

A nice cool breeze blew past my neck as I got out of my car in front of Marina Burgers' home. It was May 2018, and I remember it being a very warm day for the Netherlands; we usually don't get that much sun and warmth. I was there to do a photoshoot for my project *Krachtpatsters* which translates to "Powerhouses." For that assignment, I visited over 20 Dutch breeders and owners of classical Dutch warmbloods. The project was intended as a kind of tribute to the classical-type Dutch warmblood, a type I really love.

Although I've photographed some very nice Harness horses and Groninger horses, most of my subjects were KWPN Gelders horses, which are my favorites. Marina happened to own three Gelders mares in foal and a handsome young Gelders gelding. They were two full-sisters by Rubus B. (Ahoy x Pygmalion) and their younger brother by Floris BS (Negro x Elegant). Their dam was the majestic, big-boned classic Gelders chestnut mare Rolexia (Bazuin x Strawinsky). How excited was I that day to photograph so many of this gorgeous type together!



Picture 1: Rolexia (Bazuin x Strawinsky)

In the Netherlands, the Gelders horse is officially designated a "rare breed". Like the Groninger horse, they are monitored by the Foundation of Rare Breeds, and the GenBank in Wageningen stores their frozen semen. However, the Gelders horse is actually seen as a type, not a breed. It is one of the three official Dutch warmblood types in the KWPN studbook, besides the Riding type (dressage and show jumping) and the Dutch Harness horse. The Gelders horse and the Groninger horse are the *foundation types* of all the other KWPN types. But after the modernization, only the Gelders horse (or 'Gelderlander') is continued to be bred within the KWPN.

The Gelders horse has always been a very versatile type of Dutch Warmblood, suitable for everyone and all disciplines. They have originally been bred to be durable and versatile:



Picture 2: Jansje (Floris BS x Fortissimo)

beginning long ago as the farmer's horse and the family's pleasure horse on weekends. Generally, anybody was able to handle these reliable horses, which was possible thanks to their level-headed, honest and easy going character. After the use of horses in agriculture was not needed anymore, modernization of the type took place; but the Gelders horse in general did always stay versatile in use. Even now in modern breeding, Gelders horses are generally known for being suitable for all disciplines, more amateur- friendly and less "hot" than the other types.

Concerning their conformation, there have always been differences in types within the Gelders horses. This is mainly caused by differences in type of soil they had to work on. During the 1950's and 1960's, certain marelins got more influence on the Gelders breeding by their sons and daughters, which made for more harmonization. In the 1960's and 1970's the different types developed further towards the types we know now within the KWPN. The

Gelders horse remained quite the same, although subtle changes were bred in. This mostly happened through classical stallions with Holstein, Hannover, Trakehner and Selle Francais bloodlines, like Goudsmid, Heemraad, Zichem and Zep.

In the beginning of the modernization process, it was completely left to the breeder's desire how they bred their horses. Most breeders that wanted to breed more towards the Riding type, needed to improve the canter. So they brought more Thoroughbreds into their breeding program. Many of them also had the desire to lengthen their horses. The stallion Oregon (Kurassier x Oberon) brought such a difference and therefore was used a lot. His influence became so dominant that this led to a separate breeding group: the Dutch Harness horse. As regards to the Gelders horse, at first most of the breeders did not step away too far from the original type. Although the subtle changes in type I just mentioned by breeding in classical stallions brought modernity and improved the canter.

The breeders of the Riding type soon noticed, that when a classical type of Gelders mare is bred to a Thoroughbred or Riding type breed from another studbook, it delivered what the market was looking for. So from then on, they would only use their Gelders mare for the breeding of Riding type horses. As a result of this, the majority of the Gelders marelins was only used to breed the modern Riding type, next to another large group that was exclusively bred to develop the Harness horse. Only a very small group of Gelders marelins remained for Gelders horse breeding.

A stallion that has added more modernity to the Gelders horse breeding after the 1970's and 1980's is undoubtedly Koss (El Corona x Goudsmid). Koss his sire El Corona was a son of the well-known Holsteiner stallion Amor out of a mare by the famous Trakehner Doruto. Damsire Goudsmid brought in Holstein and Selle Francais influences. And Apollo, which is the next stallion in the marelins of Koss, brought in Selle Francais and Hannoverian influences. Koss was very popular as a breeding stallion because of his show performance. He has three KWPN approved sons, of which Parcival (Koss x Unitas) and Alexandro P. (Koss x Satelliet) are the most well-known. Just like their sire, both of them have had great influence on the Gelders horse breeding in years past.



