Florac race (which were national races at the time).

And when asked, to tease the spirit, why Persik is Persik, the answers abound!

«Persik was the first stallion to be bred for endurance, because he was in the cradle



## that's the Persik effect !



of endurance and trail riding. Most of the other stallions used at that time, were mostly used for flat races. He was at the origin of the creation of endurance sector,» explains **Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup>

«He was the first to serve mares which were themselves endurance-oriented, and whose offspring were destined for endurance. Persik probably had very good endurance abilities and capacities for endurance. Unfortunately, genotyping couldn't have been done for him, but for some of his sons, yes. Persik is everywhere: he's the leader in endurance. He's a reference: that's the Persik effect».

«Persik is good everywhere! There's no doubt about it and he's outperformed everyone. He served a lot of mares with unknown origins. At the end of his career, he only served very good mares which gave the best offspring» comments **Christèle Derosch**<sup>1</sup>. «For example, Branik (x Arques Perpex) and his descendants Mediatik Larzac and Charismatik Larzac: they have the same physique as Persik! But sometimes not: Diamant du Rolon is more Manganate-like. But Persik's qualities have been set».

**Marion Wasilewski**<sup>3</sup> confirms

this: «we've been working on Persik genetics in France for years and it's working. We've tried to bring in new blood via flat stallions, for example. Looking back, I can say that the basis is Persik. We're sticking to the classics that work. We ourselves (Bahrain - ed.n) have tried to move towards more



Persik et Pierre Cougul (1973, Toulouse) © Caroline Cougul

flat racing stallions, and my boss (Skeikh Nasser bin Hamad al Khalifa - ed.n) is now telling me to go back to Persik and to France: it's a safe bet. In France, there's everything; why look elsewhere? We're not going to look any further: we're staying with Persik and in France!».

**Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup> gives a very rational explanation: «the best mares went to Persik: it's a spiral. Persik was a great stallion, but all the conditions were right for him to be a success. When you have 2 or 3 mares who win out of 160, you get Persik to serve them! And that increased the phenomenon. Consider Cookie Hipolyte (silver/team medal

and 11th at the last World Youth Championships 2023 with Ema Chazel - ed.n), she has Persik through her father and mother!».

«Persik has an incredible genetic line,» exclaims **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup>, «right from the beginning, with Melfenik (team gold and individual silver at the 1994 World Equestrian Games - e.n), Varoussa (World Champion in 2000 - ed.n), Dynamik (bronze medal World Junior Championships in 1998, French Champion in 1999, World Vice-Champion in 2000 - ed.n). Even today, the Persik lineage

continues to shine with Easy el Boheira (European Champion 2023 - ed.n)».

**Christian Quet**<sup>7</sup> won't contradict them: «The Persik line has flooded the French breeding and the results are still there. I've had Khadar (son of Persik) for over 20 years and his son Jelam du Barthas is in his 1st service season this year».

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> also agrees on the role Persik has played in the development of endurance in France, although he thinks it is a shortcut to say he is the foundation of the discipline: «in my opinion, if we had done the same with



*a lot of stallions, because he reproduced so much, we would have had the same result. But what is certain is that Persik has been an “improver». All this gave a very healthy base which was crossed again, and then Persik’s offspring also really made a career by themselves. There were stallions, and there are still stallions available, and that is what started the progression».*

## And where do moms fit in?

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While fathers are systematically cited as reference, our experts agree that mothers play a major role.

*«For me, the mother is 75% of the result and the father 25%! They are very important for settle good bloodlines that correspond to the horses we’re looking for in endurance», says Marion Wasilewski<sup>3</sup>.*

*«The success of French breeding is based on selected mares. Let’s take the example of Cookie Hipolyte: the low line of the foundation stock is from the Lux family in Ardèche, who were very involved in endurance in the 80s. This means that the foundation mare raced in the ‘80s. She was a good mare who was put on breeding. In fact, many of our top-level horses have this format. The first successful Arab U.O and trotter mares of the ‘75s and ‘80s, were bred to Persik, or to these stallions of the time. And that’s how, today, we end up with strong genetics. So, even if we have*

*a low genetic line diversity, it’s still with mares that were tested at the time, anyway», explains Stéphane Chazel<sup>4</sup>, who adds saying that «for our mares, 4 or 5 of our mares come from the same maternal families». He takes as an example Biskra, 3 of whose offspring were in the top 12 of the CEI3\* at Monpazier, and cites «Mobrouka, who has produced a plethora of European and World Champions».*

He concludes by: «even on the lower lines, there are still same things that can be found».

**Christèle Derosch<sup>1</sup>** will talk about Melfenik, whose origins are not all known on his mother’s side: *«Persik + U.O mothers; it gave winners, exceptional champions!».*

**Guilherme Santos<sup>8</sup>** also agrees that maternal lines are crucial: *«Brazilians ask me to buy representatives of good maternal foundations stock. In France, they knew how to set up and develop real families of winners. In Brazil, there’s one*

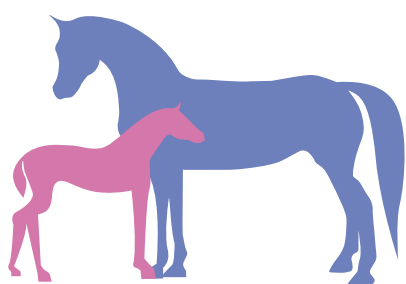
maternal family that's amazing. And when I talk to Brazilians, they're always surprised to see that the grandmother has produced a lot of good horses. People often buy a Sire's semen because he has a son who has won well. But when you're in the business, you look a little deeper into the origins, and you realize that's not quite how it works. There's the initial impact and then afterwards... That's why the mother is so important. It's like asking a wine lover if he prefers Bordeaux or Burgundy: it's a question that doesn't arise; there are other parameters to take into account».

**Guilherme Santos**<sup>8</sup> talks here about Klonica (whose grandfather is Aswan), who was imported to Brazil from Poland to produce Show horses: "but her foals were not beautiful. Klonica was retrained to endurance, and her value was expressed».

Nevertheless, there is one indisputable scientific parameter that explains why the mother is crucial: «in endurance, aerobic performance relies on mitochondria... which are transmitted by the mother. Endurance is probably the

discipline where this can have the most influence on the performance, and on the mind too: that's where the mare contributes most» explains **Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup>.

**Bruno Van Cauter**<sup>9</sup> also supports this view, providing additional information: «What makes maternal foundations is their mitochondrial DNA. And that's the difference. The mitochondrion is the organelle responsible for the cell's energy. The quality of the mitochondria transmitted by the mother determines the quality of the maternal foundation. Studies have even shown that the microbiota of a cyclist who wins the Tour de France is not the same as the one of a rider who wins a Paris-Roubaix. Microbiota could therefore also explain the quality of certain maternal foundations and show their impact on performance. Here we see the interest of what a young foal eats. A question can be raised: given that foals eat their mothers dungs on the meadow, couldn't we seed their guts by putting dung from mares recognized as great winners in their meadows, and thus increase their ability to recover, for example?».





