



PONY TROT CONGRESS – SEPTEMBER 21, 2018 REPORT

The National Pony Trot Racing Association, Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET, president, held its first ever pony trot racing congress at the Vincennes racecourse in Paris. During five hours of debate, the guests, numbering about a hundred, exchanged ideas on the following themes:

Introduction of the Pony Trot Association, the discipline itself, its development, pony racing, media promotion, with testimonies from parents of young drivers, from presidents of racecourses that host equestrian competitions, of the search for a racing pony breed, as well as pony trot racing beyond France's borders with the presence of Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Malta, Spain and Ireland.

The congress opened at 10:30am

Congress facilitator: **Fabien CAILLER**, journalist

Welcome:

Dominique de BELLAIGUE, president of the company LeTROT

Pascal MULLET-QUERNER, Federal elected official for the FFE (French Equestrian Federation)

• **Dominique de BELLAIGUE**

Thank you for joining us for this first Pony Trot congress. In fact, our Swedish friends discovered this discipline a long time ago. In France, there were just a few occasional races organized, mainly using adult horses.

Looking at our neighbours' experiences, it became clear to us that this practice should be developed in order to bring back some youth participation to the racing world.

However, a study of the legal aspect made it clear that there were no regulations in place that enabled the organisation of pony trot races with young children at racecourses. This meant that everything that had been done in the past had been done illegally, with major associated risks.

It was therefore necessary to put in place some kind of legal basis in order to develop the races and public events.

In cooperation with the FFE which is the only equestrian body permitted to organise competitions for children, president Serge Lecomte, agreed to this and registered pony trot racing, both driven and ridden, as the 33rd FFE discipline.

This was a starting point for further development, followed by the establishment of an association, lead by Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET whom we would like to thank for his dedication. The development required both time and charisma, and was based on a certain number of rules.

It therefore took some time to put in place and develop the discipline. As of today, we can take note of the progress that has been made.

I would like to thank the racecourse presidents for their help in this development, most particularly Cagnes sur Mer president Mr. FORCIOLI-CONTI who organised the world final.

We need to remember that the first races that were organised were monopolised by the sons of trainers. The fact of using the FFE and equestrian centres as a base made it possible to expand beyond the sons of professionals in the field. We can now hope for even greater expansion, given that there are still thousands of riding clubs that do not yet offer harness driving. There is a great deal of potential here.

• **Pascal MULLET-QUERNER**

The fact that I ride horses today is thanks to Ideal du Gazeau, Ourasi, and everything that happens on racecourses. I have been particularly keen on this discipline every since I was young.

These two worlds of racing and equestrian centres can no longer ignore each other, and must, on many levels, work together more and more.

There are more than 5000 equestrian centres in France, with over 640,000 FFE licence holders. It would be a good thing for every equestrian centre to have a pony and a sulky. The presidents of the company LeTROT and FFE have a great deal of respect for one another. What few people know is that, in his youth, Serge LECOMTE spent several months training with the Paul DELANOE harness racing stables at Grosbois.

“Nowadays, racing and equestrian disciplines need one another to move forward.”

The discipline must make a place for itself within equestrian centres and that will be a slow process. At the Lamotte-Beuvron FFE equestrian park, ponies and sulkies are made available whenever there are training courses for equestrian centres. Our park is available to promote pony trot racing.

Theme #1: In France, pony trot racing is the FFE's 33rd discipline

Panel:

Jean Baptiste **BOSSUET**, president of the ANCTGP, the national association of pony trot and flat racing

Martine **DELLA ROCCA FASQUELLE**, president of the Trot committee at the FFE

Presentation of ANCGTP

[Presentation of the ANCTGP, the national association of pony trot and flat racing](#)

• **Jean Baptiste BOSSUET**

In 2011, I was asked by Martine DELLA ROCCA FASQUELLE to organise the first pony races in the Anjou-Maine region, taking advantage of my double role as father of a 10-year old daughter who rode, and president of the racecourse.

Following the success of this first endeavour, the umbrella organisation for trot racing and the FFE signed an agreement in 2012 which led to the establishment of the association. The major focus of the development was to motivate equestrian centres to take part in this new discipline, and thus bring young riders and their families to racecourses.

Flat racing also became part of the association in 2017 as it is often more interesting to bring the two disciplines together on a recourse.

It was sometimes complicated to shape this in such a way as to attune the races to the size of the ponies, and to award distance handicaps so as to even out the chances.

Presentation of the discipline

• Martine DELLA ROCCA FASQUELLE

At the start, there was a wish to bring together the two families of Trotting and the French Equestrian Federation.

The FFE has towards children an educational approach which is totally absent from trotting where *“children have no place”*.

In trotting, children enter this world around the age of 15 which explains the need for help in this implementation with young children, a role which the FFE has fulfilled perfectly.

None of this can be done without volunteers and, today, we need to commend them and thank them. As of today, there are about 100 people working on the implementation of pony trot racing, supervision of the children, putting competitions in place, running and managing events, as well as the breeders who are working on the creation of a breed of trot racing ponies.

This endeavour has enormous potential, but nothing can happen without the presence of committed and competent people. That is what we now have.

