

# The Friesian

By Scott Kelnhofer | Fenway Foundation for Friesian Horses, Inc

**W**e have all seen them. A noble black horse trots across the movie screen and while our focus is supposed to be on the actor, we are drawn to the dramatic steed on which he or she rides. Whether it be “The Eagle”, “The Mask of Zorro”, “Pillars of the Earth”, “Interview with a Vampire”, “Clash of the Titans” (2010) or the breed’s premier film, “Ladyhawke”, the Friesian horse has been called upon countless times to lend its unique charisma to what a role that otherwise would have been, just a horse.

This is not the first time these versatile horses have answered the call of its human master and responded admirably. One of the oldest breeds of Northern Europe, the Friesian was initially a knight’s horse. Native to Friesland, a northern most province of what is now The Netherlands, the courageous and bold Friesian horse carried knights into battle and with a similar commitment and devotion to his battered and war weary master carried him back out.

As battle tactics changed, so did the horse; eventually demonstrating the versatility that has become their hallmark, the Friesian adapted to the demands of his master and became the most dependable asset of an Agrarian society. Used on the farm during the week the Friesian did everything that today’s tractor now does. On Saturdays, when the workload was light, the Friesian then became a horse for entertainment, with athletic men and women competing with them in bareback trotting races. No day of rest for this horse; on Sunday the Friesian was hitched up and used to take the family, by carriage, to church and the inevitable after service visits. And when Monday rolled around ready to

*Friesian rock star, Anton 343 Sport attracts hundreds wherever he demos. Now retired, he is enjoying the good life at Fenway Farms, Hortonville, Wisconsin. Photo credit: Cally Matherly*



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*KFPS Approved Stallion 476 debating at the 2014 Stallion Show in Leewarden, Friesland, The Netherlands. Who says horses can't fly? Photo credit: Cully Matherly*



*Nothing more heartwarming than a Friesian mare and foal. Foaling season is a happy time of the year on any horse farm. Photo credit: Cully Matherly*

resume his or her duties when the work-week chores began again.

One would think, with such versatility the breed would have a bright future. Disappointingly, this was not to be the case for the Friesian horse. As the farm mechanized, the future of this horse began to look grim. Only action by the Koninklijke Friesch Paarden-Stamboek (con-nick-lick freeze pardon stom-buk) (KFPS) saved this horse from extinction. Unfortunately, by the time action was taken, the gene pool had shrunk to an alarming level. With only four approved breeding stallions at their disposal, the KFPS set to work to preserve and protect the Friesian horse. Now with over one hundred approved stallions

the breed is assured a bright, albeit, challenged future.

#### **The Modern Friesian**

Again, responding to the demands of its human master, the Friesian horse has been “redesigned” to meet the needs of an ever-changing market. With a well-managed breeding goal, the KFPS is moving the breed from the Baroque style horse to what is now called the “Modern Friesian”. What is Baroque versus Modern Friesian? Baroque Friesians, typically are more heavy of bone and body, built a bit more “down hill” versus level or “up-hill”; the conformation of a horse built to pull a plow, etc. The adage, “form follows function”, is the perfect application of the Modern Friesian “re-design”. With the demand of the horse now evolving into the competitive arena, the horse is becoming more lightly boned, considerably less feathered (Feathering is the term used to describe the profuse hair around the horse’s fetlock, pasterns and hooves.) and more athletic. They are built with either a level or “up-hill” conformation. This redesigned Friesian is built to compete alongside their Dutch warmblood counterparts in dressage, saddlebreds in saddleseat competitions and any number of breeds in combined driving events (CDE). While, at times it has been difficult due to the preconceived notion that the Friesian is a Draft horse, the Friesian endures and continues to win over converts who see

the athleticism that has always been inherent in the breed.

For more information on this incredible horse please contact the Friesian Horse Association of North America (FHANA). The FHANA is the oldest, largest and most respected Friesian registry in North America and is the exclusive affiliate of the KFPS in the United States and Canada. A plethora of information is available on the FHANA website that will enlighten any Friesian “newbie” as to the past and future of the breed. Their website is [www.fhana.com](http://www.fhana.com) or they can be contacted directly at 859-455-7430. Jason Tice is the FHANA’s Executive Director.

The Friesian horse also has an advocacy group in The Fenway Foundation for Friesian Horses. The Fenway Foundation was founded to aid all full-blooded Friesian horses in need and works with researchers from around the world in addressing issues that are unique to this wonderful breed. The Foundation has an on staff veterinarian who works with Friesian owners and their vets on problems pertaining to their Friesian horses. They also work to relocate Friesian horses that need to be “re-homed” for any number of reasons. They can be found at [www.fenwayfoundation.com](http://www.fenwayfoundation.com) or called at 888-838-0877.

So now when you see a dramatic black horse trot across the movie screen, you know that in all likelihood that is a Friesian horse and they have a very special place in the hearts of thousands of Friesian enthusiasts around the world.



*KFPS Approved Stallion, Nanning 574 being driven by Fred and Fran Hekstra of Byron Center, Michigan. The Hekstras are in traditional Dutch attire in a sjees (shays) carriage, hand built by Fred. Photo credit: Cully Matherly*