# FRANCE: A LAND OF “PERFORMERS»?»?

**The equation, endurance horse + Causse = performance, is legendary. But a close look will reveal that it's not the only winning combination. For some, it is the large semi-extensive spaces that are important... and others think that foals raised in very large spaces do not receive the same care, are less close to human and that, as a result, good horses can go unnoticed or even miss out on their sporting career.**

**Who is right? No one does! Everyone has their own convictions and experiences.**

Christèle Derosch<sup>1</sup>, whose breeding is based south of the Causse du Larzac and operates on a semi-extensive basis, is well placed to talk about this: *«In France, there are terroirs that are ideal for breeding. There are some in Brittany, but many in the South. It requires space, semi-extensive land where the horses live in a herd, and you need to give them time to grow. We release the foals at 3 weeks to preserve the joints; too steep a terrain from birth can cause joint laxity. Hard ground is preferable to soft ground, and*

*a moderate slope means that the work can be done without too much intensity. Another advantage of the Causse is the altitude, which provides good oxygenation. We can see that his intrinsic metabolism is better than that of other horses. Our horses draw on all the natural good things present in the trace element-rich Causse grass. Limestone grounds also provide better bone density; this remains to be validated, but it's logical. Another indisputable fact: the mind. A horse raised in this way has character and is well-*



**«On these lands, the food is rich, based on very woody fodder.»**



balanced. He's better bred because he lives in a herd. And economically, it allows you to wait for the horses, as their care costs are lower. This gives them time to mature, and then go on to a successful career. But having horses bred like those of **Christian Quet**<sup>7</sup> (*Élevage du Barthas - ed.n*), means that the horses are used to being handled, especially when changing pasture: they behave better».

When **Christèle Derosch**<sup>1</sup> is asked whether her breeding conditions enhance the respiratory system, she explains that it's a combination of factors: «the respiratory system is innate through genetics, to which are added the benefits of attitude, slopes and the size of wild spaces, all of which provide better ventilation. Horses are on the move all day long: in the morning, to get into the rising sun, then they walk 1km to get into the shade, find water and finally seek out the setting sun».

And about the cardiac, her answer is clear: «the insane heart comes from the heritage more than the environment. But it's better acquired in a natural environment, because it's better anchored than obtained

artificially, as a general rule».

**Christèle Derosch**<sup>1</sup> also cites the Cabirat breeding farm, which is not in the Causses but in Dordogne, where Jean-Noël Lafaure breeds his horses in herds and in large open-spaces, and achieves very good results, «and he lets his horses taking time to grow», she adds.

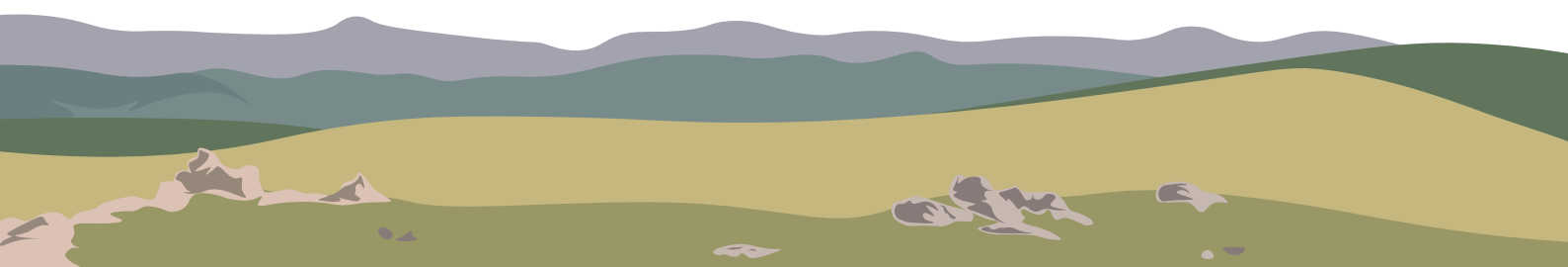
**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> takes a more pragmatic look at the previous testimony: «the UAE, like others, tried to breed in Normandy (because they had racehorses there). After 2 generations, the Purebred Arabians looked more like Thoroughbreds or Selle Français horses! They had lost the conformation and quality of the Purebred Arabian, and this very quickly. The UAE had their breeding farms in the Orne and ended up with horses with big, wide, flat feet like those of the Selle Français. We can see the importance of the environment; the effect of the environment is immediately apparent!».

## Why do the Causses remain the reference?

**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> explains that «when we talk about raising horses in the Causse (or in the South of France), we think about locomotion, joints and osteo-articular impact, but that's not all. This environment is very important because it also affects bone strength and tendons».

In fact, the impact on food is undeniable: «On these lands, the food is rich, based on very woody fodder. But there's still some cellulose left, because it's grass. With semi-extensive rearing, we can take the most of what the land has to offer over the long term. And that's interesting, because endurance racing takes place over long distances, and the horse has to be able to take advantage of the fodder it eats; that's what's going to enable him to use the fatty acids from the fodder to go further and longer in his effort. And that's not what you develop by feeding with cereals: it's not the right

La proprioception est très importante en endurance



*metabolic pathway! We know that it takes years to develop this metabolic pathway, whereas muscle develops in a matter of weeks or months. This fodder maintains the digestive flora (the microbiota) and develops thanks to what the horses will eat. They'll be better able to assimilate the fodder they're given during the race» she argues.*

**Céline Robert<sup>2</sup>** also notes that differences in soil, and therefore grass, influence the horse's physical condition: *«a priori, we don't find the same species of herbaceous plants in Normandy as in the Causses or in the South (where the grass is rather roasted). The soil is also different, which means that the minerals are different too».*

When asked if there are regions more predisposed to endurance horse breeding than others, she refers to old research: *«a small study compared the performance indices of horses according to their department and region of birth, but nothing came to light. For example, PACA was no better than the rest of France. But that doesn't mean there are no effects. I think the number of horses studied was too small (a few hundred). Besides, horses are born in one place and go somewhere else, and this is an effect that can explain part of the performance. I think that if we were to repeat this study with all the indicated endurance horses, we'd find an explanation. And let's not forget the historical specificities: Normandy = Jumping, Center = AQPS ... In my opinion, if we bred a Selle Français on the Causses, it would certainly have a hard time of it and won't be in good shape: he rather needs rich grass».*

**Céline Robert<sup>2</sup>** rightly points out that *«Arabian horses come from the South, from the desert, while sport horses come from northern Europe».*



## A global impact on the body

We have talked about bones, tendons, muscles and respiratory capacity, but what about the nervous system, and therefore pain resistance?

