

What are we talking about today? And why?

- **Guideline** of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) **on the handling and use of horses from an animal welfare perspective**
- **Focus topics:** → start of training
 → housing of young horses
- **Current discussions in Germany**
- **Impact on equestrian sport and breeding sector**
(especially **selection-system of stallions**,
licensing and preparation)



BMEL - guideline for animal welfare in equestrian sport



- July 2020
- no law
- concretization of the **German Animal Welfare Act (TSchG)**
- **support authorities during implementation**
- „**anticipated expert opinion**“



BMEL - guideline for animal welfare in equestrian sport



- **applies to everyone**, who handles horses
- assistance for **self-monitoring**
- revised jointly by authority officials, stakeholders like national federations, scientists, animal welfare associations (→ **compromise!**)



German guideline: Content overview

1. Scope and general principles
2. Glossary
3. Handling of horses (behavior, knowledge needed)
4. Training and use (trust, **learning behavior**, aids)
5. **Beginning of Training, use and competitions**
(basics, recovery, health status, control measures)
6. Equipment and devices ((un-)authorized aids, bridles,
prohibited manipulations, transport)
7. Doping



German guideline: Stabling at events

- The **guideline on the husbandry of horses also apply** in principle.
- Concerning in particular the **size of the single boxes**:
at least **(2xWH)²**
- Deviation only in **justified exceptional cases** and only **for a short period of time**, for example
if **turnout cannot be granted** at events



German guideline: Transport / time on trailer

- **Not longer** than absolutely necessary
- **Overnight stay** of the horses on the trailer **is to be rejected**
- **Foot restraints/hobbles** = violation against animal welfare



picture: FN-Archiv/Jana Gerstenkorn

German guideline: Definition of hyperflexion

"Over-bending of the upper neck with the horse's head and neck position very tight and curled toward the front chest (so-called rollkur)."

→ **Violation of animal welfare**

German guideline: Free jumping in young horses

"**Targeted training** such as **free jumping** has to be age appropriate and **is not developmentally appropriate for foals and yearlings** and therefore animal welfare relevant."



picture: Wenzel



German guideline: Start of training for the intended purpose

- "The start of targeted training (...) is **associated with physical and mental stress** for horses, especially for young horses."
 - Removal from herd (loses „friends“)
 - Change of housing (single box instead of group husbandry, turnout?)
 - Change of feed (concentrated feed, roughage?)
 - Start of training
- **Mental trauma**, may develop behavioral problems / behavioral disorders later on
- **Gastric ulcers**



German guideline: Husbandry of young horses

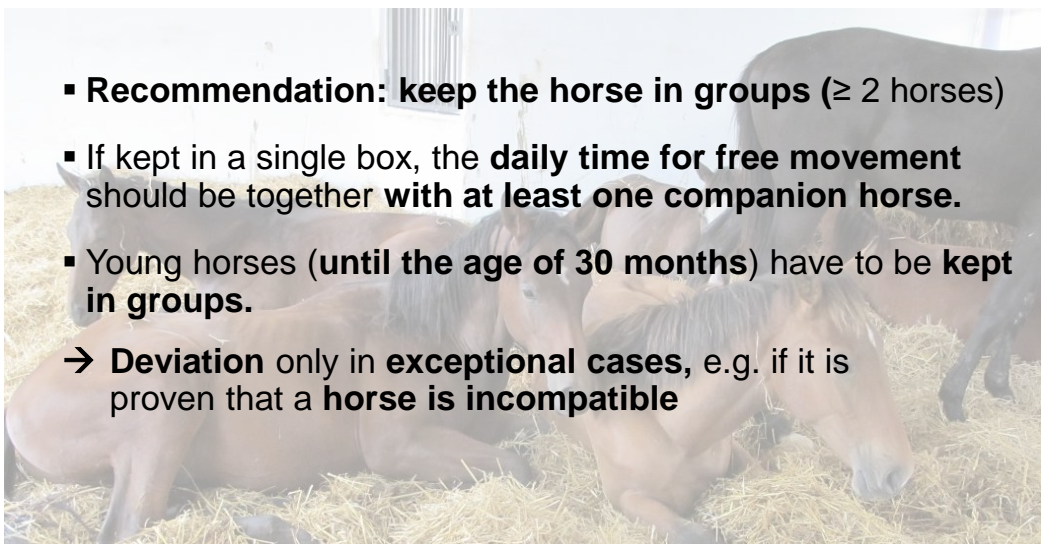
- (...) changes (**housing conditions**, exposure to **new environmental stimuli**, change in **feeding**, new **group composition**) should be carried out **gently** and step by step.
- **Free movement of several hours a day** and a **sufficient supply of roughage** must be ensured.



