

Marco Polo – from maligned to coveted

Chestnut, date of birth: 1962 height at the withers: 1.58m/ 15.3hh.
Foundation stallion

Marco Polo

In 1965 during the NWP stallion inspection, a disapproving murmur went through the rows of spectators along the inspection track in the Prins- Bernhard hall in Zuidlaren, when a slender chestnut stallion appeared in the ring. The spectators, mostly peasant breeders, made it clear that they were not pleased with the frail chestnut. The vocal expression of displeasure even swelled to cacophony, when the speaker announced on the second day of the inspection that the stallion had been approved. The breeders shouted and screamed: 'Was this goat to cover their good mares, mares bred for generations as a reliable source of power for farm work?! It was a Russian or Polish hit! He would break at his knees and hocks if put in the harness to do farm work!' Program booklets were waved, clogs rumbled on the floor, people shouted and whistled.

In this orgy of sound something happened that was both wondrous and embarrassing. The monster servant brought the stallion to the center of the ring, the driver took - with the whip still in his hand - the bridle, the handler took up one hind leg of the stallion and with bare hands pulled a loose iron from the hoof. The stallion endured resignedly and stood calmly in the middle of the track. The speaker, Mr. W. Spoelstra, commented on this scene: "It seems that the stallion has more decency than the people." Embarrassed, the busy crowd went silent.



In this atmosphere Marco Polo - that was the stallion involved - was received in the Netherlands. So he was certainly not given a warm welcome. The stallion would, however, even more than Mr. Spoelstra's comment did, shame his critics by his breeding results.

Marco Polo, despite the headwinds of almost hurricane force, has smoothed his way into Dutch breeding and has become one of the most famous stallions in Dutch breeding. When he arrived, Marco Polo was a somewhat narrow, immature stallion with a height of only 15.3hh. Later, when he was full grown, he measured almost 16.1hh. He was blood horse type, a little long in the middle. The legs were on the fine side but crystal hard. The foreleg was a bit straight, a trait that he often passed on. He did not have the noble head often found in Trakehners: it was somewhat long and slightly rounded between the eyes. However, the eye was expressive and radiated peace and confidence. The neck was well formed and turned into a well-developed wither. Although he had a Trakehner registration paper, he was more of a half-blood with a lot of thoroughbred expression in his appearance.

[A grueling journey](#)

Marco Polo's breeder, K. Rosenau, fled in the winter of 1944-1945, like many East Prussian peasants, from the approaching Russian army. He took the mare Mira with him, among others, on this for humans and animals harsh journey to the West. Heavy and countless were the hardships suffered by the East Prussian farmers and their horses on the journey to the West: the weather conditions were almost Siberian, the roads were bad - sometimes even crossing the ice - and the food they brought was scarce. But Rosenau and Mira, unlike many who were less fortunate, reached the territory of the federal republic.

Mira, Marco Polo's grandmother, was a strongly built, robust mare. She was a daughter of Löwenherz -Pirol- J.Pilot -Pilot -Persival, a stallion line of which little is left in Trakehner breeding. Pirol is the father of the influential mare Abfahrt, mother of the stallions Abenstern, Absolom and Absinth, the founder of the A-line in Hanoverian breeding. Pirol was a stallion that was used a lot after the First World War to give the Trakehners more substance and heavier legs. Mira produced, with Altan as a partner, the mare Mirabel. She was the dam of Marco Polo and Miranda, the grandmother of Trajanus. The latter bred in the Northern Netherlands from 1966 to 1970. Trajanus was also by Poet XX and therefore closely related to Marco Polo. However, he has had little influence on breeding and in 1970 he returned to his native country.



Mirabel's father, Altan, was born at Hauptgestüt Trakehnen in 1943. He and his fellow young stallion prospects escaped to the West and were further raised in Hünnesrück. Altan gave the Trakehner breeding seven sons, of which Geysir and Pelion are the best known. Geysir is best known for supplying good show jumpers in Westphalian breeding. He is the father of Fresco, who worked in the Netherlands from 1967 to 1981. Pelion is, among others, the sire of Frostwind and Intermezzo (in Germany called: Insterfeuer), both of which, with little success, have bred in the Netherlands. Pelion himself also spent a year in the Netherlands, but he turned out

to be a notorious weaver and therefore returned to Germany. From a full sister of Marco Polo, the mare Miramar, Morgenglanz was born, the champion of the year 1967 in Neumünster.