**Céline Robert<sup>2</sup>** provides a scientific opinion on the subject: *«We have relatively little data on the development of the nervous system and pain resistance. What we do know is that proprioception is very important in endurance: if the horse puts his foot down the wrong way, he needs to be able to pick himself up. This means that in very regular meadows, the horse won't be used to doing this, whereas in irregular,*

*stony terrain, he will get used to adapting himself to the ground».*

What about pain? *«There are no really objective studies on horses. But we do know that in human, to acquire resistance, you need to be confronted with pain, with a threshold effect that must not be exceeded. You need enough to learn to cope with it and set up a regulatory, inhibition loop, but not too much: we know that an intense painful experience will have negative effects on the subject, who will become more sensitive to pain. It is therefore highly likely that horses bred*

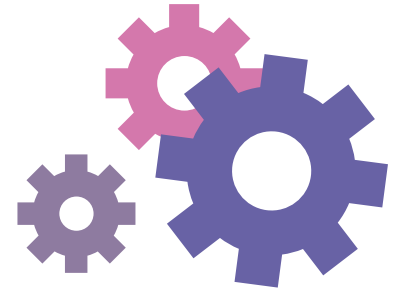


*in more difficult conditions, such as those of the Causses, will have a greater capacity to adapt».*

In short, raising a horse in a harsher climate with marked temperature variations strengthens the body? «What's certain is that raising them in a cocoon is not the right solution: it weakens them» concludes **Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup>.

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> disregards the notion of large or small spaces concerning the development: *“I think that bone and tendon capital develops in the same way as respiratory or cardiac muscle, and that, if you train properly from the outset, taking care, you can go a long way. We have horses that race in endurance when they are 18*

*or 20 years old. They still have integrity, and if they had any osteo-articular capital, it would already be depleted. And to perform well, a horse has to eat. As they get older, they go through phases where they are a little less well off. That is when they need to be supplemented. A horse's growth phase is like that of a teenager: he doesn't eat the same as an 80-year-old grandpa. It is the same for growing horses: they have to eat».*



## And the mind: can the environment also have an impact on it?

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**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> is convinced of it: «Yes, it affects the mind! Adaptation takes place locally: horse have fairly limited central control; his brain is small in relation to his size. He needs a lot of local adaptation (muscles, tendons). As for the pure mental aspect, a lifestyle like that the one in the Causses, will teach the horse to be calm (that's the difference with racehorses!). Horses in the Causses live outdoors, travelling long distances for long periods of time. They are face living conditions that can be unpleasant. So, they learn to calm down and cope with these conditions: just what we need during a race. What's more, they're raised in a group and have to learn to fend by themselves: a rider can't pay attention to his horse all the time, for 160km. In these conditions, real mental preparation takes place throughout the horse's early life».

real mental preparation takes place throughout the horse's early life



## Large spaces: all right, but...

**Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup> fully validates the benefits of semi-extensive breeding: «For me, the positive factor of this breeding system is the huge spaces! I'm sure that if we put a GPS on these foals, we'd see that they cover more than 10km a day! This may compensate for the fact that they're put to work a little later. By walking a lot, the foal toughens him up. The sloping ground doesn't

necessarily matter: it's the size of the paddocks that counts. As for me, my horses go for aestivation on the Causses. I bought a 150-hectare park in one piece where I put 10 fillies».

**Christian Quet**<sup>7</sup> sees another, more «medical» interest: «In France, we're lucky enough to have large spaces, so we can avoid problems like OCD, etc. Horses that walk in a

park are necessarily better off than those who live in small paddocks or boxes. Horses who walk in a 100-hectare park are necessarily better than those who live in small paddocks or stalls; their tendons and fetlocks are strengthened: everything is better; it's not the same horse at all!».

When asked about his breeding method, everything looks well



structured: «I have 2 properties. In Aveyron, I have 38 hectares of fairly rich land, and in Lot, I have almost 100 hectares of moorlands. I alternate between the 2, because if I leave the horses in Aveyron, their feet get bigger, while in Lot they shrink, the cannon bone increases, and so on. I play with these 2 places to obtain the

best possible morphology. But from 6 months to 2-year-old, I give them a ration with mineral supplements every winter».

And when asked if there's an ideal paddock size? The answer is clear: «1 horse per hectare is perfect! With this surface area, the horse is autonomous. A horse who lives in a herd builds

its character without human impregnation: he doesn't need us for that».

**Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup> is a little more moderate about very large space: «I've worked with a lot of breeders: Persikland, Haras de la Majorie, l'Élevage du Barthas which all are different types of breeding: I've

had success with all of them. Personally, I prefer smaller spaces, with individualized management. This limits the breakage, because we can take care of the horses every day. For me, it's very important to have an accurate follow-up, to provide care, to check the foals' legs conformation, to be able to easily estimate their general condition. My horses are in parks of 1 to 3 hectares. They are supplemented as needed and eat Crau hay... I live nearby. All this allows them to maintain a stable weight. They stay outside all the time, even in winter (we're lucky enough to have dry winter) and I give them extra rations».

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> also agrees, but give other reasons: "We have to make do with what we have! But as for me, I am in a corn-growing region (Pays de Tarbes- Haute Bigorre - ed.n) where the square meter is worth its weight in gold, so I have smaller surfaces. Having said that, large surfaces are all very well, but there are times when you cannot go and see the horses every day. In fact, smaller spaces limit the number of small injuries, unlike large parks where, as a result, it takes longer to care for them and you end up with small wounds all over them. But it is natural selection: those who don't get hurt and get out of there, make very good horses. But after that, it depends on the quality-price ratio you want and the quantity you want at the strong level; it is always the same».

While there are no measuring tools to demonstrate the impact of a horse's environment on its physical condition, **Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> suspects that there are: «it's very difficult to show that respiratory capacity increases with training and



© Pixabay



**1 horse per hectare is perfect!**



work, but we know intuitively that it will play a role, just as it will on the immune system. Respiration also takes place in the tissues, and is carried out locally by the mitochondria (cf. And where do moms fit in? - ed.n). And this, on the other hand, we know very well that being constantly on the move, walking, will develop respiration at the muscular level in particular. The use of oxygen in the muscles, and therefore this aerobic capacity, this is what we need for endurance. Tissue oxygenation, generally speaking, over a low but constant effort over time, improves tissue quality for years to come. This is why 4-year-old horses often start out in training and are then put back outside again. At 5, they generally spend half the year outdoors».

# 3

# IT IS ALWAYS THE IMPATIENCE TO WIN WHICH MAKES YOU LOSE

(Louis XIV)

We've talked about genetics, environment and feed, but there is another parameter that can't be ignored: the preparation of young horses. The way they are prepared will influence their endurance sporting career: that is a given. And there's food for thought, as there are 2 opposing modes: those who prefer to take more time, and those who advocate starting work at an early age. To wait or not to wait for the horses: that is the question...

