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THE EUROPEAN VIEW ~ By Klaus Koch

Steroid Users Beware

The use of steroids has been banned in Europe for several years and any breeder or trainer wishing to race or sell their horses overseas should take note.

The North American sales are now over and as usual a number of horses found themselves in European ownership, but there are some storm clouds on the horizon for the future.

Those clouds appear in the shape of the use of steroids which have been banned for many years in Europe. In Scandinavia a total ban was implemented at the beginning of the 1980s. It just became forbidden for Scandinavians to use them on their horses from one day to another, and the rule was followed.

Before that we mainly used anabolic steroids on geldings through winter time and on mares who showed significant character changes while in heat. The ban did not dictate any withdrawal time, and while the substances (at that time) were impossible to trace after some weeks, horses who had been treated in jurisdictions which allowed steroids were free as long as they did not test positive.

In the beginning of the '90s the European Community (EU) dictated a lifetime ban of steroids for all animals. This was a food industry matter, but as harness racing, and other kinds of horse competitions, answers to the Department of Agriculture, the race industry had to answer to this.

As I recall, nobody reacted much to this new legislation, and it didn't become important until recent years, as testing equipment became more and more advanced from day to day. Within a short time period, it will be possible to reconstruct the entire medical history of a horse, which means that we will be able to measure the use of various medications in an individual. With the exception of steroids, every other medicament has some kind of withdrawal time related to them, so they will not be subject to accusations of doping as long as withdrawal times are respected. Any presence of steroids will be prosecuted.

You may ask why? According to our vets a horse which has been treated with steroids is not the same horse as before the treatment from a genetic point of view. Further abuse of steroids can lead to some kind of addiction, which will have a severe impact on the horse's future life.

Even if we aren't quite there yet, the current testing quality will surely detect use of steroids within a number of years back, which means that horsemen who buy or, as I do frequently in my role as international race consultant, invite horses from countries which allow the use of steroids must pay attention.



Photo by Monica Thors

Klaus Koch

There is a rumour in Europe that many yearlings, Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, are given a 'shot' of hormones before going to the sales in order to make them present better in the auction ring. A well known breeder wrote a "warning" in one of our leading magazines in order to make Swedish horsemen doing business at North American sales aware of the danger of ending up with an individual who eventually could be caught with a positive.

The same thing goes for older horses. Steroids already put a stop to a planned European trip for Hambletonian winner Vivid Photo two years ago, so in the last couple of years Solvalla Racetrack, who hosts the famous Elitlopp, have had North American horses tested before bringing them over.

As we have no precedent to refer to, it is difficult to tell what will happen if a horse bought from North America, or any other country for that matter, turns out to be positive for steroids after com-

ing here. So far it is up to the buyer to make sure that the individual he bought is clean of such substances. I guess that, at least concerning older horses, it will be difficult to get the consignor to guarantee that the horse he sells never has been treated with substances which are banned in the horses' new home country.

Fortunately a number of people in North America already do a great job in order to get rid of the steroids on a long term basis. Unfortunately extended withdrawal times do not help us, as we are talking about a life time ban. I have talked to many North American horsemen who still do not understand the impact of this.

I can ask the question: "Did you use steroids on this horse?" Answer: "No, I didn't, at least not since last month!" Luckily enough the work which has been performed by, amongst others, Dr. Scot Waterman and Tom Charters eventually will make North American horsemen aware of the difference, and getting to this first milestone will help us a lot. We



can not dictate North American rules, but we can try to get your attention on the differences in order to avoid any scandals, and we can always dream of the day when we can bring North American horses over without having to be nervous about their medical history.

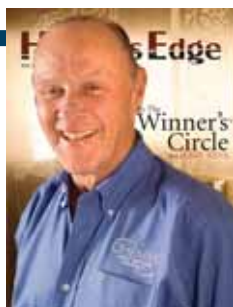
North American trotters are and have been an extremely important part of our harness racing industry both as racehorses and breeding stock and we want to keep that way.

This was all this time. Please do not hesitate to comment my articles. My e-mail address is ontrack@telia.com and as

usual I would be more than happy to receive 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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