The concept of pony trot racing originated in 2007 as a result of brainstorming between the members of the Femmes Cheval Passion (Women Horse Passion) association who wanted to add a further resource within the framework of training. From Alain LEMENAHEZE of the National Horse Racing Federation to presidents Dominique de BELLAIGUE and Serge LECOMTE, everyone has found a degree of potential for development in their own field.

Pony trot races are held at 30 racecourses with both a national and a regional circuit, a French championship, and a world cup known as the Wold Summer Cup, with the final held at the Cagnes sur Mer racecourse, gala day at Grosbois where prizes for the season are handed out, and all the families can enjoy a day of relaxation and fun, and Trotting Kids which regroups 15 races within its programme.

None of these events could be organised without a set of rules which evolves from year to year. These regulations are based on two major points:

- The security of the children and the professionals
- The image of this still very young discipline

Chronologically, it has been necessary to put in place qualifiers, a training programme for equestrian centre instructors, followed by certification, and then put in place TROT diplomas, ranging from level one to four, and to create the website where the children can find all the news relating to their discipline. Finally, we are focusing on breeding. The first races took place with 10 children (5 in the Hauts de France region, and 5 in the Anjou-Maine region), and we now have 50 licence holders. It takes time to recruit and make the discipline known.

When thinking of development, there must be serious reflection and the realisation that the path drawn by all the volunteers is reaching its limits.

“We must think about an economic development programme, and work more closely with equestrian centres, which are talent pools for children.”

My thanks to all the logistics teams at Vincennes and at AFASEC for their help in organising this congress.

From the floor:

Fabien CAILLER, how receptive are the regions?

Martine DELLA ROCCA FASQUELLE: The approach to pony trot racing differs depending on individual racing society presidents. Some of them lack vision concerning the future.

Cédric YETTA, Compiègne racecourse: When a pony trot racing video is shared, it is viewed 10,000 times as opposed to 300 times for a professional race.

“Establishing pony trot races to save racing”

Emmanuel DELPECH, President of the Val de Marne departmental committee: The perspective of the equestrian centres is that the discipline is interesting but particular to the children of horse racing professionals.

“ This is clearly a hurdle that needs to be overcome”

Guillaume BLANC, IFCE (French Institute for Racing and Equestrianism): There is no permeability between the various families in the world of horses. We need to build bridges so as to make the field more solid. Recruitment of youngsters is problematic. They know nothing about this discipline.

“The totter pony is a great opportunity to bring the different disciplines together”

Theme #2: Developing the discipline

Racing company investment to host the competitions and the consequences for the racing company

Panel:

Alain LEMENAHEZE – National Horse Racing Federation

Frédéric MUNET – President of Rochefort sur Loire racing company

Bernard MARIE – President of Rambouillet racing company

Jean Baptiste BOSSUET – President of Meslau-du-Maine racing company

• **Alain LEMENAHEZE**

Putting aside Martine’s deeply held convictions, it seems self-evident that there was an incredible division between the two worlds of horse racing and equestrian centres.

And yet, bringing together these two worlds is the real means to create a connection and to encourage families to come to racecourses and take part in the world of races by means of a race-centric activity.

The important point is to restore the image of racing which has too often been degraded due to:

- The exclusive promotion of betting, to the detriment of the beauty of what can be seen.
- Ignorance regarding the existing trades and the economic significance of the field.

The discovery of these trades must therefore be promoted so as to make them into a real lever for recruiting.

• **Bernard MARIE**

Initially, there were difficulties in organising days of racing with ponies because of the reticence of the institutions and regional presidents. Our federation must be persistent if we want to move ahead, and to do so without financial assistance, despite the compulsory regulatory obligations (such as the constraints of a heavy sanitary burden for the smaller racecourses).

Digital communication opens up the way for the presence of more families on racecourses. It is important to put pony trot racing in together with flat and harness racing so as to develop these disciplines.

• **Jean Baptiste BOSSUET**

The organization of pony trot races within the framework of PMU betting meets is more complex with regard to scheduling. It is fitting to favour the PMU betting races, and the future will doubtless see full days devoted to ponies (such as Sillé-le-Guillaume and its full day dedicated to flat racing).

- **Frédéric MUNET**

First organizer of pony trot races at Rochefort sur Loire, with trainers' children, with these races bringing a lot of activity to the racecourse between other races.

"The greatest shame is the lack of replay on our major horse-related media"

It is very important to promote these actions at the same time as pushing youngsters forward.

From the floor:

François FORCIOLI-CONTI: Particular sensitivity of the public with regard to pony racing, and all the ceremonial aspects that go with it.

Marie-France WISSOCQ, Director at LeTROT company: The dramatization of the Prix d'Amérique 2018 with children was very touching. Such events should be used for communication as much as possible.

David LEPERRE, father of pony trot racing drivers and amateur: We must convince those who are against it, and also understand the contrast between the enthusiasm of some and the scepticism of others. It is an ongoing challenge.

Xavier DECAUDIN, President of the northern Trot committee:

"The problem is strictly political"

Pascal MULLET-QUERNER: If we look back 25 years, there were then 150,000 FFE license holders. There are now 640,000. Ponies saved the FFE and helped it to grow. But we must watch out for elitist communications.