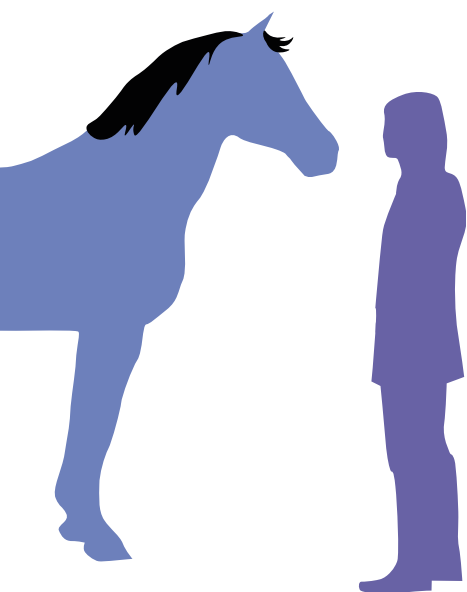
## Waiting for horses: a good idea or not such a good one?

Christèle Derosch<sup>1</sup> gives foals time to mature: «Presenting 3-year-old horses at Modèles & Allures competitions implies that they have to be taught to walk, that they have to be supplemented: their achievements are therefore artificial, and I don't agree. Breeding horses in a herd is less expensive, which means you can wait for them longer and let them mature. A young horse who lives up to 5 or 6-year-old in a herd will build a character and a physical in line with the longevity of its sporting career».

Christian Quet<sup>7</sup> is also one of those who prefer to wait: «From my point of view, presenting a horse at the age of 4 is total heresy! As far as I'm concerned, it's very simple: a horse has joint capital when he's born. And if you tap into that capital until he's 7 and a half or 8, he won't have any left after that. If you strengthen it up to that point, then you have the best. I'm not in favor of breaking horses in his 3-year old: the end of their 4-year old year is good. Then they quietly go through their 5-year old year, and when they qualify for the 60km, you either go to the final or you don't, and then you leave them in peace!. In my opinion, at 6 years old, the horse does his 2 80km

aces, quietly, and at the end of the year of 6-year-old, he does a CEI1\* at the same speed as he did his 80km. And the horse is ready, he is qualified and his health maintained. It's like the World Championship for Young Horses: even if it's been moved up to 8-year-old, it's better, but the distance is still too long». To enhance his horses, Christian Quet<sup>7</sup> works with French and Italian riders. The breeder entrusts them with his horses at the age of 5, and they exchange ideas, on how to work them, when to wait for them, etc. «this year, my horses, at 5 years old, they do 20, 40, 60, and so on. And at 6 years old, they do 2 x 80km and if they're up to it, they'll do a CEI1\* at Durance or Vaylats. But at a moderate speed, just to qualify».

As breeding is also a matter of business, horses are usually sold between the ages of 5 and 6 «because this is when they're most valuable. But I also keep some for pleasure, like Camchatka and Carma du Barthas, and I will breed them». Stéphane Chazel<sup>4</sup> is part of the «young horses at work!» team and appreciates the S.H.F \* system: «We're on regulated speed races, we don't faster than 15 -16km/h: it's very instructive. As far as I'm concerned, it's work, not



competition, because there are no rankings. It's education. On the other hand, I'd lower the speeds and increase the distances. For the 5-year-old final, I'd set 80km, but limited to 15km/h.

In my opinion, the later a horse starts working, the more difficult it is to fit him into a mold. When I say work, I mean conditioning, education. We attack them too late. I take young horses out 1 or 2 times a week, for walking, for 3 hours: they work earlier but without competition. And then there's the economic reality to take into account: at some point, you have to count!».

“We have a preparation circuit that works in steps. They are what they are, and these are obligations. I don't think the horses are any worse off because of the qualifications system.

In fact, I think the horses that make it to 160km are really ready to run that distance. Before, there are all the gradation by 20km increments. Obviously, that multiplies the races and the kilometers, but if you don't put any speed into it, there's no problem doing that. So, it's the speed that's

**working a young horse is not a problem, as long as the work is well done and respects the horse's natural evolution**

the problem, not the distance», explains **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup>. He argues that “some people rack their brains to find out what to change in their training to go faster: often, you don't have to change anything! You just have to wait for the horse to mature, and it happens naturally».

He also points to the economic reality of breeding: “Everything costs so much! But if you hurry and rush the horse, it's no good. If the horse doesn't hold up, it'll cost a lot more and it'll be counter-productive: it'll be worse!». As a result, working a young horse is not a problem, as long as the work is well done and respects the horse's natural evolution, as **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> explains: “Some people have stopped the 4-year-old circuit because it was supposedly too early. We're the only discipline that

starts horses at 5! There are some who start at 4 and they're doing well. In fact, working a horse at 4 triggers it. But it has to be done well; it's always the same. But what's really important is rest. It's an integral part of preparation, of the horse's growth phases. When a breeder or rider sees a horse deteriorate a little when he rides him, often this is because he's still growing; it's urgent to do nothing and respect this growth period. After that, you start all over again, reducing the workload if necessary, and so on. I don't see why we should be the only discipline to ride horses once a week from time to time, and then on Sundays, jump on their back and go! We're seeing more and more horses who, at the age of 6, haven't done anything yet, and who ride the scales during the year. They're broken in during the winter and off they go, doing 20, 40, 60km and 2 races of 80km, or even a CEI\* at the end of the year; I think this is harmful for the horse and his career, and the qualification circuit is long. But if you ride a horse when he's 4, and he does 20 or even 40km when he's 5, then 60km when he's 6, then 2 races of 80km when he's 7: he's ready for a 1-star race without any problems. That's why I think it was a mistake to hold the Young Horse World Championship at 8 years old and keep the same distance: I would have set 140km at 8 years old, and I think we'd have something good there».



**Jean-Philippe Francès<sup>5</sup>** manages his horses' careers according to his organization: *«I break my horses in at the end of their 4th year, but more for reasons of work organization. Before that, I don't have much time to work them. They do their first race at 5-year-old, 20, 40, 60 km, sometimes 2 races of 60km».*

He's not very active on the S.H.F\* circuit, even though he's already had some good results there: *«Breeding is more Sabrina's job (Arnold - ed.). We go to Uzès to show ourselves and we've had some great performances at 6-year-old: once 1st and once 2nd. But I think it's good to wait for the horses and listen to them. Unfortunately, there's a lot of pressure from the FEI to qualify them. The system is too long, too complicated and pushes riders to increase the number of races. The FEI has opened the door with the CEI1\* (100km): this creates speed tests. Horses aged 6 and 7 years old go very fast: there's a lot of waste. Horses who go fast when they're young are weakened. After that, we earn our living on selling horses qualified for CEI1\*... We have to train horses for performance, without damaging their mental and metabolic systems, because that leaves physical and psychological scars «.*

And what does our vet **Céline Robert<sup>2</sup>** think about this? Her view is different from the one of a breeder or a rider: *«There are a lot of critics of the Young Horses circuit, whatever the discipline, because we're racing babies. But I think it's really part of their education to start racing when they're young, to gradually get them used to it. When a human athlete participates at the Olympic Games, he hasn't started*

