



AWHA Ltd 2015 National Assessment Tour

with Joanne Verikios & Silvia Ahamer

Australian Warmblood Horse Association Limited

AWHA LTD 2015 NATIONAL ASSESSMENT TOUR ANOTHER OUTSTANDING SUCCESS!

By Joanne Verikios.

Having participated in the very successful 2014 National Assessment Tour, I was excited and honoured to be invited by the Australian Warmblood Horse Association (AWHA) Ltd to officiate in their third Tour from the 6th to the 28th of February, 2015.

Backing up a couple of steps, the inaugural Tour was conducted in 2013, in conjunction with the Trakhener Association of Australia. The Assessors were Germany's Matthias Werner, a former dressage and show jumping rider, now an FN Judge and Trakehner Verband Classifier; and Austrian-born Silvia Ahamer, a former show jumper, member of the Upper Austrian Eventing team, and member of the Warmblood Breeding Association of Austria, who has settled in Australia. Silvia is now an AWHM Mare Classifier, Colt Classifier and Judge. She is also the Administration Registrar and Federal Registrar on the AWHM Ltd Federal Board.

Pictured right: Joanne back in 1993 when she was Federal President of the Australian Warmblood Horse Association Limited. Image courtesy of the AWHM Ltd ©

The Year of the Horse, 2014, was also the year of the first all-AWHM Tour, with myself, Joanne Verikios, as the local Assessor and Lynne Crowden, principal of Woodlander Stud in the UK, as the international Assessor. I have been involved with the AWHM Ltd for more than 30 years as a classifier, trainer of classifiers, judge, breeder and former Federal Registrar, Publicity Officer and President. Lynne has a sterling record of achievement in Warmblood breeding, including producing over a dozen licensed stallions and the super dressage mare, Farouche. Lynne is also a trained Warmblood judge who officiates for a number of the major breed associations in the UK and Europe.

This meant that Silvia had an opportunity to get an update about international trends and developments from Matthias in 2013; while I learnt a lot from Lynne in 2014. All parties benefitted from the exchange of ideas and viewpoints, as the international experience went both ways. Importantly, the AWHM was able to benchmark two of its senior classifiers against two of the most respected international judges in the industry and it was exciting, if unsurprising, to discover that we more than measured up. What was particularly pleasing was the consistency of scores between – and amongst – the two pairings of Assessors.

"Plan A" for the 2015 Tour was that the Assessors would be Michael Schmidt, from Germany, and myself. I was looking forward to working with Michael, who manages the EU insemination station at Gestüt Peterhof in Perl-Borg, Saarland. An accredited master of breeding and keeping horses as well as equitation, Michael is responsible for the stud schedules of stallions like Sezuan, Silvano and Florett, as well as providing advice and support to breeders. Sadly, however, a death in the family shortly before the Tour meant that Michael was unable to make the trip to Australia.



Pictured left: Hollingrove Felicity by Fürstenball (IFS) out of Amarice (Imp) (Ampère). Hollingrove Felicity scored a whopping 93.93% and was the Highest % Studbook Led in Victoria and Highest % Studbook Led Australia wide! Bred and owned by Bruce and Debbie Williams (VIC). Image courtesy of [Hollingrove Warmblood Stud](#) ©

With no time to arrange an international replacement, the AWHM responded to this setback by polling its members and exploring whether two local Assessors would be acceptable as "Plan B". The vote of confidence was amazing. Members indicated an overwhelming



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desire for the Tour to proceed, with Silvia Ahamer replacing Michael Schmidt. In the end, record entries were received, with over 100 horses in the Tour and nearly 60 mares nominated for classification (to establish their suitability for entry into the Studbook or Foundation Mare Register).

Needless to say, while I was disappointed not to be meeting Michael, I was thrilled to be on tour with Silvia. I have always thought it was a lucky day for Australian Warmblood breeders when Silvia came to Australia in 1990 and the Tour allowed me to see first hand just how knowledgeable and helpful she is in her role as Federal Registrar. Silvia and I met in the early 1990s at a classifier training course I conducted and she kindly credits me as the reason she is a classifier today!