Picture 4: Alexandro P. (Koss x Satelliet)



Picture 3: Zep (Goudsmid x Magneet (Trakehner))

Currently, the Koss grandson Henkie (Alexandro P x Upperville x Zep), ridden by Olympian Adelinde Cornelissen, is quite famous in the Netherlands. He was the sensation of the 2016 World Breeding Dressage Championships for Young Horses and ranked high in all his competitions in 2017 and 2018. Henkie is used a lot at the moment by Dutch breeders of all types and breeds of mares.

The Gelders horse has also garnered acclaim internationally, including in the USA and Canada. Many years ago, some very good stallions with classic Gelders bloodlines were exported there from the Netherlands. These stallions excelled in both dressage and show jumping up to the highest levels. Consider Patrick, Vosmear, Taxateur and Zoöloog, who all produced offspring.



Picture 5: Patrick (Jonkheer x Geoloog)

Among them are IJsselmeer (Vosmear x Taxateur) and his cousin Lauwersmeer (Farmer x Vosmaer) at Lio Lomas Dutch Warmbloods in California, and the bloodlines of the stallion Patrick through his son Avenir (Patrick x Sportman) and his offspring in Vermont at Avenir Farms. Other examples of successful Gelders horses in the USA and Canada are the Keur mare Adessa (Koss x Ahoy), imported and owned by Hilton Hall Sporthorses, and Sandor Jane (Inspekteur x Elegant), imported as a young stallion by DG Bar Ranch.

Gelders horses are exported to other countries as well. A few years ago, the Gelders Grand Prix dressage stallion Zethar (Parcival x Cabochon) was exported to Korea, and the KWPN approved Gelders Stallion Wilson (Koss x Cabochon) was exported to Japan. Then there's Upperville (Cabochon x Creool), the KWPN-approved Gelders stallion that was exported to Russia and subsequently competed at Olympic level. And this year, the young KWPN-approved half- Gelders stallion Kardieno (Dante Weltino x Parcival), was bought by Helgstrand Dressage of Denmark and the KWPN approved Parcival son Vitens (Parcival x Zep) moved to Italy.



Figure 6: Kardieno (Dante Weltino x Parcival)

Clearly, Gelders horses are able to produce high-quality offspring. But if their offspring keeps getting more modern and never gets bred back to horses with classical Gelders bloodlines, we have to consider the risk of losing the special traits the Gelders horse has. For starters, we might breed away the typical conformation characteristics of the Gelders horse. In addition to that, constantly modernizing the Gelders horse by breeding it to Riding-type, mostly dressage stallions with abundant "blood" may result in the loss of the versatility in use and the cool, easy-going, happy and willing character for which the Gelders horse is historically known. On top of that, since the modernization the Koss bloodlines have been used so much, that it gets really hard to find suitable 'Koss- free' bloodlines to breed with. As a result, an increasing number of people have been raising a very important question the past decade:

'How can we ensure that the Gelders horse doesn't disappear?'

During my photoproject, I found out that there are still quite some Gelders horse breeders that explicitly try to maintain the Gelders horse. Some of the Dutch breeders do this by simply breeding their Gelders mares to one of the KWPN approved Gelders stallions with more classical bloodlines. Other breeders pair more modern, Riding-type mares with these Gelders stallions, with the goal of getting a distinct Gelders-type foal.

But they are all facing a bit of a challenging task, because a lot of their mares carry the famous Koss blood and there is only a small number of KWPN approved Gelders stallions to choose from. Since the modernization, only a limited number of young Gelders colts are kept to be presented for stallion selection. Next to that, only a very small number of stallions gets approved by the KWPN each year, and most of them carry Koss blood. Examples of classical Gelders stallions with 'free' bloodlines that are available in the Netherlands now, are Sirius (Zichem x Goudsmid), WV Saron (Creool x Zichem) and Rubus B (Ahoy x Pygmalion).



Picture 7: Sirius (Zichem x Goudsmid)



Picture 8: Floris BS (Negro x Elegant)

There are also breeders that try to get some new 'fresh' bloodlines in their program, by choosing Riding-type stallions with ample Gelders blood in their pedigree. An example of which is the KWPN approved Gelders stallion Floris BS (by Negro) out of the classic Gelders mare Zamira (Elegant x Zichem). Back in the day, Floris's breeders explicitly strived to pair their mare with a stallion that would produce a distinct Gelders-type foal with 'free' bloodlines, which would subsequently benefit the Gelders horse breeding program.