*training at 18 years old; he's started at 8! The same goes for a horse: he has to compete in its age category. We're lucky to have clearly identified circuits for young horses».*

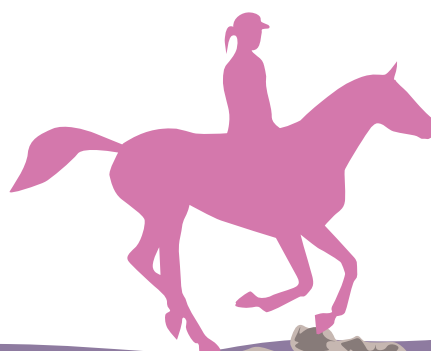
Logically, when asked about the change in the age of the Young Horse World Championship, the answer is clear: *«a World Championship at the age of 7 was not an aberration because, in France, they had started to do 4-year-old, 6-year-old, then 7-year-old, progressively on limited-speed races. They can reach the age of 7 being properly prepared and without having raced too much, and without having done anything and everything... which is not the case in all countries .... We are in phase with the S.H.F\*».*

So why had the Championship been changed by raising the selection age to 8 years old? *«I'm not sure it's based on very reliable scientific bases. It's more a matter of image: we're not going to make very young horses run a long distance, with the risk, for certain countries (this isn't true for France!), of considering this Championship as THE race of the horse's life.*

*In fact, it all depends on your objective: is it a stage in the horse's life, or is it a goal in itself?*

*And that's the problem with some nations and some riders! I think that's why the age has been increased, because we all know that for some people, it's a "make or break"...».*

**Jean-Philippe Francès<sup>5</sup>** shares this point of view: *«I was an absolute fan of the World Championships for 7-year-olds at Compiègne, even if it was discredited. The Championships at Compiègne, Nègrelisse and Samorin were very good. The ideal thing is to ride on this type of track. Compiègne was the flagship event of the year, the selection of horses was relevant, made by Pierre Cazes (the man with 32 medals with the French endurance team - ed.n) and reserved for experienced riders (3\*). It was the best track in France and in Europe. For me, whether you're 7-year-old or 8, there's no difference. By regulating your speed, you protect your horse: it's the riders who need to be educated! Excessive speed is counterproductive».*



## A passageway between racehorses and endurance horses: good or not good?

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Some endurance horses come from the racing sector, and it's debatable whether this is a good strategy. Here again, opinions vary.

From her own experience, **Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> provides an enlightened observation: «depending on their abilities, horses with more aptitude for endurance were put into racing, or vice versa. They accumulate injuries during their training and racing periods, and end up with metabolic and osteo-articular damage. These are horses at risk of fragility, but that hasn't been proven».

**Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup> gives a counterexample: «I'm also a racehorse breeder. I was lucky enough to breed a horse that was the best racehorse in the Emirates for 2 years. His name was Pony Express, the first Tidjani's to succeed at a very high level. Basically, I didn't breed an endurance horse, but a racehorse. He went into training at 3, 4-year-old ... and was retired from racing at the age of 6. He had a year's rest and then went on to endurance racing. This horse won 6 160km races, including the Maktoum Cup!».

An exception or a rule? «I don't know» replies **Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup>, «I have another one who last year won 3 races in the Emirates in the same season. Likewise, he's a racehorse. That's why I wonder whether, in endurance racing, we don't put our horses to work too late. Take the example of the world's best



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*ultratrailer, Kilian Jornet: he grew up at 3000m altitude and at the age of 5, he climbed his first 3000m peak. This is what makes me think that a young organism is more malleable than an older one: the margin for progression brought about by work is greater in a young organism than in an older one. Then there's the limiting factor of wear and tear on joints and tendons...».*

The other argument put forward is that «flat racehorses run on good ground, with very little weight on, and therefore have fewer traumas in their young career. To put it in the context of endurance racing, Claude Lux, in the Ardèche, used to break his horses in at the age of 2 and a half year-old. I'm not saying that he made them do endurance, but they got into a certain conditioning, a working mechanics».

And **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup> won't disagree: «At the 2011 European Championships in Florac, Sabrina (Arnold - ed.n) came 2nd (behind Maria Alvarez Ponton & Noby), with Beau Ox (or Beau 36 - ed.n), a German racehorse. The big difference between racehorses and endurance horses is that racehorses are raised in stalls and artificially grown up».

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup>, for his

part, disagrees: «How long has it been since you've seen a Purebred or a retired racehorse shine on a 120 or 160km podium? And fortunately for the genetics of French breeders! Originally, retired horses weren't made for that: they gave a second life to those who weren't fast enough in flat races. But that wasn't their primary objective at all. The pity is that there have been abuses with the horses. The system was perverted, and all of a sudden, we saw people buying reformed racehorses for €3,000 in February and selling them for €35,000 in October! But it's been a long time since a reformed racehorse won a 7-year-old. So, one out of 2,250 births a year still is an exception».

## The SHF circuit, an asset for some...

For some, it's an undeniable plus in terms of valorization, while for others, like **Christèle Derosch**<sup>1</sup> «it's incompatible with the longevity of a horse's sporting career to wish to follow the Young Horses cycles».

**Christian Quet**<sup>7</sup> agrees, although he acknowledges that «this circuit was fantastic until 2 or 3 years ago. And in my opinion, that's what allowed breeding to express itself. Today, the mentality has changed: the commercial aspect predominates over the horse training aspect that the circuit used to have. Putting a fast-line on the vet-gate leads to crazy vets, even for 5-year-old! This clearly shows that the purpose is no longer the same. I think that horses' welfare and their making have now been forgotten. There's less respect for horses».

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> partly agrees with **Christian Quet**<sup>7</sup>: «A trainer's job is to build the horse. The problem is that we don't build horses anymore: they have to be good right away. Very, very quickly. And that's why we miss out on them. I think we used to build horses very well. We had a great S.H.F\* circuit and so I haven't been going to Uzès for 2 or 3 years. I think we've forgotten something essential: if you build solid foundations, the house can go up high and it will be solid. If you build a paper foundation, it won't hold».

To be precise, the problem lies to the finals: «For the finals, under the pretext of elitism, we ask people to over-prepare young horses and start showing them things they shouldn't see at that age. Young horses are no longer worked as they should



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be. Otherwise, you'd have to train them all in the same place at the same time, or even in the same way, and then you'd be able to select them. But as things stand now, we're going against the S.H.F\*'s initial idea. Where it differs, is on the subject of the fast-line; he even makes a suggestion: «Putting a fast line is not shocking because you can educate young horses. It makes them jump into the deep end, so they can discover what it's like. But then again, it's always the same: it all depends on why you're doing the fast-line: if it's in a calm environment to educate the horse, or if it's to get into the vet very quickly. It's not at all the same goal and the same consequences».