But let's pause for a moment and discuss what an Assessment Tour actually is. It is an event which allows horses from around Australia to compete against each other without having to travel too far, because the judges, i.e. the Assessors, go to them. Each horse is assessed individually against a breed ideal. This means that foals, weanlings, yearlings and other horses whose owners might not otherwise take them to an agricultural show or Gala Day, can gain some experience in a safe and secure environment; and more seasoned horses can also strut their stuff on a national level.

Pictured right: Aveden Fendi by Aveden Don Amour (IIU) out of St.Pr.St. A H Finesse (Imp) (Argentinus). Highest % WPRB/WID Led in Australia, Highest % WPRB/WID Led in Queensland, Highest % Open Led in Australia and Highest % Open Led in Queensland. Owned by Sharon Armstrong (NSW). Image: Dave Lynch ©



Owners can choose to present their horse either at a "stud stop" or at a venue. The Tour classes accommodate all ages of led horses as well as ridden classes for those already going under saddle.

The Tour achieves a number of aims. A major advantage is that it provides AWWA Ltd members with an opportunity to have their horses assessed by independent judges in order to receive feedback on their breeding program or acquisitions to date, which in turn can inform decision making with regard to future combinations of bloodlines. This applies not only for owners of horses entered in the Tour but also for people in the wider breeding community who attend Tour venues as supporters and spectators. The Tour encourages breeders to evaluate what they have achieved to date and to consider strategies for further improvement.



An appealing bonus for entrants is the ability to participate in a major national competition without the need to travel long distances. The prize money is pretty impressive too, with \$7,400 on offer, along with beautiful sashes. This year the AWWA Ltd welcomed [Gow-Gates](#) as sponsor and gratefully acknowledges their support. This should be a mutually beneficial, long term relationship, as the Gow-Gates equine and bloodstock team understands horses and how to help members insure the risks involved in owning, training and breeding them.

Pictured left: DeLorenzo K by De Niro (IFS) out of Flowervale Sandrena (Sandreo). Owned by Gwen Paddon (QLD). Image: AWWA Ltd ©

Last but not least, the Tour showcases AWWA-registered horses both around the country and internationally, allowing breeders and riders to see what the different studs are producing and thus to facilitate the selection and purchase of superior riding horses, purpose-bred for the sports of dressage, show jumping and eventing.

So, with "Plan B" firmly on track, Silvia and I packed our suitcases for rain, hail and shine (especially shine, because it was going to be hot), left our respective homes in New South Wales and Queensland, and met up in Perth. It was time for the Tour to get underway! In three weeks, we had the "job" of looking at beautiful horses almost every day across six States: WA, SA, VIC, TAS, NSW and QLD.

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As with previous AWWA Tours, we gave immediate feedback at the conclusion of every assessment, as well as presenting each owner with a sheet summarising their comments and scores. Throughout the Tour, this feedback was very well received. In some cases it even extended to hoof care and snippets of riding and horsemanship advice. Silvia demonstrated how a plaited tail can constrict a horse's movement – a revelation for the owners and a godsend for the horses when their tails were set free!

We also presented a number of seminars on conformation and movement and their correlation to riding and breeding, with attendees asking excellent questions. Added to this were some short talks on the difference between classification and assessment; along with the main attributes of Warmblood horses; and answers to all manner of questions.

Pictured right: Oaks Kestrel by Kannan (IFS) out of Oaks Cinderella (Centus (IFS)). Oaks Kestrel scored a whopping 91.43% making her = second highest scoring horse across all ages and divisions on tour! Bred and owned by Alice Cameron (NSW). Image: Niki Pollock Photography ©



A good horse is a good horse, no matter where in the world you find it, irrespective of who owns it or shows it. A good assessor needs to combine their well-practiced “eye for a horse” with consistency, impartiality and the courage of their convictions. The Assessors' job is to evaluate each horse as they see it and to mark accordingly, which means utilising the full spectrum of marks available to them. In other words, if a horse deserves to score a 10 (excellent), it should be awarded a 10.

As in previous years, Silvia and I found fractions ($\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mark) useful to fine tune our scores where necessary. Even so, averaging our marks was usually very easy because, as with Matthias and Lynne, we often gave identical scores – and tended to finish each others' sentences when discussing the horses too! All results are on the AWWA website www.awha.com.au.