"The comeback and promotion of our base is vital"

How to develop pony Trot within the framework of equestrian business

Panel:

Laurent BULLOT: Manager of the La Licorne equestrian centre in the Haut de France region

Mathias HEBERT: Sports councillor in charge of FFE development

- **Laurent BULLOT**

Distinctiveness is what makes "new" disciplines interesting, as they bring diversity to equestrian centres. Pony racing has a strong impact on families and is appealing to children. My assessment is that, right from the start, these races have aimed to showcase a "perfect" image of the discipline, with top level ponies and equipment. Sadly, this cannot be replicated at an equestrian centre, and for a beginner. The major issue is the lack of financial viability associated with a starting base of one pony and one driver having to travel from equestrian centres to distant racecourses. The first step is to educate parents about races, and it is after that that driving can be introduced. A great deal of advance work is necessary before going to the races with a well-trained pony and children who are not apprehensive.

How can this be developed in other equestrian centres? The biggest point is to have motivated teachers. It is the teacher who is the ambassador who brings the discipline together. The lack of development in this area is now the biggest stumbling block to children coming with their parents and grandparents to racecourses. I experienced in my own equestrian course the case of a trainee for the agricultural exhibition management baccalaureate. I took him with me to the racecourses to look after mini-drivers aged 7 to 12. Interacting with racing professionals led to him to change his professional orientation following the baccalaureate, and going to the racing school in Graignes where he gained a professional qualification (CAP) as a training lad. On graduating from school, he obtained a long-term job at a racing stables.

"You want people at the racecourses? Go and get the children!"

Right now, this is still not a growth booster because it remains an elite sport, and it is hard to imagine mixing an "all discipline" pony club with the racing ponies of the children of trainers. It discourages young participants at equestrian centres.

• **Mathias HEBERT**

Pony clubs have brought an image of safety to equestrian centres and have been a real boost for the sport. Against a background of stagnation in the participants, Trot and racing in general have been a growth factor. Racing is a show.

This must be turned into a sports project for all with, perhaps, putting in place a circuit for children in equestrian centres, with somewhat less strict selection criteria, that would be a base for greater development.

From the floor:

Jérôme GRADEL: I am president of the French School for Trot and Equestrian Sports, which was set up under the 1901 Association Law. We have been based for the last 24 months at the la Capelle racecourse and we have a pony trot section. In addition to the 120 riders who are registered with the equestrian centre, we have 5 full-time drivers twice a week who are trained by a young Trot trainer, together with a riding instructor. This activity is not profitable, and exists with the support of the club that shares the ponies. This is a model, a working model, but the discipline requires costly investments because to equip a driving pony costs €1,800 for the harness, bridle and sulky, as opposed to €600 for a riding saddle, plus the cost of a pony, ranging from €1,000 to €5,000. This must happen everywhere with the goodwill of racecourse presidents, but above all with the encouragement of the TROT and FFE presidents in terms of helping with human resources and financing.

Daniele BERNARDI, Cagnes-sur-Mer racecourse: The organisation of races can be divided into two sets, so as to mix the ponies

Martine DELLA-RICCA: That is already in place with the distance handicaps by category, minis for ponies under 1m20 (11.3H), and junior for ponies under 1m40 (13.3H).

"To develop the discipline, we need youngsters, clubs, means and racecourses"

Cécile MADAME, President of the Galop Committee at FFE: In flat racing, we organise entire meets that allow for different levels and the presence of a great many people. There are few time constraints, and concerns about results.

Christine HAMON, Journalist at Le Parisien: Where in France can one now sign up a child who wants to get into pony racing?

Martine DELLA-ROCCA FASQUELLE: At the moment, there are only two equestrian centres in France that offer this discipline; Mr. Bullo's Licorne centre, and Mr. Gradel's Trot School. There are also youngsters who are affiliated with an equestrian centre but do all the organising themselves, with their parents.

Mathias HERBERT: It is through the opening up of equestrian centres (there are more than 5000 equestrian centres and pony clubs in France) that we will be able to create vocation. It becomes economically viable if these equestrian centres consider the discipline sufficiently accessible, and if they are located close enough to a racecourse to be able to get there with a lorry full of ponies and several children.

Cécile MADAME: *Opening up the way for clubs to organise races and thereby own the discipline*

Mathias HERBERT: To bring together the 235 racecourses, trainers and teachers with a common will.

A Pony Trot training course for equestrian centres

Panel:

Florence PIERRET, Director of the Grosbois Horse Racing School

• **Florence PIERRET:**

Since 2012, a training course in two parts, over two weeks, has been offered by AFASEC for teachers and managers of equestrian centres. The aim is to prepare and control a pony in training so as that children can be safely supervised.

Few people have taken the course, doubtless because of the lack of communication by AFASEC and FFE concerning this course.

From the floor:

Olivier LOUIT, Director of the Vichy Racing Company: Could we consider organising flat races for equestrian centre teachers that would deepen their awareness of the world racing? The teachers are willing, and it would be a good idea to connect regional committees for racing and equestrian sports to develop this option.

