

New Directions in Stallion Performance Testing

The Advanced 10-day Test makes its debut.

By Kyle Karnosh

Think of warmblood stallion performance testing and chances are the first thing that comes to mind is the 100-day test. Long the standard for stallion performance testing, many will be surprised to find that in Germany it no longer exists. Instead, there are now two tests, the 30-day test in the spring and the 70-day test in the fall. In America, the 100-day stallion test is now also history. The ISR/Oldenburg North America Registry pioneered the American 100-day test in 1986 and since 1998 has held a joint testing with the American Hanoverian Society every two years, but no longer.

Photos by Jim Greene



J.J. Tate rode Rosall (right), an Oldenburg stallion by Rosario (Rubinstein) and owned by Wendy and Marty Costello, to 129.7, the highest index score at the new Advanced 10-Day Test. Petra Wilder (left) rode Diamunde, her 2002 Oldenburg stallion by Diamond Hit, to the reserve championship with 118.9.

One of the main problems with the 100-day test in America has to do with numbers. Unlike Germany, which typically has 30 to 40 stallions at a testing, the participation at an American testing was typically 15 or 16 stallions and only occasionally reached 20 stallions. Indeed, the 2006 stallion testing had to be postponed until 2007 due to an insufficient number of horses. Even then, only 14 stallions attended. "We almost always lost money on the stallion testing. It was difficult to get enough stallions to make the testing self supporting," says ISR/Oldenburg N.A. CEO Ekkehard Brysch.

In contrast to Germany with its huge breeding industry, many American registries only approve one or two stallions a year. Also a problem is the reluctance of stallion owners to cede control of their stallions—some are performance horses—to someone else. Increasingly, even in Germany, owners of high priced performance stallions are reluctant to pursue the stallion testing due to the interruption of training and the risk of injury. "No one wants to do cross-country with their expensive dressage stallions,"

says Brysch. For that reason, stallions in Germany that do the 30-day test can be exempted from the 70-day test under certain circumstances, such as qualifying for the *Bundeschampionat*.

The 100-day test was designed for 3 to 4-year-old stallions, and in the early days many were not even started under saddle at the beginning of the testing. This determined the length of the testing, as the stallions needed at least 100 days of training to be prepared for the test finale. However, due to the infrequency of the testing in this country, many stallions were 5 to 7 years old by the time the next testing came around. To take a stallion away from its training program, rider and owner for 100 days turned out to be more and more unreasonable, according to Brysch.

The ISR/Old N.A. Registry has experimented with changes in the format to meet the needs of its breeders, introducing the Short Test in 1996, a 30-day testing run where the owner's trainer of choice did all the training and preparation. Taking what they learned from that format and feedback from their breeders and stallion owners, the registry decided to take another step in the evolution of performance testing.

The new Advanced Stallion Test lasts only 10 days and, with the exception of the guest rider tests, the stallion owner's trainer of choice does all the training and riding. It consists of age appropriate requirements and is intended for 5- and 6-year-old stallions, although 4 year olds are allowed to participate. While all horses do the first week of the testing, called the Basic Test, which includes basic gaits and free jumping, the second week is specialized for jumpers, hunters or dressage horses. The cross-country phase was eliminated.

There were originally nine to 10 stallions signed up for the first ad-

vanced test held in March at Lady Jean Ranch in Jupiter, Florida. However, due to injury and other reasons, only five stallions actually attended the testing. All of the horses specialized in dressage. No hunters or jumpers participated. After the official vet check and drug test, the stallions had a day to settle in and train at the owner's discretion and, if so desired, practice free jumping. The stallions were judged by Hanoverian breeder and trainer Reinhard Baumgart, ISR/Oldenburg breeding director Christian Schacht, and Dieter Felgendreher, Kentucky trainer and training director for the 1994 Stallion Performance Test at the Kentucky Horse Park.