Mozart



Another notable descendant of Mirabel is her daughter Mirakel by Maigraf XX. Together with Impuls she produced the mare Miranda I, the mother of “our” Mozart (by Gunnar). This stallion was brought to the Netherlands by F. Hollaender from Wenum-Wiesel and was available for breeding in the Netherlands from 1982 to 1984. He was exported to America, where he proved himself as a breeding stallion and dressage horse.

Poet xx

Marco Polo 's sire Poet XX was a somewhat small Thoroughbred stallion (16hh, 19.5 cm pipe circumference) with a well-formed neck, well-set legs and a small rear rib. The connection between his middle and hindquarters could be a bit stronger overall. As a two- and three-year-old, he started nine times on the racetrack, achieved three victories and was placed four times. On his dam's side, Poet carries the blood of Herold - Dark Ronald, a line that has inherited show jumping ability in Germany. He gave three sons to Trakehner breeding: Harfner, Perfekt and Abendglanz. Poet produced horses with “Rittigkeit”, especially a good walk and canter, and a lot of willingness to work.



Breeding in the Netherlands had still to be transformed from farm horses to sport horses in 1965 when Marco Polo arrived. The task of the horse on the farm had been taken over by the tractor and only some steps had been reluctantly taken on the road to modernization. Some stallions from Holstein, Hanover and France were already used, but these stallions themselves were still too much of the agricultural type to achieve a rapid transformation. Developments went fast, equestrian sport expanded strongly, therefore the demand for good riding horses increased rapidly. To breed good riding horses from the Dutch mares in one go, high blooded stallions were needed, such as the Thoroughbred and the Trakehner.

Purchase

Against this background, a whole group from the Northern Netherlands went to the Trakehner stallion inspection in Neumünster in the autumn of 1964 to buy a stallion. In that company were Northern Superintendent J.K. Wiersema, who had already tracked down several good stallions abroad, the stallion owners and breeders Boelstra, Oosterbaan and Gerbens (jointly forming the

B.O.G.-combination), the stallion owners De Vries and Kamminga and commission agent Y. F. Kamphuis. Initially they were charmed by the stallion Doruto, but he was not approved by the Trakehner Verband due to a blind eye. They did not want to buy a rejected stallion, but neither did they want to go back home empty-handed! Marco Polo was second choice.

After they saw the stallion under saddle, the sale was quickly concluded: for 7,000 Deutsche Mark, Marco Polo changed hands. After approval in Zuidlaren, which was anything but silent, the stallion was put at stud at De Vries and Kamminga in Surhuisterveen. Marco Polo would spend the rest of his life there. After such a controversial entrance, it was to be expected that the stallion would cover few mares. That changed somewhat when the first children at the inspections ended in the front ranks. And it all changed when the Marco Polos turned out to be very good jumpers. Mares were brought in from all parts of the country: Marco Polo had gone from a maligned stallion to a coveted pasha for whose favors the mare owners queued.

Rumor

Anyone who thinks that the criticism of Marco Polo was completely silenced by this is mistaken. After the first children had come out with great success in the show jumping sport, it was rumored through the Netherlands that all Marco Polos got injured in the front legs after a few years. And again the stallion was reviled by many. Was the rumor about Marco Polo true? The answer is yes and no. It is true: some Marco Polos, like their father, were not flawless in the foreleg, which was often a bit short with a straight pastern. A maternal legacy, as we have found. Still, that foreleg was usually not the cause of the early wear. It should first be realized that in those days, there was much less knowledge about the correct training and education of a young sport horse. Now we know that late-maturing blood horses like the Marco Polos, need time, now we know we shouldn't throw a four- or five-year-old horse in front of the lions like that. Add to this the work willing, even phenomenal attitude of the Marco Polos, and it is clear how many of Marco Polo's descendants were overused and perished before their talent reached maturity.

Franke Sloothaak



That the Marco Polo offspring can go for many years if used correctly, is proven by top horses like Pierrot, Irco Polo, Pybalia, Marius, Volontaire, Van Opstal's Orpheus, Marcus G, Mr. L.A., Pallieter, Sarco, Polo Boy and many others. One of his first children to draw attention to Marco Polo as a jumping horse supplier was Elzette, the horse with which Franke Sloothaak became KNF champion in 1973 at the age of fifteen. A year later, the talented young rider became Dutch junior champion with Polo Marco. Both horses left for Switzerland and

they were successful in the sport there too. Polo Marco, renamed Volontaire in Switzerland, achieved excellent results with Jörg Friedli in the saddle. Another international celebrity, Henk Nooren, experienced his first successes on the back of Jonker Arno. One of Marco Polo's most famous sport horses is the keur mare Pybalia (dam sire Solo man by Sinaeda), bred by P.K. de

Boer in Surhuisterveen. In 1984 she took part in the Olympics in Los Angeles under Swiss rider Philippe Guerdat and finished fifth with the team. Then in 1988 she was reserve horse for the Swiss team in Seoul. Talk about durability!