François LUCAS, President of the Ile de France Horse Council: France Galop and LeTROT could have a full-time person who would concentrate on releasing information to equestrian centres. The training would have to be very efficient in order to manage their movements and absence from the centres. One could even conceive of certain professionals from leTROT making their way to equestrian centres.

Organising the Pony Trot Discipline

Panel:

Stéphanie BENOIT, In charge of pony Trot in the Hauts de France region

Laurent BIZOUX, In charge of pony Trot in Normandy and Ile de France

Xavier DECAUDIN, Director of the LeTROT company

Organising the Pony Trot discipline

• **Stéphanie BENOIT**

Harmonising the discipline with federal interpretation.

The creation of a tool to offer customers. The “Trot” diplomas are the equivalent of the FFE “Galop” qualifications. We offer several levels of qualification, from 1 to 4, just like federal exams. The few regulations that have been put in place this year encourage club riders to pass these exams so that they achieve the same levels as the children of trot professionals. This is the necessary benchmark for organising regional racing. The key word remains Safety.

At present, we lack the funding to enable our pony trot experts to sell their discipline to equestrian centres.

• **Laurent BIZOUX**

The few races organised during a typical day are established, with one race after the first race, and the other after the fourth race. This reassures the professionals and optimises the joint organisation of the full day, as well as shine a light on the children’s races as the stands are not empty.

• **Xavier DECAUDIN**

In the early days, our request to make it compulsory to host one pony race by racecourse for the Northern Federation was met with great reticence. We had to run through a typical day with complete safety measures in place in order to reassure the professionals and racecourse presidents.

There is now a line in the racing code which acknowledges the existence of pony races. The connexion has been established with the FFE through the recognition of the Galop 7 qualification. And the Trot 4 has been created, a diploma that both acknowledges the capacity of the children and the work of volunteers.

We must reassure the people in charge at FFE: Trainers are ready to accept children for training at their training centres.

From the Floor:

Is it possible to organise pony trot races with riding teachers?

Stéphane BENOIT: Yes, whilst taking into considering insurance issues, with the possibility of a day licence. We could also conceive of 2-seater sulkies. There are also trot schools for adults, and these also take part in this training.

Xavier DECAUDIN: The presence today of three directors from the board of directors of LeTROT is an important indicator in favour of taking decisions supporting pony trotting.

[Media promotion of the discipline](#)

Panel:

Martine DELLA ROCCA, President of the Junior-Trot Association

Olivier LOUIT, Director of the Vichy Racing Company

Alain LEMENAHEZE, French National Horse Racing Federation

Mathias HEBERT, Sports councillor in charge of FFE development

Thibault CEFREY, Head of digital project of the Marketing & Communication Management

• **Alain LEMENAHEZE**

The great importance of using social networks. Children always have something to prove and something to show, and are proud of their experiences. The message communicated is gratifying, and the reach is enormous, going way beyond close family and friends.

“Let us give children the means and tools for them to broadcast their exploits the most widely possible”

• **Thibault CEFREY**

There has been, since 2012, a collaboration between the marketing management of TROT, the organisers of pony trot, and the FFE: Promoting young pony drivers, putting in place of the letrot.com Internet site (250,000 hits per week), sharing on the Facebook Le Trot community (170,000 likes).

“It is essential that the pony trot race organisers build themselves up within the digital world, both to bring together the players and to create a platform for exchanges with the public”

At this stage, the players are the best ambassadors to communicate their discipline via social networks. If I remember correctly, 85% of households in France have Internet access, and 84% of under 40s are on a social network. Facebook is the number one media in France (8 million visitors per day). The community is very welcoming of the pony trot discipline (20,000 hits in a few days on the French Pony Championship at Vincennes).

In order to be efficient nowadays in the digital sector, there needs to be clear identification of the speakers and players.

The major events are still the showcase of TROT and pony trot must always be linked back to them (broader media readership).

- **Olivier LOUIT**

Major yield from social networks when sharing pony racing events, with the arrival of families on racecourses.

- **Mathias HEBERT**

The great power of communicating via social networks. 90% of all messages go through Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

- **Martine DELLA ROCCA FASQUELLE**

Media promotion of pony racing on social networks is also a great asset for adding visibility among the general public.

On the www.junior-trot.fr pony racing site, there were, between July 2017 and August 2018, 384,677 page views by 38,738 regular Internet visitors from 12 countries outside France. One must not forget that the young drivers promote the days spent on the racecourse on their Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and other accounts, and that pony trot races are broadcast on YouTube.

Of the foreign countries that look at the site, first comes the United States, followed by Hong Kong, Ukraine, Russia, Great Britain, Taiwan, Germany, Sweden, Australia, Belgium, Spain, Poland, Italy and Israel.

The example given by Thibault CEFFREY of the video of the 2017 pony trot racing championship that was broadcast on www.letrot.com, and that seen by 20,000 in a week, is proof that the public is drawn to pony trot.

Fabien CAILLER has been asking about the need to pinpoint a common name for the promotion and communication of pony trot in the future.