So, the fast-line isn't necessarily made for going fast? **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup>'s opinion is more practical: «Above all, it allows to clear the refreshment area with 1,000-litres basins, which are much less dangerous than a whole slew of little buckets stuck together. If a horse gets spooked and crosses everything, it's a disaster. What's wrong with the fast line is that all the bins are stuck together. 1 out of 2

should be removed and there should be clearance lanes at the right and left. That way, if a horse gets spooked, it won't take everyone with it. Today, it can take anyone ...».

The National coach really regrets what was done a few years ago: «Visitor numbers at Uzès are falling, and since the Covid there's been less business. Moreover, the S.H.F\*'s new policy will only lead to further decline. Afterwards, maybe it will prove its worth, maybe in 10 years we'll say, «if we hadn't done that in Uzès ...». I think it's typically French: we had a system that worked, that was well oiled, that was great, and we change it. But why change something that's working well? Our circuit was better than it is, that's for sure». However, **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> recognizes that not everything has to be thrown away: «What's really nice is that when a horse starts on an S.H.F\* day, he'll only find horses of his generation, with the same objective, so he won't be overtaken by free speeds. That's really important. Above all, the fact that it's categorized means that if a horse is a bit tense or delicate in the first few races, he won't be



*scared, because if he's scared once, it's all over. I think the circuit as it stands encourages breeders and riders to do a good job. After that, there will always be those who try to leapfrog the stages ...».*

So, this S.H.F\* circuit is one of the elements that made the reputation of French breeding and brought a big plus in French performances? *“Exactly»* replies **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> *“Big foreign stables such as Juma Punti and others, used to train horses in France to have access to this production system».*

This circuit had another important benefit: it was a way to amortize the caring cost the horses: *“The business was lucrative, and it enabled a horse to pay for his season, not his training season, but if he was good, it paid for his entries and the diesel to go racing; it's something»*, argues **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup>. *“There were years when there were 700 4, 5 and 6-year old horses in the same place on the 2nd weekend in October; that was quite exceptional! Anyone who wanted to buy a horse, including the French, because there were people selling top-level horses, came to do their business at Uzès. I don't think they do that anymore».*

From her position, **Marion Wasilewski**<sup>3</sup> confirms this attraction for the event: *«Bahrain is very attached to Uzès. Every year, they buy 2 or 3 horses. In 2020, we bought Fizz Fageole, on the first loop of the Championship, because he had an exceptional heart; he ended up winning the 5-year-old Championship. We believe in him very much. This horse did the whole S.H.F\* circuit with Sandrine Foiry, to whom he was entrusted».*

## When a horse starts on an S.H.F\* day, he'll only find horses of his generation, with the same objective

To explain his feelings on this circuit, **Guilherme Santos**<sup>8</sup> shares his experience when he came in France to train: *«In 1996, I came to work with U.N.I.C\*\*. They offered me an internship program that included a phase with the S.H.F\*. I began my training as a judge. When I returned to*

*there's a system that gives them a framework and an access to a lot of information (stallions, bloodlines)».*

This is confirmed by **Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup>: *«The S.H.F\* circuit is another factor for success; it's a real plus in the making of our horses».*

But, one question remains: is this circuit really incompatible with the longevity, the well-being of the horses? The results would suggest not: all recent World Champions have taken part in the S.H.F\* circuit.



*Brazil in 1997, I went on being a NEP judge for the S.H.F\* until 2000. I did all the Interregional shows and the Grande Semaine de Fontainebleau. The S.H.F\* endurance circuit is a good training tool for horses aged 4 to 6-year-old. This system is formative and protects them while enabling them to evolve. Moreover, many countries are trying to copy this system because they see that it works in France, which produces horses for the whole world! It also enables young breeders to make fewer mistakes, because*

# 4

## IS THE “FRENCH TOUCH» THE MYSTERY INGREDIENT?

**Sorry for disappointing some: there is no magic formula, no big secret.**

Even if **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> does say the word: «What's most important is that the horse eats enough throughout its life, that it has no deficiencies, and that's the secret, I think. They're sport horses like any other, they're endurance horses, they don't become good by starving to death, by learning to suffer; that was 30 years ago, and it was a beautiful «cretinism» (word replaced to remain polite! - ed.n)».

### An inexhaustible genetic reservoir?

We could be tempted to say yes, so big is the production and so great is the quality. But the experts we interviewed seem more moderate.

**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> brought one point up relating to breeding and Persik: «In France, we have 700 registered Arabian stallions for 2,500 mares. We have 2,250 foals/year. Why so many stallions? Because Arabian horse is brave, so we don't neuter him, which means that each one will cover 2 or 3 mares. But it's also understandable because Arabian horse breeding is a long-term activity and isn't an insane profitability. We try to

*do what we can, but this goes against selection. Conversely, this is when we find Persik, who probably had very good endurance abilities and aptitudes, and was therefore used a lot».*

### So, is Persik unrivalled?

Persik is and will remain the absolute reference in endurance, but as **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup> says, “Persik's sons are all over 20 years old, and so are his broodmares. It is necessary to recreate a broodmare band («responsible» for 75% of the foals' quality). In fact, even if Persik is still indisputable, we must pay attention to the new generations of offspring, because we're moving further and further away from the mother-stock foundation: we have restricted genetics in France, and it's

*where we produce the most. Nevertheless, Persik remains the absolute reference today. I am co-owner of Baltik des Ors with Christian Manoha (Haras la Majorie - ed.n) and he is the best father by Persik: this year alone, he has a son, Darco la Majorie, who is World Champion, and a daughter, Raya de Jalima, European Champion.*

*But there's another stallion who is very good: Zulus. And for me, the Persik + Zulus combination is ultra-performing! (ex : Darco la Majorie, Bolt de Venelles ... - ed.n)».*

A sentiment entirely shared by **Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup>: «Zulus was rented by the Haras Nationaux (from 1985 to 1988 - ed.n). He was an extraordinary Sire! Today, the best stallions are from Zulus. I even think he has a better rate of success than Persik because he only spent 2 covering seasons in France and left a plethora of stallions and mares. This Persik & Zulus crossing is fantastic!».

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> feels the same thing about Zulus: “He's bred very little, so if we'd done the same with Zulus, we might have had even better results. In terms of the number of covering, he's superior to Persik. Of course, the Persik-Zulus cross works well, and Zulus-Persik in the other direction also works well».

**Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup> also wishes to remind that «we must not forget the Franco-Maghrebin



origins», because in his opinion, «the best lineages we have in France come from Tunisia. In Monpazier, 3 of the top 5 horses come from this low foundation stock».

**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> also points out that «Persik's latest offspring were born in 2000: they're 23 years old. In competition, we're more on Persik grandsons, great-grandsons and granddaughters. But the Persik effect is still there!».

## The French know-how

It is a combination of ingredients and features that have made French endurance horses so renowned for their quality and performance at the highest level. It is also the result of almost 50 years of research, work and experience, and as **Christèle Derosch**<sup>1</sup> so rightly says, «it's empirical: we observe our mistakes, we correct them and we improve».