Picture: private

German guideline: Husbandry of young horses

- **Recommendation: keep the horse in groups (≥ 2 horses)**
- If kept in a single box, the **daily time for free movement** should be together **with at least one companion horse**.
- Young horses (**until the age of 30 months**) have to be **kept in groups**.
- **Deviation** only in **exceptional cases**, e.g. if it is proven that a **horse is incompatible**



German guideline: Start of training for the intended purpose

„Taking horses into targeted training for the intended purpose **earlier than the age of 30 months** generally **violates the principles** presented.“

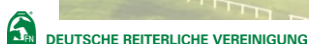
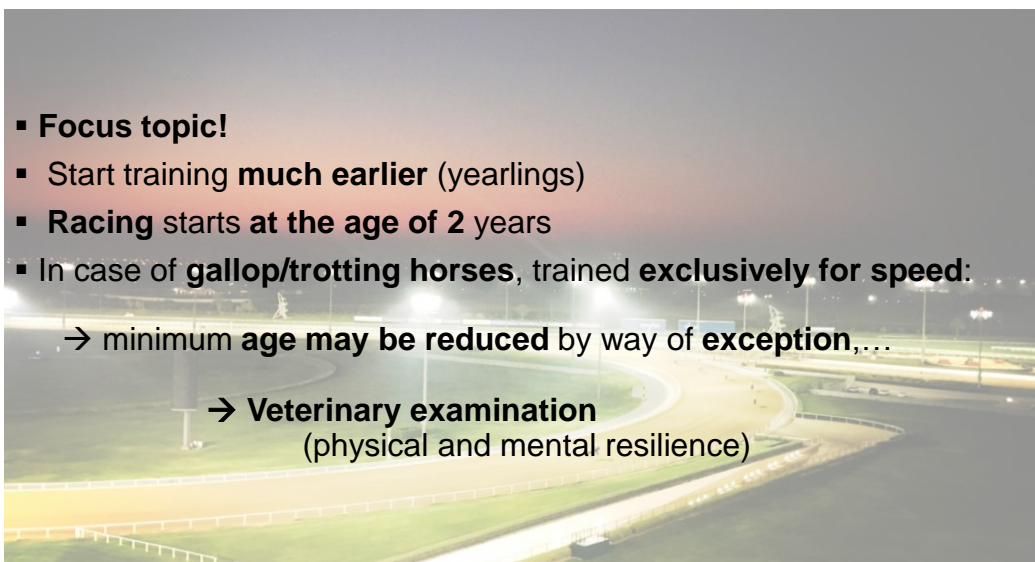


picture: FN-Archiv/Lehmann



German guideline: Racehorses – exception clause

- **Focus topic!**
- Start training **much earlier** (yearlings)
- **Racing** starts at the age of 2 years
- In case of **gallop/trotting horses**, trained **exclusively for speed**:
 - minimum age may be reduced by way of exception,...
 - **Veterinary examination**
(physical and mental resilience)



German guideline: Definition of „start of training“?

„**When getting used to** the bridle, lunge, saddle, harness, vehicle etc. **before the start of targeted training** for the intended purpose, care must be taken to proceed sensitively and carefully.“

- „**Habituation-phase(familiarisation)**“ before actual start of training is **possible before 30 months** of age
- **Thin line** between **habituation** and **targeted training** for „the intended purpose“

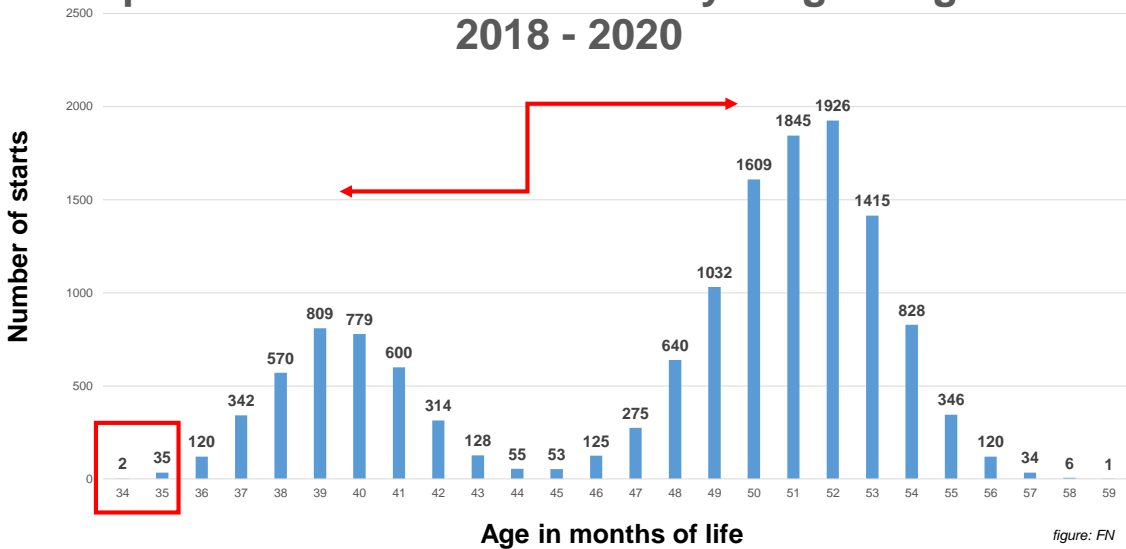


German guideline: From the start of training to the first presentation

- „From the **beginning of the training** phase until the **first use in a performance-related test** as a riding, driving or racing horse, **about six months** of training are **usually** required.“



Competition starts in classes for young riding horses 2018 - 2020



How many horses compete at the age of three?