Theme No.3: Testimonials on Pony Trot

Panel:

Grégory DIEU, parent of a pony trot driver

Eric CORDONNIER, parent of a pony trot driver

Clément DUVALDESTIN, ex-pony trot driving (from racing background)

Léa LEFEVRE, ex-pony trot driver (from riding background)

Thibault LAMARE, President of the National Syndicate of Trot Trainers, Drivers and Jockeys

- **Grégory DIEU**

When my daughter, Romane, went for the first time to an equestrian centre, I could never have imagined the extent to which my family would take on a new dimension. In fact, even though I had some vague idea of horses acquired through some very distant riding, plus some stops with my father at the betting shop, the world of horses seemed very distant.

Very much drawn to horses (she would like to become a vet), Romane had the good luck to find herself at an equestrian centre (The French Trot School, at the La Capelle racecourse) which offered courses in pony trot organised by Stéphane Benoit. She was immediately smitten! She loved the idea of speed, 22km/h behind a pony when you are a child is already quite a feeling, and the tactical aspect on the track convinced her. I have no doubt that she will become an amateur as soon as she can.

On the day of the Grand Prix d'Amérique, where I was able to be at the Vincennes racecourse thanks to pony trot and the support of the Lens Club), I thought I was at the Bollaert Soccer Stadium! It was absolutely magical! I am certain that one of these young potential drivers, one will one day take part in the Prix d'Amérique.

We are at the races as a family almost every weekend. Even when Romane is not racing, we go to support her trainer, Romain HEMERY.

We see how happy our daughter is so we encourage her to follow her dreams and she now has quite a circle of supporters who come to applaud her. And it's not as if we have a choice, since the trop professionals are so wonderful with our children! My daughter is supported by one of the best drivers in the world, Björn GOOP, who is infinitely kind. You cannot imagine how proud she is to wear his colours. My son Ethan (6 years old) is sponsored by Pierre VERCUYSE and will start competing at La Capelle on September 30th. It is true that pony racing has completely changed our lives! It's a real investment for the parents because we live our children's passion to the full.

• **Eric CORDONNIER**

Until my daughter developed an interest in pony trot, our involvement in racing, was limited to watching each year the Prix d'Amérique on television. I only knew racing through my father who is a punter, and that was all. When we went to the racecourse at La Capelle, the time between the races was very boring for us and for the children. One can say that the pony races add something to the meets. It creates entertainment for families. This is important both for the image and from the point of view of entertainment. We discovered a whole new world, learned its regulations, and visited its infrastructure such as the training centre at Grosbois.

"For us the world of racing had been an opaque universe that was not open to the general public"

Supporting our daughter requires us to make a major investment, both financially but also in the time it takes to get to racecourses. We should have support from federations to help us finance equipment, sulkies and ponies.

You can see how children flourish in practicing this discipline. It makes them more mature through their being responsible for their pony. There is also the important concept of safety, and all the relationships built up with all the other players on the racecourses.

• **Léa LEFEVRE**

I started out by learning to ride at an equestrian centre. I don't come from a racing family. My family and I discovered this world by practicing this discipline at my equestrian centre. It was love at first sight for me. It's an incredible sensation. You are positioned behind the animal, sat on your sulky. My parents are with me in this passion, and we share incredible moments. They bought me a pony and the equipment I needed to get started. They then bought a second pony, faster than the first, which allowed me to move up to another category.

Fabien CAILLER questions the two youngsters to ask them if they think of pony trot as a leisure activity or a future profession

Léa LEFEVRE: For me it's a leisure activity. I won't turn professional but would like to continue as an amateur.

• **Clément DUVALDESTIN**

I come from the world of racing. I started pony trot when I was 12 and there were not many of us. I stopped when I was 15 as I started studying at the AFASEC school. Those 3 years were a good experience through which I was able to discover how races are organised on a racecourse. It was a good apprenticeship because it is less risky to learn with a pony than with a horse. I would recommend this experience to those who would like to study at equestrian schools because it is a good way to reduce stress, and to understand well the strategic aspect of racing.

I think that more racecourses should organise pony racing.

From the floor:

Stéphane Benoit: Are the rigorous aspects of pony trot, such as the dress code, useful to you now that you have turned professional?

Clément DUVALDESTIN: I was not traumatised by the rigorous aspect which, in fact, is necessary. I think that when we are young, we need supervision for our future. It is important to adhere to the proper rules from the very beginning and later take advantage of what has been learned. I would like to thank Martine who knew how to impose this discipline.

• **Thibault LAMARE**

Pony racing is a call for vocations. At present, we can barely meet professional needs at our racing tables and it is clear that there are recruitment issues. We have a tendency to mix among ourselves, and this initiative can bring with it discovery and passion. We trainers should consider with great interest how to encourage vocations, and to help people discover and love our professions. *“We must encourage the opening of training centres for young people”*. This is a fine example of what can be done in terms of building bridges, and the partnership between equestrian centres and racing is very important. The final result of this double-fronted initiative would be greater activity at equestrian centres and more people at the races. This is a win-win situation. But one wishes that all of this could be underpinned by the infrastructure necessary to get things going. We need to study exchanges, partnerships, and joint activities with the equestrian world. This will be a meeting of those two worlds in terms of training, apprenticeships, and the putting in place of good practices.