Marius and Milton

<https://youtu.be/N82utX6hKQ8>

The most famous offspring of Marco Polo is perhaps Marius, who celebrated triumphs under the tragically killed British rider Carolyn Bradley. This combination won, among others, the Grand Prix of Birmingham, the Queen Elisabeth 11 Cup and was "Showjumper of the Year" in 1977. Marius was bred by W.D. Oosterbaan from Leeuwarden out of the mare Ominka (Sinaeda x Feiner Kerl Old.). In addition to being used as a sport horse, he was also used as a breeding stallion. He was a success there too, being the sire of Milton, considered by many to be the best show jumper ever. Another son, Pierrot, out of a mother by Farn x Sinaeda, has participated in World Cup competitions with Emile Hendrix in addition to many international competitions.



Van Opstal's Orpheus, with Kees van Opstal, was a well-known appearance at national and international competitions for many years, and the same goes for Aid Man N van Ton Klumpers, Marcus G with Piet Raymakers, Mr. L.A. with Sven Harmsen, Lady Oceline with Gert Jan Mooy, Pieter CZ with Arne Kouwenberg, Sir William CZ with Tanja van Malsen, Julisca with Janna van Zon, all horses that stood out in the sport with Dutch riders.

The young Marco Polos were also very popular with foreign riders. For example Polo Boy (dam sire Sinaeda) left for America, when he was Z2 dressage and Z jumping. In his new stable, Polo Boy, a full brother of the stallion Otto, was ridden by Kathy Monahan. Another famous American rider, Melanie Smith, also had a Marco Polo under saddle. Vivaldi (damsire Fortuin) was named the best "speed horse" in the USA under Melanie.

Of the approved sons, Irco Polo and Recruit disappeared to Switzerland, but both returned. For Irco Polo, the return from Switzerland was of a temporary nature; unfortunately there was no great interest from the breeder's side in this very valuable Marco Polo-son from the famous Lottie-line. Interpol and Plutus went to England and Ico to Germany. In the Netherlands, only Legaat has served breeding without interruption.

Prepared

When Marco Polo arrived in Surhuisterveen, he found a stock of mare that had already been prepared by Sinaeda and, to a lesser extent, by Farn, for the conversion to riding horses. Commandeur was usually the stallion in the line before Sinaeda. The Commandeur daughters are

also often attributed special qualities: on average they were very ordinary horses, which suited the farm work well and which had sufficient movement. However, Commandeur would never have played a significant role in breeding if Sinaeda had not ended up at the same station. Sinaeda was very tall for its time, 16.3hh. He had a lot of front, a strong spacious trot and a cannon bone circumference of 24.5 centimeters. Characteristics that came in handy for Marco Polo, with his small height, fine legs and average trot. The combination Marco Polo x Sinaeda turned out to be a very good fit. Marco Polo also proved to be a good partner for Farn mares, who sometimes had a slightly bossy, idiosyncratic character. Marco Polo neutralized the excess of temperament, transformed the character into very compliant and easy to handle and added jumping technique and manners. He did not bring the last jumping ability: the explosive power that a jumping horse needs, had to come from the dam's side.

Erhalter type

We have seen that the modern riding horse type was not to be expected from Marco Polo's dam's side. The dam's line was dominated by the 'Erhalter type', the riding horse points came from his father. Perhaps this is why his sons that were paired with mares that stood fully or in large part in the old type, could not emerge as good converters to the riding horse type. The value of the sons was mainly in the psychological baggage that they imparted and the jumping ability that they passed on. This is not always and often too late recognized. The value of Marco Polo 's heritage is not the outer but the inner, not the physical but the psychic. The latter is even more important for sport horses than the former, in addition to talent.