But there is one element that everyone recognizes: the French know-how.

*«If I chose to come to France to learn, it's because in France, there's a culture of breeding, training and trade. I saw breeders, professionals and all the organizations that gravitated around competitions. This made it possible to collect results, data and make statistics on lineages to see what worked and what didn't. In France, there's a history of everything that's happened. Articles and books are written, so there are more opportunities to learn and understand: I don't think any other country does this like France. It's a world of enthusiasts who are very*



*interested in the origins, who follow the races at trackside: I've never seen anything like it! This is part of the French culture: breeders are true professionals, with a feeling and who want to improve breeding; they're looking for solutions»* explains **Guilherme Santos**<sup>8</sup> enthusiastically.

*«We have a real equestrian culture in France, and this is what sets us apart from other countries»* adds **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup>.

**Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup> points out 2 criteria that set us apart from other countries: «First of all, right from the beginning, in the '75s, when the first endurance races were launched, we had a breeding program that was associated at the time with 2 major institutions: the Haras Nationaux, which were involved in buying stallions, and where people offered their stallions. Then, of course, there's the Parc des Cévennes and the

*Gévaudan Breeders Union, created in 1975. And all this at a time when other countries were just starting out in endurance racing, using scraps from other disciplines, without thinking ahead in terms of genetics. For me, that's why we're 20 years ahead of the countries that got into the sport after the '2000s and the price boom in the Gulf countries. And the 2nd criterion is our sensitivity to horses which enables us to take our horses further. For the preparation, we protect them more: that's the French spirit! Moreover, in France, we have a huge selection potential, and other countries don't do that, or do not so well. At the World Youth Championships in Castelsagrat, half of the horses had more than 5 generations of 2 endurance horses: that's what we call genetic progress».*

For **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup>, what elevates French endurance to another level is very clear: «I think that what made the

*difference in the long term was above all the heritage of the Haras Nationaux and the fact that everyone could have, at public price, a covering from a very good stallion selected by the Haras at the time. The stallions rotated, and there were Haras stations all over the place. Everyone was at maximum 1 hour away from a stud station, where a quality pure-bred Arabian passed through once a year, or even stayed for 2 years. And I think that was the best thing after the Cévennes National park, which bought Persik. It was also very good for French breeding».*

Undoubtedly, one of the major decisions that gave French endurance racing its lead, was the creation, from the very start, of an endurance sector, with a selection of horses geared towards this discipline: *«it's a real strength to have a breeding sector geared towards endurance and independent, in most cases, from the flat racing sector. Producing pure endurance horses is a real asset. Moreover, we are on a long-term strategy, a career strategy, an image strategy, a performance strategy: perhaps*

*that's why French horses are so good and high-demanded. We know how to wait for them, and they have a reputation for being resistant horses»* explains **Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup>.

**Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup> is well aware of *«how lucky we are, in France, to have had this motion at the right time, in the right place: endurance was born with Persik. The fact that the discipline is well established in Europe means that we can produce and conserve maternal and paternal genetics».*

**Bruno Van Cauter**<sup>9</sup> sums up the situation with this metaphor: *«the stars were properly aligned!*

The professionalization of endurance racing has also enabled France to become the leading showcase for the Gulf countries, which are looking for very good horses, often turnkey horses. Petrodollars have enabled many breeders to keep their mares and thus growing.

*“25 years ago, when Sheikh Mohammed (bin Rashid Al Maktoum - ed.n) arrived in*

*France, he bought all the good horses that shone in the championships. Because at the time, it was the French team that shone in the championships. He injected colossal sums of money. As a result, people have become more professional, something that didn't exist before. And when you become professional, you do things properly. There are very good horses in other countries too, but thanks to a real selection process, I think we're very, very far ahead in terms of selection, that's the main thing »* explains **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup>, who adds that the arrival of the Gulf countries also has had an impact on breeders lives and the quality of their breeding : *« as the price of horses has risen ten-fold, but their cost price has remained the same, breeders have done things better : regular deworming, vitamin cures given at the right time. They were able to do this because they had money. Some people see the arrival of the Emirates etc. as the fox in the henhouse, but I think it's a very good thing and that it's enabled people to make a living, breeders to structure themselves, buy genetics and*

**in France, we have a huge selection potential**



take good covers. They were more expensive, but they knew they were going to get a return on their investment. I think that was a big trigger. We already had a solid base thanks to the Haras Nationaux. We had the tools with the existing breeding, the Haras and the S.H.F\*, so it was easy

to adapt. I think that without the Emirates, we'd still be in the 90's and 95's, and endurance would be an outdoor sport. Maybe we'd be going slower, because they've shown us that we can go faster, but without them, the discipline wouldn't have evolved as quickly as it has».

Nevertheless, he qualifies his words somewhat: "due to the influence of the Gulf countries, where speed and cardio were the most important factors, we produced horses with tremendous gallop and exceptional hearts, but we set our rusticity aside. But we have to meet the demand, and it's always better to have horses that go fast than horses that go at 12km per hour. I don't have the solution, but careful "horse builders» make horses that last, but we've focused our breeding too much on these criteria, forgetting solidity».

As **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup> rightly said, «professionalization isn't just a question of skills. The horses also had to be bred in the right place».

For him, those who believed in Zulus took the lead. He adds that «horses who are well trained, well structured, progressively, are horses who are ready to perform».



## French-style work

This know-how is fully expressed in breeding, but it is even more convincing in the way the horses are worked. It confirms, if proof was needed, that to succeed, you need good, adapted work.

«There's no standard model to become a champion, and there's no such thing as an exact science, which is even truer in endurance racing» affirms **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup>.

Amused, he admits that a horse doesn't have to be an Apollo to succeed: «If you see Tarzibus in the park, he looks half like a Haflinger! He's not athletic at all. He doesn't have a good gallop, it's laborious, but he's the fastest in Europe. Secret de Mon Coeur, when not at work, is more like a strolling Camargue horse!»

Work makes all the difference...

For **Guilherme Santos**<sup>8</sup>, «the quality of the man is essential because some people have more ability and feeling than others. You have to understand what's going on with animals that are different from each other. And that can change everything! The same conditions, the same breeding atmosphere with 2 or 3 different people will produce a different horse. But basically, you still need to have a good stock-foundation to make a champion, even if there are exceptions. As soon as you have a good stock-foundation, the system improves. As soon as the system improves, you can see when a strain isn't so good. A good system can always improve a horse, but people who don't have the knowledge will miss out on good horses».

**Céline Robert**<sup>2</sup> points out

another element: «One specificity that we have in France, and to my knowledge, there is no equivalent (even if some things are close), is this performance index (IRE) and genetic system (BLUP) that is now used in endurance. It's not perfect, but it's a help for breeders who know how to use these indexes. They know it's far from the Holy Grail, but it does exist».