From the floor;

Xavier Decaudin, President of the Northern Trot committee: I would add to what has just been said that the technical know-how is the same whether you are behind a pony or a horse. The only difference is that the pony does not go as fast which makes it a lot safer and less prone to accidents. To start with ponies is very safe and makes for excellent schooling where values are transmitted, something which is very important for the future of these youngsters.

One should mention that level 4 of the TROT diploma is registered in the racing code. In order to drive in races, a youngster employed by a stable needs to have one year of experience. With the Galop 7 qualification, this is reduced to 6 months. The level 4 TROT diploma also reduces the amount of time needed at the place of work.

At present, these diplomas are certified by a state-qualified teacher.

Theme No.4: Creating a French Trotter Pony breed

Panel:

Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET, President of the National Trotter Pony Breeding Association

Philippe FRAIOLI, the National Trotter Pony Breeding Association

Guillaume BLANC, Support Director of the IFCE's equine sector

• **Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET**

We are now in the early stages of breeding a French Trotter Pony. It is going to take at least 10 years to produce ponies within the framework of organising races that are homogeneous and pleasant to watch. It is important to be able to make selections whilst relying on a breeder. At present, breeders are becoming involved in studying cross-breeding. We have already had some births such as, for example, a pony who is racing in the mini category.

• **Philippe FRAIOLI**

At this point in time, there is a real opportunity for breeders. But this is a competitive world. This means that those who undertake breeding ponies for trot will be in a situation where they will not make it unless they are driven to progress in the face of international competition.

Genetic improvements must be tied to the new uses and that is the first area to tackle. The needs at this time of all the youngsters practicing the sport are the same as those of adults. For example, a pedigree book was opened a century ago for French trotters which eventually led to the breed being recognised. It is through cross-breeding that we will manage to define a breed of racing pony. There has already been some cross-breeding between ponies of different sizes. This opens up the possibility to meet the different needs imposed by racing regulations.

- **Guillaume BLANC**

We must support the breeders who have a reasoned approach to cross-breeding for racing. For a start, there will be high-level horses that will be crossed with trotters and other breeds that will be used in racing more by the general public.

The goal is to produce a high-level pony, but in order to achieve this, basic level ponies must also be produced. Low-level racing must remain open.

At the moment, if you look up the SIRE French equine database, you can find a list of ponies with the TROT classification. The second step would be to list the ponies obtained through a particular cross-breeding, perhaps in a “racing hope” category.

From the floor:

Marie Noëlle PROUTHEAU, Ministry of Agriculture: This approach is very interesting and falls within the creation of a breed. It seems premature for now to say that we will soon be setting up a stud book for trotter ponies on a European scale. This would require having a basis for selection which is something that requires several years. We are now in the initial phase.

“Careful not to move too quickly in this phase because the concept of breed would become meaningless”

The requirement would be to have a population that is as homogeneous as possible, and distinct from other populations. That is what makes it possible to create a breed, but it takes time to obtain that basic population and to see what results it yields in terms of usage which, in this case, is trot racing.

From that perspective, the ability test is very important because it helps to define the pony’s capacity to race and to work with children, and that is what is important as a basis for breeding and commercialisation.

Theme No. 5: A second life for racecourses as equestrian hubs

Panel:

Alain LEMENAHEZE, French National Horse Racing Federation

Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET, President of the Meslay-du-Maine racecourse

François FORCIOLI-CONTI, President of the Cagnes sur Mer racecourse

Jean-Luc EGERT, President of the La Capelle racecourse

Cédile MADAMET, President of the Pony Flat Racing Association

Jean de CHEVIGNY, General Secretary of the Eperon Fund

Question from Fabien CAILLER: What are the stakes at the moment for a racecourse to be considered indulgently by the state or local authority? Why would they be opened up to other activities that would include pony trot?

- **Alain LEMENAHEZE**

Pony races are an FFE discipline. One can therefore conceive of the FFE getting closer and closer to racecourses, to the extent that it might consider the creation of an equestrian hub on one or other racecourse. This could certainly be a bonus in the way public powers and departmental and local authorities view the matter since the economic aspect is not to be sneezed at. *“The key to opening up racecourses lies in the creation of equestrian hubs”*

• **Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET**

The Meslay-du-Maine racecourse company was joint organiser in September of the French Driving Championship for Heavy Horses. The more we offer different disciplines on our racecourses, the more people we can attract to our racecourses for races. Putting in place a driving competition is complicated because the obstacles need to be built and these must not in any way impede the running of the races.

• **Jean-Luc EGERT**

The racecourse at La Capelle is a rural excellence hub, as designated by the state since about 10 years ago. Those who financed the project, whether it was the state or local authorities, expressed a wish that there should be something else in addition to putting up a racetrack. So, a school that is now run by the MFR was set-up to teach farriery, to school trainer drivers, and equestrian sports teachers. There followed the pony school which is unique in France. The fact that our racecourse is open to multiple equestrian activities means that we get lots of different visitors. We also organise driving competitions for heavy horses, and trekking. I would like to mention the positive outcome on professionals with regard to the creation of these pony trotting races, and the opening up of our racecourse to other activities. I believe that the future of racing must be tied to pony racing. On the other hand, it seems necessary to put in place a common set of rules governing pony racing competitions, and do this in conjunction with our friends and neighbours overseas.