On March 14th, the first day of judging began with the free jumping and basic gaits. The Oldenburg stallion Diamunde excelled in the free jumping, getting 8s and 9s for capability and technique. In the basic gaits, this Diamond Hit son also scored the best walk, while the Oldenburg stallion Rosall scored the best on the trot work. Although many of the stallions, including Diamunde, the ISR stallion GQ Romeo and the Holsteiner stallion Reesling scored very high on their canters, Rosall topped them all with 9s and a 10. The following day was a guest rider test for basic rideability with noted dressage trainers and competitors Fred Webber and Jim Koford doing the honors. Once again Diamunde and Rosall earned the top scores, foretelling the outcome of the testing.

Monday was a day off followed by training at the owner's discretion on Tuesday through Thursday. On Friday, the testing resumed with the first of two special discipline tests. According to their age, the stallions performed the FEI young horse test at one level under their age, i.e., a 6-year-old did the FEI 5-year-old test. On Saturday the stallions were ridden by the dressage guest

rider, the Danish dressage professional Mikala Gundersen.

The test concluded on Sunday with another dressage test, this time at the stallions age level. While Rosall's first test with a score of 8.50 was better than his second, both he and Diamunde dominated the scoring with scores in the high 7's . The same was true of the guest rider scores, with Diamunde earning an 8 and Rosall a 9. So it was no surprise that these two were the top scoring stallions, although all five of the stallions passed the performance test.

During the entire two-week period, the stallions were observed under saddle and in the stable by testing director Helmut Schrant, a veteran director of the U.S. 100-day tests. Schrant scored the stallions in four temperament related categories: Character, Temperament, Ability to Work and Willingness to Work. Schrant says, "This particular group of stallions had unbelievably good temperament and character. We had no stabling issues with any of the stallions, which was not always the case in previous 100-day tests. They were super well behaved."

Rosall's rider and trainer, J.J. Tate was a guest rider at a previous 100-day test, allowing a comparison between the old and new tests. "It was a lot less stressful on the horses, they weren't so exhausted at the end. You had full control over your training and could stay on your program," she adds. "I would definitely recommend that a stallion be sent to the trainer who will ride it for at least three months beforehand for adequate preparation."

Training director Schrant was pleased with how the testing came off. "It was the first time for this kind of test and everyone didn't quite know what to expect with the new format. It's like when the FEI young horse test first came out; riders didn't know how to ride it. Now it's been around for a while and

riders have figured it out. I think some of the horses could have been a little better conditioned. They did get tired, especially after the gallop in the basic gaits. This testing format is harder on those without resources. They could just drop their horses off at the 100-day test before, even unstated. Now the owners have more control over their horses, but they also have the responsibility to prepare them. The shorter the testing is, the better prepared the horse has to be when he arrives. Down the road I think the 10-day test is the way to go.”

Petra Wilder, owner and trainer of the stallion Diamunde said, “I personally would bring any of my stallions back to this form of stallion testing. I am a very protective owner/trainer and felt that all my needs regarding care for my boy were addressed.”

With the demise of the 100-day test, a new independent 30-day and 70-day testing site is now starting at Silver Creek Farm in Oklahoma, slated to hold its first 70-day testing this fall. “The 100-Day Test (or the 30 + 70 Day Test) may be the best format for young stallions and, of course, will remain an accepted test format for the Registry. But for the true evaluation of a more advanced stallion the new format is by far the better choice”, according to Brysch .

Currently the Advanced Test is only accepted by the ISR/Oldenburg North America, but the registry is hopeful that other registries will join in recognizing the new format. Reinhard Baumgart, an experienced judge from the Hanoverian breeding area in Germany, said at the presentation of the results, that in his opinion this new test format is totally competitive to the 100-Day Test but more horse and owner friendly. “I do not need more than 10 days to find out about the quality of a stallion” he said. The ISR-Oldenburg Registry N.A. plans its next Advanced Stallion Performance Test for March 2010. 