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THE EUROPEAN VIEW ~ By Klaus Koch

# Solvalla: How To Move A Racetrack

In North America construction of new racetracks has become quite common in recent years thanks to the racinos. In Europe however, we haven't seen a brand new racetrack of any significance for many years. But now it looks like one of the most important tracks, Solvalla in Stockholm, will have to move.

Solvalla Racetrack, located just five miles northwest of downtown Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, was built in 1927. At that time it was far out in the country and the area where the track was placed was then being used as pasture for dairy cows.

Now the city has grown and is coming closer to that location every day. So close in fact that the city of Stockholm would love to get the premises into their hands.

Solvalla would like to achieve some vast changes. About a year ago, a joint venture with the biggest soccer club in Sweden (in fact in Europe) Brommapojkerna, with more than 4,000 members, was launched.

The plan called for a giant stadium with a sports academy and hotel facilities to be constructed on the premises of Solvalla with the hotel facing the finish line and the rest of the complex continuing from the current grandstand area and over the parking lot.



The above are artist's renderings of the proposed racetrack near the Arlanda airport which would have both Standardbred and Thoroughbred racing but presented in a very innovative fashion.

While negotiating with the city council about the project, the city came back with a counter-suggestion: the city takes over the current area for a large sum of money and in addition to that, the Solvalla racing club will be offered an unused area half a mile to the west of the current site. This area can only be developed for commercial use, as it is too close to the Stockholm City Airport (Bromma) to be suitable for living facilities.

This would not only give Solvalla the possibility to build a brand new racetrack and the joint venture with Brommapojkarna, it will also infuse a lot of money into the track, which could be used to increase purse money and perhaps build a training centre some miles outside the central Stockholm area.

If environmental studies allow a racetrack to be placed in that particular area, it could be reality within three to five years. If it goes through, the new racetrack probably will be the first in the world with a roof over it! Not over the entire facility, but the track surface and a little bit into the infield will be covered in order to maintain a year round constant track. The board of Solvalla has approved management to continue negotiations.

The Thoroughbred track of Stockholm, Täby, is also looking for a new place to locate. It's the same thing there: The suburban town of Täby wants the land and offered the Thoroughbred race club a pile of money for it, and the search for a new place to settle has already been initiated.

There are only three Thoroughbred racetracks in Sweden (compared to 34 harness racetracks), and the turnover on the Thoroughbreds is less than five per cent of the annual total on racehorses.

Some people are of the opinion that now is the chance to establish an all-Scandinavian Thoroughbred centre (Denmark and Norway each have one Thoroughbred racetrack) in the south of Sweden, and others are of the opinion that Täby and Solvalla should join together in order to establish a mutual racetrack facility north of Stockholm and close to the international airport Arlanda.

Everybody will argue against such a complex because we all hate to have the harness racetrack on the inside of the (two or three) Thoroughbred racetrack(s). But now a totally new idea has been launched. The two tracks will have a mutual grandstand, parking lot and paddock and stabling facilities, but they will

be built on each side of the grandstand. The possibilities seem fantastic, especially if a railway station underneath the grandstand can be achieved as well.

As you understand, the future of horse racing in Stockholm seems secure, but we do not know where we will be racing both Standardbreds and Thoroughbreds in 10 years. Personally I look forward to following the developments, it should be quite fascinating, and I promise to keep you updated through this column.

This was all this time. Please do not hesitate to comment on my articles. My e-mail address is ontrack@telia.com and as usual I would be more than happy to get reactions from the North American harness racing fans. 📧

Till next time,  
Klaus Koch

*Klaus Koch is one of Scandinavia's leading racing administrators and is perhaps best known for his former role as director of racing at Solvalla Racetrack. His duties included orchestrating the Elitlopp, one of the world's most prestigious races, and attracting North American and Australasian horses to compete in the event.*



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