Work makes all the difference



## A model that works

Marion Wasilewski<sup>3</sup> is in the very heart of this system, buying horses for Bahrain: «for a few years now, they've been buying a lot of horses on origins only (without worrying about the size). 2 and 3-year-old and even 1-year-old. After their purchase, they stay in France, at the breeding, to be worked on by French trainers until their first 120km. That's what we've been doing for the last few years, and we're realizing that it's really ideal because the performances are there. Darco la Majorie, for example, we bought him when he was young and left him with Sandrine Foiry until he qualified for 120km. Sandrine took did everything slowly. Before, Bahrain was always eager to see its horses win: they couldn't wait. This year, I had different orders: go slowly, preserve them. They've noticed that when they get back horses who have evolved gradually, they can manage to get them to perform, and they can give them speed. They tried to head for flat-races bloodlines and tried to breed them by themselves, but it didn't work and it wasn't economically viable».

Bahrain diversifies by buying ready-made horses such as Be Goode, Ermine Dartagnan, Bolt de Venelles, Calandria PH, Lola de Jalima...

«At the end of each season, the horses already qualified for the 120, go to be ridden by Bahraini riders. Involved in the management of the horses and very attached to French breeding via the classic Persik strain which works very well, Sheikh Nasser (bin Hamad al Khalifa - ed.n) has also taken



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on board the fact that, in addition to the ability to breed good horses, France also has trainers who know how to take horses to performance. He therefore relies on the expertise of 4 trainers based in France: Sandrine Foiry, Elisabeth Hardy, Pierre Auffret and **Jean-Philippe Francès**<sup>5</sup>»

Another new feature is the distinction now made between the winter season in the Gulf and the summer season in Europe: «they are aware that you can't do both seasons with the same horses. As a result, Bolt de Venelles will stay in France this winter» explains **Marion Wasilewski**<sup>3</sup>.

As for **Bruno Van Cauter**<sup>9</sup>, he sees France «as a big reservoir where the great breeders will have to come to find what will enable them to produce very good endurance horses».

**Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> felt to highlight another French feature that deserves greater success: «the FFE has proposed the Top 7, but it's struggling to get off the ground. There's

still €10,000 to be shared each year. It's run on a CEI\* and the last winners have done well afterwards, like Lola de Jalima who is Champion of the 8-year-old!».

And what would it take for this challenge to take off? «It's typically French: until you see that it's working well, it takes time. Or you'd need a €100,000 prize, and then the Top 7 would be interested. But €10,000 is obviously not attractive. And yet, it's still an opportunity to have an S.H.F\* circuit (as it was) and the Top 7, which the others don't have! If anyone has the magic formula or any wishes, we're ready to listen!».

When asked whether French horses are attractive, particularly to Gulf countries because they are easy to ride, **Jean-Michel Grimal**<sup>6</sup> gives his vision of the situation: «Their choices are based on genetics. There's no place for hysterical horses. So, of course, when the work is well done, the horse feels better. But I think the choice is made more on origins and performance.

*They buy more turnkey horses that have already started out, and less very young horses. They're looking for horses that have already run 120km and/or ready to run in CEI1\*. After that, there's also a small trade in very high-level horses».*

However, **Stéphane Chazel**<sup>4</sup> warns about the future of the discipline and consequently of breeding: *«If we don't go back to what Pierre Cazès defended, that is fundamental endurance, that means 160km races, technical races, where our horses are very good, and if we move towards faster races, or even shorter formats (100km), we'll lose the genetics we've*

*acquired over the years: to go faster, we'll have to use Tidjani or Anglo-arabian blood».*

The final word goes to Brazil with **Guilherme Santos**<sup>8</sup>'s voice: *«I'm a great admirer of what's being done in France! In France, there are good horses, ridden by good riders and running in nice races. There's a very good level of selection and the results are there. France can still remain dominant for a while yet...».*

It's clear: French endurance, as a whole, still has many fine years ahead of it, but we must remain vigilant and anticipate what's to come, so as not

to squander all these fine cartridges that enable us to aim high.

The supremacy of French breeding has been established, but let's make sure it will last for a long time to come...





# PRÉSENTATION DES EXPERTS

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- 1) **Christèle Derosch** : talented breeder of horses (affix Larzac) ... and camels.
  - 2) **Céline Robert** : veterinarian, professor at the Alfort Veterinary School, co-director of the GenEndurance project, author of the precious guide “Le cheval athlète d’endurance”.
  - 3) **Marion Wasilewski** : tenacious international endurance rider, buyer for the Kingdom of Bahrain for 15 years and manager for the entire France part.
  - 4) **Stéphane Chazel** : President of the Arabian Horse Association, International Endurance rider, Tevis Cup competitor at 15, endurance trainer, breeder of endurance and racing horses (affix Hipolyte).
  - 5) **Jean-Philippe Francès** : international Endurance rider with multiple medals, skillful horse upgrader.
  - 6) **Jean-Michel Grimal** : French national team coach, international rider, 3rd of the Tom Quilty Gold Cup, qualified farrier and breeder of endurance horses (affix Dartagnan).
  - 7) **Christian Quet** : riding instructor, enlightened and passionate breeder, grower of winners (affix of Barthas)
  - 8) **Guilherme Santos** : veterinarian in Confederação Brasileira de Hipismo, technical referent of the Brazilian endurance team, successful importer of sports horses (show jumping, dressage, eventing, endurance), FEI level 4 endurance veterinarian.
  - 9) **Bruno Van Cauter** : veterinarian, teacher, author of various publications, osteopath trained by the master of the equine osteopathy Dominique Giniaux. FEI level 3 endurance veterinarian and treating all disciplines, and endurance trainer.
- \* **SHF / Société Hippique Française** is a french association dedicated to young horses (breeding and training). The SHF brings together all the stakeholders involved in the breeding, development, marketing and sales of sport horses and ponies. One of the SHF’s objectives is to select and prepare horses for high-level competition. For that, the SHF holds national championships for 4, 5 and 6 years old.
- \*\* **UNIC / Union Nationale Interprofessionnelle du Cheval** was an association dedicated to promote french horse industry in the world.



# 2023: FIGURES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES!

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## World Championship - Boutheib (UAE):

By team:

- Gold: France with 5/5 French horses
- Silver: Portugal with 3/5 French horses
- Bronze: Italy with 1/5 French horses

Individually:

- 11 horses out of the first 15 are French horses



## World Championship for Young Horses - Padise (Estonia):

- 19/42 horses at the start were French
- 1 Bronze medalist
- 4 French horses in the Top Ten



## Young Rider & Juniors World Championship - Castelsagrat (France):

By team:

- Gold: Bahrain = 5/5 French horses
- Silver: France = 5/5 French horses
- Bronze: Italy = 2/5 French horses

Individually:

- 9/16 French horses



## European Championship - Ermelo (Netherlands):

By team:

- Gold: France = 5/5 French horses
- Silver: Spain = 3/5 French horses
- Bronze: Germany = 2/3 French horses

Individually:

- 3 French horses in the first 2 places
- 13 French horses in the top 15