• **Jean de CHEVIGNY**

One can but acknowledge the numerous synergies between racecourses and other equestrian activities. In France we are also witnessing the development of structures that are being built in the centre or around racecourses, and that of course ties in with the aim of attracting a new clientele.

But above all, this makes it easier to justify the scale of the initial investments because the overall surface that is “frozen” is large and more intense utilisation of it, going beyond a few meets a year, is preferable. There are several examples in France of the creation of equestrian hubs (Landivisiau Cluny, La Roche-sur-Yon). The Eperon Fund has given its financial support to develop horse-related activities other than racing. There is therefore a real economic logic to this sharing and, most particularly to this development. Local authorities which are the only ones that can finance such sites, come out even thanks to the versatility of the sites.

• **François FORCIOLI-CONTI**

We organise an international show-jumping competition at the heart of the Cagnes sur Mer racecourse. As wonderful as the world of racing is, we must face the fact that, today, few younger people are fans, and it does not have a sporting image. Nowadays, when people talk of sport, they mean equestrian sports and not racing.

It was therefore important to link back to the sporting image of the racecourse and races, and to welcome the young in doing this. We take part in the organisation of a 130km endurance race. Inside the racetrack, we have created three sand arenas, including the largest one in Europe. We organise two long-term two-star and three-star international horse shows (they span three weeks each) with the participation of 850 horses and 20 countries. One can see the economic boost from the presence of numerous participants and spectators through the occupancy rate of hotels and restaurants outside the traditional tourist season. This is therefore entirely beneficial to the local authorities.

In addition, one must admit that press and media coverage of these competitions is much greater, with higher visibility, than for races. There is therefore something going on at the racecourse 44 weekends per year. This considerable activity obviously needs an important infrastructure and the associated implementation, be it with volunteers or staff.

“Creating ties with the young is very important and that is how, in the long term, we will work towards the continued existence of racing”

At this time, we are negotiating with the board of education to work more closely together in developing an educational programme with children coming to the racecourse to learn about horses and associated trades.

From the floor:

Pascal MULLET-QUERNER: I shall return to the federation this evening reassured by what I have heard here today. Things are moving in the right direction and people are beginning to really understand one another. Everything starts with breeding but there is a simple principle:

“the good horse is the one that is the best in its category”

Horse riding sells well in schools. There is much school activity in equestrian centres, in outdoor classes, and it is an important activity for them. Within this frame of mind, pony trot should be the base of important development in schools.

Ponies are an important and wonderful vector for employment. The basic training allows both to motivate and select future employees.

Pascal ADDA: I fully support pony racing because I am convinced that it is a vector for enthusiasts.

If the world of racing believes in it, the necessary resources must be provided as well as supporting all the volunteers with paid staff. At present, we are in the red with regard to training because it is not done well. The pony races allow us to do a pre-selection so that when the students arrive in the schools, they will already be ahead.

“Let us provide the financial means to develop and encourage this discipline”

Theme No.6: Pony Trot beyond our borders

Panel:

Kerstin PETERSON: Sweden

Georges SANTI: Italy, represented by **Daniele BERNARDINI**

Jean-Pierre KRATZER: Switzerland

Juan LLABATA CURSACH: Spain

Achille CASSART: Belgium

Edwin BORG: Malta

François FORCIOLI-CONTI: France

• **Kerstin PETERSON**

We organize 100 days of pony racing per year. These are mixed days that include both pony races with Shetland and Gotland Russ ponies and harness racing. These are very strong ponies that adapt well to all disciplines, but are particularly suited to trot races. You must hold a license to race in Sweden.

Between the ages of 8 and 15, children can race with Shetland ponies. Between 13 and 25, they can race with Gotland Russ ponies. Between the ages of 16 and 25, they can also race with horses against Gotland Russ ponies. All harness racing meets organise pony trot races and the children wear the colours of their trot schools. In all trot schools, there are both ponies and horses to train the children. Out of the 43 racecourses in Sweden, 23 have trot schools. The licenses are the same, whatever the age of the holder. Some races allow the double participation of parents and children, which is a lot of fun. Very often, children come to trot schools with their parents and friends. This opens the way for the gradual expansion of recruits to the racing world. Although a few children do come from trainers' families, the vast majority do not come from the racing world. As of today, there are 400 license holders for 400 ponies and 500 Gotland Russ. In 2017, almost 1,200 pony trot races were held for a total distributed purse of €100,000 (to the winner and runner-up). The overall budget dedicated to pony racing is €500,000 which is divided between the race organisers and the trot schools. Each racecourse is responsible for organising its pony races. The racing conditions applicable to ponies are the same as for harness racing.

"The significant moment which opened the way to develop the discipline was the establishment of numerous trot schools within the racecourses."

All of this generated a great deal of curiosity and interest among race-goers.