From the first crop of foals, which consisted of 14 mare and 13 stallion foals, two stallions were approved. That was in the last year of the NWP. In that studbook stallions were given names starting with the first letter of the father. So these two sons of Marco Polo were also given a name that starts with the letter "M": Miro and Monarch. Monarch, full brother of Legaat that was approved four years later, has never been used in breeding. He was one of the few Marco Polos to go into dressage, where he made it to Intermediate I. Miro was a son of the model preferent Sinaeda daughter Ogeina, bred by B. Kamminga from Augustinusga. In the performance test he received 169.65 points and high marks for jumping and free jumping. Later in the sport he also turned out to be a talented show jumper. A brain tumor ended his life at the age of 6. The most famous daughter is the preferent Nerma, the grandmother of the KWPN stallions Armstrong and Rolando, who was approved in Oldenburg.

Irco Polo

Irco Polo was number 1 Stb in 1970, in the newly formed WPN. S.J. Hulshoff from Surhuizum is the breeder of this stallion, who carries the blood of the stallions at Surhuisterveen station: Marco Polo x Sinaeda x Commandeur x Rembrandt. With 167.29 points, Irco Polo was the best in the performance test. For jumping he got a 9, for the terrain test even a 9.5 and the report praises: 'Very good performance horse with good character'.

Irco Polo covered mares from 1970 to 1973 at W. Brinkman in Twello. Paul Weier, the famous Swiss show jumping rider, recognized the stallion's qualities and brought him to Switzerland. He competed with him in the international show jumping sport and used him for breeding, but because the emphasis was on breeding, the stallion did not get the chance to

manifest himself in the big sport under optimal conditions. Irco Polo struggled with the same handicap as his son Mirco - namely the low quality of the mares supplied, produced many good show jumpers from his first period in the Netherlands. The breeding area eventually improved by leaps and bounds, thanks to the good stallions that were made available to stud by the Brinkman family. Well-known sport horses by Irco Polo are: Erco Polo, Okay Jumper, Pas de Qui, TDK Pourqoui, Diamonds Supreme, Gold Bridge and Omara G. The stallion Irco Marco shone under foreign colors. Bred by Hans Bijen from Stal Maathuis out of a Sportman mother, inbred to Sineada, this stallion was competed at top sport level by the Swedish rider L. Nilsson. He was named the best jumping stallion in Sweden and he passed on his jumping talent to his offspring in Sweden. He is the father of Marcoville, the gray who became champion of Sweden with Maria Gretzer, and of Feliciano, the current crack of Maria Gretzer.



From the second breeding period in the Netherlands, Irco Polo brought the stallion **Casimir**, rented out to the Spanish team in preparation for the Olympic Games in Barcelona and later under Eric Willemsz Geeroms, among other things, winner of the Grote Prijs van Arnhem.

The stallions Ico and Interpol are from the same year as Irco Polo. Ico, also from a Sinaeda dam, was not very popular with the breeders with his colorful color and exotic appearance. Ico disappeared after three years to the German breeding area of Hesse. His son Nokma, born in Germany, who jumped internationally under Jürgen Kenn, proves that he too has been given jumping talent and that he has passed it on. The variegated **Nekoma** was a real puissance specialist, who often covered a wall of 2.20 meters.



Legaat



Legaat was approved in 1973. He too came from a Sinaeda daughter, Lanita, a descendant of a special line. She was a daughter of Anita (by Godin; import from Oldenburg), who brought the influential brothers Camillus and Camillo. Lanita is inbred with mother Anita through Sinaeda, whose sire was Camillus. The most famous Legaat offspring in sports was Gräfin with Austrian rider Hugo Simon. Gräfin has often conquered great heights in puissances. Jos Lansink was successful for a short time with the Legaat son Double Eagle. Italian Orsini also had a Legaat son, Stoppelhaene, who he competed with at international level. Also known are Black Jack with Leon Sommerdijk and Bert Romp, Lady Tarina with Gert-Jan Mooy, Sanzero with Miranda Kooiman, Terlinus with Arnoud Dobber and Vainqueur with Eric Willemsz Geeroms.

Approved sons of Legate are: Accent, Adios, Calimero and Cosmos. One year after Legaat, Matador (Marco Polo x full sister of Garant) was approved. Matador, producer of a number of good show jumpers, has died of a brain hemorrhage, just like his father and his half-brother Miro. Otto was born at H.K. Veenstra from Oostermoer. His mother is Sjaan, a model mare by Sinaeda with classic Oldenburger blood further on. After the offspring inspection, Otto was taken out of breeding in 1979, because he gave his children too moderate movements and too simple a type. Otto was then used with great success as a sport horse. His most famous offspring is Treffer H, with which Bernadette Nijhof has achieved good results at home and abroad.