Everywhere we went, the standard of grooming and condition of the horses was high and many seemed to really enjoy their time showing off in the arena. There were queenly mares, macho males, feminine fillies, dignified geldings and cute and scopey foals. The overall quality of the horses entered in the Tour was very impressive and many were clearly of modern international quality, as evidenced by the record number of entries who scored in the high eighties and even over ninety percent!

Pictured left: Winmallee De Nisha by De Niro (IFS) out of Winmallee Emerald xx (Redding (NZ)). Bred and owned by Amanda Evins (SA). Image courtesy of Winmallee Warmblood Stud ©

As we demonstrated in our seminars and feedback, however, there is definitely room for improvement in how the horses are trained and presented, particularly when being led out at the walk and trot. Australian handlers could learn a lot from their European counterparts in this aspect of ringcraft.

Everywhere we visited, people went out of their way to make us feel welcome. A huge amount of behind-the-scenes effort goes into making a Tour run well and Silvia and I were immensely grateful to the AWWA Board, local committee members and volunteers who booked the venues, provided wonderful hospitality, helped keep things running smoothly, drove us around, and generally kept us fed, watered and housed. It takes a lot of passion, commitment and coordination on the part of a lot of people to do what needed to be done and make it all work. Thank you all! A big thank you, too, to the photographers in each State, who made sure that the Tour was recorded for owners and the public alike.



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Once again, the Federal Board of the AWHALtd is to be congratulated on the outstanding organisation of this tour. It was a team effort but Claudette Johnson, Shanna Antrim and Silvia Ahamer deserve special mention for their efforts on behalf of the members, whether they have one horse or many, whether it is their first horse or maybe their last. This is what people had to say about this year's Tour:

"Thank you for a great morning." Heidi Warren.

"Thank you for today! Very happy with my mare and the assessors' comments." Caitlynn Dumbreck.

"... just want to say thank you to Silvia, Joanne and the rest of the team for a great day in Albany yesterday and all the background work you have put into organising the event. Silvia and Joanne were very approachable and everyone at the event found it informative and rewarding." Andrew Forbes.

"Thanks so much for a very pleasant morning. Great to get the opportunity to show my horses to somebody that will give their honest opinion." Lotte Reib.

"Thanks to everyone who organised the SA leg. I was a first timer but was thrilled with the experience. Excellent feedback from some very knowledgeable and friendly judges. Great outing for my young horse. See you next year." Kirrilly Thompson.

"I would like to extend a huge thank you to the organisers and the touring assessors for all the hard work they put into organising this tour. I found it very helpful and informative." Katrina Phillips, Tasmania.

Pictured right: Glenhill Geronimo by Belcam Graphic out of Ballantyne Gezzabelle (Gelriano (Imp/Dec)). Highest % Studbook Ridden in New South Wales and 2nd Highest % Studbook Ridden in Australia. Owned by Christan Trainor. Image: Niki Pollock Photography ©



"Very valuable feedback and tool for breeders." Alice Cameron, Oaks Sport Horses.

"Busy day today with 4 horses at the Australian Warmblood Horse Association inspection. Wonderful classifiers were right on with their comments and gave some great feedback! Very refreshing!" Christan Trainor, Trainor Equestrian.

"Thank you all for making the NSW leg such a friendly and safe experience." Alana-Leigh Flanagan.

"Thank you to Joanne and Silvia for your time and lovely comments." Sally Downie.

"Thank you for the feedback yesterday, we really appreciate it." Michelle Vigurs Butler.



"Looks like a great successful tour! I am happy to see that Australians put in more trust in their own judges." Matthias Alexander Werner.

Next year's Tour should be even bigger and better! Now is the time to get involved. Join in and help; have a say in how things are run. In return, you will learn or improve valuable skills, including event management, horsemanship, conformation, bloodlines, judging, administration, fund raising, public relations, diplomacy, record keeping, and financial management. Most of all, enjoy our beautiful Australian Warmblood Horses and celebrate their achievements.

Pictured left: tour assessors, Joanne Verikios and Silvia Ahamer with Heidi Warren's RH Jakkaranda by Jive Magic (Imp) out of Wyuna Cynergi (Ludendorf (Imp/Dec)). Image: Eric Lloyd Photography ©