The concept of animal welfare was the first rule in promoting pony trot racing, along with the safety of children, which reassured everyone. In addition, we work hard to make sure that the great Swedish harness racing champions are present and available for the children. Finally, in order to promote trot races among both children and adults, we created the two-seater sulky. We also use this with adults within the framework of corporations, in order to develop sponsorship. This has proved very successful and makes it possible to feel the speed behind the horse. It is also a good means to recruit future horse owners. It enables us to show quite transparently, both the associated sensations and also the respect towards the horses.

• **Daniele BERNARDINI read the message from president Giorgio SANDI**

Italy's equine sector was for many years a world leader in terms of its working practices, both in terms of the breeding and training of its own horses and in the results obtained in both harness and flat racing. The sector experienced a major shrinkage towards the end of the 1990s. This is still the case and, as a result, we have lost contact with new generations. It is rarer and rarer to see families with children in our racecourses today, and one could count the number of youngsters who are passionate about the world of racing on the fingers of one hand. If one looks at other sports for reference, the best approach in order to create a broad base truly is drawing in children and their families so that they can experience from the inside the sporting greatness of racing. Nowadays in Italy, there are just a few people who believe in the potential of pony racing on racecourses. We will work on carrying out the reforms necessary to the Italian equestrian sector in order to give it a sustainable future. One of the proposals for which I am the ambassador is to really invest in pony races. This would be done principally through different incentives for racecourses that would organise these and also welcome schools in order to bring children closer to the races that would feature them. My dream is to see, in the very near future, the creation of the first high-level pony schools on racecourses and training centres in Italy.

"A great equestrian nation can only be born of the passion that we find ways to transmit to the younger generation."

• **Achille CASSART**

We need other activities on racecourses to ensure their survival in the long term, and pony races are certainly a very good means of achieving this. We have, on average, 2 or 3 race meets a month during which there will be 2 to 3 pony races. At present, these races are almost exclusively reserved for the children of professionals. We can only hope for the setting up of pony schools in order to open up the participation of new clients.

• **Jean Pierre KRATZER**

One very important consideration is animal welfare and the behaviour of people with animals. France is not currently a leader when it comes to the idea of animal welfare. It is difficult to maintain an equestrian culture with more and more people insisting that horses should not be used at all.

We have created and put in place a campus on horse knowledge that is dedicated firstly to teaching young children, and also the 230,000 people who are not license holders. It is place where equestrian skills are taught and implemented. When it comes to youngsters, the most important thing is the use of media and social networks. I was able to obtain a considerable budget to this end so that we could communicate every single day about horses to children. When you are the president of a federation or a company, you can put together a common strategy and implement it. You can therefore make it so that all racecourse include pony races within a finite programme. The appeal is enormous and there is a very strong emotional pull.

• **Juan LLABATA-CURSACH**

Our very first pony races started in 2009 with just 5 children and 5 ponies for the first 5 years. At present, we have 50 ponies (undetermined origin). The races only take place on the Balearic Islands, on 5 racecourses. We have about 100 official pony races. Most of the children at this time come from the horse world. Trot professionals are totally committed to this discipline and are aware of the importance of these children for the future of harness racing. In order to develop the pony trot discipline, we will be establishing a school in conjunction with the Spanish Federation of Trot and Equestrian Sports.

• **Edwin BORG**

The first teaching establishment for pony trot racing was created in 2011. The Maltese Racing Federation worked hard to set up this school and, most importantly, brought its financial support. The pupils at this school are from 7 to 15 in age. Pony trot races are organised regularly and, on the day of the President's Cup, Malta's premier race, a mini cup is organised for ponies in the presence of the president who gives the cup to the children. The Maltese TROT Federation sees pony racing as a real platform for promoting future race professionals and amateurs.

From the floor:

Marine_France WISSOCQ, TROT Director: Today's congress has made it possible to pinpoint the different paths necessary for developing pony trot racing. Such a development can only happen with financing which is a theme that sadly has not been touched on during today's congress. It will be necessary to work with the different institutions, given the importance of pony trot as was shown today, and the involvement of many racecourse presidents.

"Financing is the crucial point"

In addition, the training offered at Grosbois is under-utilised due to defective communication. It is therefore vital to strengthen PR ties between the French Equestrian Federation (FFE) and AFASEC (The racing stables training organisation). Let us make use of the tools that are available to us to develop pony racing.

Conclusion

• **Jean-Baptiste BOSSUET**

A big thank you to all of my friends, presidents, and representatives of various countries who came to Vincennes today, as well as you, the public, and all the speakers. The quality of your attention and your remarks shone new light on our discipline. Each person was able to speak freely and so contributed to the success of this congress.

I paid close attention to everything that was said. The success and evolution of pony racing will not happen without a strong base. The future lies in equestrian centres, with suitable ponies, and training for teachers. But is also lies in organising races on racecourses of days of pony flat or trot racing dedicated solely to this discipline.

I also listened closely to Jean-Pierre KRATZER's remarks and the importance of animal welfare. We need to follow the shining example of our European friends in improving things in a major way in this area.

Thank you, Martine, for the quality of the organisation of this congress.

See you soon at the races!