Recruut



Recruut turned out to be a very talented sport horse in the performance test of 1978. With 182 points, the highest number ever achieved, he stands far above his peers. For character and free jumping he even gets a 10. A real Marco Polo, excellent in the specialties of his father's inheritance. In the development of his appearance, Recruut also reminds of his father: as a three-year-old he is still immature and somewhat long-legged, but later he grows into a strong stallion with width and depth. The mother of Recruut is the studbook mare Maril, a daughter of the Gelders stallion Apollo and the Wachtmeester studbook mare Froukje. She was a solid mare, but also a mare who should be riding type.

Breeder / owner was J.A. Smits from Gerkesklooster. After his registration in the studbook, Recruut stood at the station of J.Zomer in Odijk (Utr.). The breeders are more guided by the exterior of Recruut than his results in the performance test and he will not get many, let alone good, mares. Albert Voorn took the stallion in training and together they showed their great

talent in the jumping arena. Recruit's capabilities did not go unnoticed and in 1982 he went to Switzerland. The new owner was Paul Weier, who also had Irco Polo in his stables. Weier, a big supporter of the Marco Polo children, was actually not planning on buying another Marco Polo, because he wanted to avoid inbreeding. But after seeing Recruit jump, he couldn't resist and the stallion moved to the land of Wilhelm Teil. In the offspring of Recruit the Gelders descent from his mother's side is evident. Although his offspring have more talent for jumping, Recruit is unable to inherit an above- average jumping ability. His best- known offspring is Anadolu Bikker, who celebrated international triumphs under Emile Hendriks. His son Waverveen is approved for breeding in the Gelders direction and after a few years went abroad. In 1990 Recruit returned to the Netherlands and this time the interest of the breeders was up to standard.

Salvador

In 1980 the last Marco Polo- sons were approved: Salvador and Topas. Salvador, bred by J. de Jong from Burgwerd, was out of the Gelders ster mare Kirkie, a daughter of Waldo. Topas is from Marco Polo's last breeding season. He was bred by Mrs. Boelstra-Fokkema from Vrouwenparochie. His mother is the performance mare Viola, a mare by Farn out of a model mare by Camillus and then an import mare from Oldenburg. Shortly after the performance test, Topas was seriously injured in a front leg. Despite a negative prognosis from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Utrecht and the advice to put the stallion to sleep, the owners decided to give him another chance. He was entrusted to the care of veterinarian Krijn van Muiswinkel from Emmeloord, who managed to cure the stallion in such a way that he was able to compete in jumping competitions again a few years later. In the stallion competition he showed that he is a good show jumper.

Topas also appeared to be a moderate type producer. His 3- and 4-year-old offspring that



are presented at the studbook inspections don't impress in movements and type. The same happened to Topas as what happened to several of his half- brothers: he was taken out of breeding. And again happened what had already happened with so many of Marco Polo's sons: after a few years it appeared that Topas had given a lot of jumping talent to his children. In 1992 he achieved a high score of 152 points on the jumping index. He only needs to give way to the recognized greats such as Nimmerdor, Almé and Farn. Based on of the performance of his offspring, Topas is admitted to breeding again in 1991. Kingston is Topas' only approved son.

Only a few of Marco Polo's grandsons ended up in breeding through his daughters. Zadok (by Nimmerdor) left for America in 1986 after his offspring were rejected and developed into an excellent show jumper. As an eight-year-old he already participated in the final of the World Cup in Tampa with Hap Hansen. Of course Marco Polo's influential grandson, the keur stallion Concorde, is an international show jumper under Eric van der Vleuten and Jos Lansink, a loyal

supplier of successful participants in the World Championships for young jumping horses and sire of Jumb Jet, Larino, Laroche and Jacorde. Concorde produces horses with a lot of quality on the jump.

Only fourteen

On December 21, 1976, Marco Polo, aged 14, died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Too young and too early. Breeding in the Netherlands was on an upward trend, the mares were better attuned to the new breeding goal: the sport horse. Marco Polo could have done such good things to those better mares.

Marco Polo was - with his mistakes - a milestone in Dutch breeding. The positive was so clearly present in Marco Polo that he far exceeds stallions that have inherited no faults, but also left no positive characteristics. Marco Polo did not belong to the 'mediocre mass': he distinguished himself and he deserves to be distinguished.

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