As another way to keep breeding classical Gelders horses, breeders have been using frozen semen of deceased stallions more the last couple of years. This obviously brings the opportunity to get interesting classical bloodlines back in the Gelders breeding program. Stallions like Recruit (Marco Polo x Apollo), Nickson (Fortissimo x Waarborg) and Laurentz (Bazuin x Unitas) are examples of this. Crossed with both classic Gelders mares and more Riding type mares, they've proven to produce very strong, athletic and typical Gelders offspring with an easy-going character. There might actually be more interesting stallions suitable for helping the Gelders breeding program this way, like for example Aktion and Farrington.



Picture 9: Nickson (Fortissimo x Waarborg)

As mentioned, some classic Gelders bloodlines are also still available in the USA and Canada. The bloodlines of Vosmaer, Taxateur, Patrick and Zoöloog, for example, would be very useful in the Netherlands. But existing regulations prevent the convenient and affordable export of frozen semen into the EU, especially from deceased stallions. Importing Gelders stallion semen from the Netherlands to the USA and Canada is also challenging, especially when the export is not arranged with Studs involved. There might be options there though, if this project is supported and organized well.



Picture 10: Vosmaer (Formateur x Epigoon) on the right, with two of his offspring (Osierlea.com)



Picture 11: Olivier (Idocus x Porter)

Fortunately, the KWPN also assists Gelders horse breeders by licensing and approving some very interesting stallions that may significantly improve blood distribution yet maintain the Gelders type, even though one parent may be from a different Dutch studbook or closely related to other breeds. One example of such a stallion that could specifically benefit the Gelders horse breeding program, is the USA-based Grand Prix competitor Olivier (Idocus x Porter), who has a classic Gelders background closeby. He has been licensed for Gelders horse breeding since 2010.

In the Netherlands, the KWPN licensed the Gelders Grand Prix dressage stallion Fuerst Augustinus a.k.a. Atze (Astor x Sander) for breeding since 2018. Atze's sire is NeWP registered but roots from original Gelders bloodlines. The KWPN-approved Palomino stallion Edmundo (Upperville x Modern) also deserves mention, as he carries American Saddlebred and Hackney blood through his dam-line, next to the classical Gelders bloodlines of his sire Upperville (Cabochon x Creool).



Picture 12: Edmundo (Upperville x Modern)

After my overview on the Gelders horse so far, it would be interesting to find out what the KWPN's vision for the future of the Gelders horse is. I figured that Wim Versteeg, the recently appointed Head Inspector Gelders horse, and the Gelders horse Breeding Council would be the right people to ask. They told me:

"We surely agree that the modernization of the Gelders horse has brought us many positive developments, but also some threats which need to be addressed. One of which is that we have to make sure that the Gelders horse stays recognizable as such.

That's needed to secure their right to exist between the other types in the KWPN studbook. To accomplish this task, the Breeding Council has written the document '*Gelders Horse 2030*' (or: *GP2030*). This document will be the guideline for Gelders horse breeding and it will inform everyone involved with the Gelders horse, what road the KWPN will take to ensure their future.

A Gelders horse has to be an elegant horse, built with more than average size, bone and mass, an upward-arching neck and abundant elevation in front. It needs to have expressive, uphill movement, with correct use of the front legs and hind legs that step powerfully under the body.

We think the uniqueness of the Gelders horse lies mostly in versatility and character. They should be suitable for all disciplines because of their conformation and durability; pleasure, dressage, jumping and harness. Their character is of big importance for their versatility too: Gelders horses should have a happy, reliable, willing to work, calm, honest and social character. They should be suitable for all family members and all types of riders. On top of that, their correct conformation and movement, together with their willingness to work, should make it possible for a professional to perform on the higher levels with a Gelders horse as well. All this exactly makes them distinguishable from the other types within the KWPN, that are bred specifically for sport performance up to the highest levels in their discipline."

That sounds good. The plan *GP 2030* has been written with input from Dutch breeders, riders and drivers and the first concept has already been approved by the KWPN General Board of Directors. A section on movement will be added before the plan is finalized, which will further and formally describe how a Gelders horse should move. This section will be co-authored by Johan Hamminga at a special "movement evening" meeting in October of this year.

In addition, *In de Strengen* magazine recently published an interview with the new Chairman of the Gelders horse Board, Erik Zeegers and his wife Mariska Toet. The couple own the KWPN approved Gelders stallion Imposant (Danser x Elegant). Coming soon is an in-depth interview with the members of the Gelders horse Breeding Council. These developments combined should bring more clarity about the strategy that the KWPN will implement to secure the Gelders horse's future.

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Picture 13: Fuerst Augustinus a.k.a. Atze (Astor x Sander)