2018:

- **4% of the warmblood foals** registered in 2015 **competed** in 2018 (963 three-year-old horses), of which...
- 36% one start
- 25% two starts
- 16% three starts

→ 77% were started one to three times.

→ **Responsibility of the trainer!**



Championships for three year old horses?

- Appropriate?
- Requirements?



picture: FN-Archiv



Do the age limits in the guideline apply for stallion licensing?



picture: FN-Archiv/Lehmann

- **Preparation** starts earlier (24-28 months?)
- **First presentation** is earlier (26-32 months?)
- **No riding** → summarized as “familiarisation”?
- Different **interpretations**



Do the age limits in the guideline apply for licensing?



picture: FN-Archiv/Lehmann

- Meeting between BMEL, animal welfare officers of the federal states, breeding associations and FN
- Differentiation:
familiarisation vs. targeted training
- **At licensing:** at least 30 months of age
- **Status quo** controls in the training barns
- **Evaluation** after licensing season 2022/2023



Is the current system compliant with the guideline?

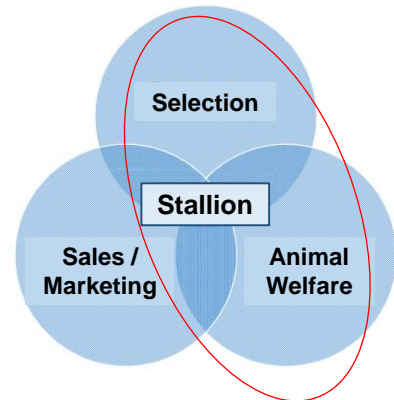
- **Intensity?**
- **Possibility for free movement** daily
- **Social contact, groups**
- **Training adapted** to the very young horse (**intensity, frequency, load, variation**)
- **Lunging? Yes, but how?**
- **Free jumping?** Height?
- **Manipulations?**



Working group – licensing and preparation system in Germany

- **Breeding events for selection no issue** in revision process
- **Scrutinize current traditional licensing** in autumn
 - time points
 - requirements
 - General conditions
 - stabling of stallions

→ **Different scenarios**



Wind of change

- **Steward system** and **controls**
- **Strict equipment rules**
- **Information talks** with preparation stables/trainer
- **Involvement** of the veterinary authorities and **official vets**
- **time shifts** of the licensing

Early start of training - What does research say?

Metaanalysis - Maier/ König von Borstel (2017) – impact of early training on duration of career and health:

- 70%: early use has positive impact
- 20% no significant impact
- 10% negative impact



picture: private

Early start of training - What does research say?

- **Horses that start early, usually have a long career.**

(Tanner et al., 2012, Braam et al., 2010;
Friedrich et al., 2013).

Early start of training - What does research say?

- **Bones:** Optimum of movement that is not yet achieved if the horses are only on pasture (*Firth et al., 2011*)
- **Tendons:** tendons of young horses adapt to the training loads (*Birch et al., 2011, Smith et al., 2011*)
- **Cartilage:** Moderate workload does not lead to damage of the cartilage (*Nugent et al., 2004*)

 **BUT...**

Early start of training - What does research say?

- Study horses were **kept on pasture 24/7** → **better basic condition!**
- **Treadmill / gallop training not comparable** to riding (rider weight?)
- **Risk** of damage is **influenced by the demands** (intensity, frequency,...)

Early start of training - What does research say?

→ Early start of training in age appropriate intensity/frequency could be an advantage, **IF a lot of free movement and turnout or even 24/7 turnout is granted!**

- **Worst case:** a young horse, stabled in a single box without turnout and little but intense time of workout!
- **Leads to damage!**



DEUTSCHE REITERLICHE VEREINIGUNG

Special case: Stallions in groups?

- **Until 30 months**, longer possible?
- Studies have shown:
 - Stallions **can be successfully kept together** (similar to bachelor bands seen in the wild)
 - only **few injuries** due to aggressive behavior

(Christensen et al., 2002; Heitor and Vicente, 2010; McDonnell and Haviland, 1995; Tilson et al., 1988)



picture: private



DEUTSCHE REITERLICHE VEREINIGUNG

Special case: Stallions in groups?



picture: private

- **Greatest problem** about the wellbeing of breeding stallions: **lack of direct social interaction** with other horses
- Risk prevention **counteracts with welfare** aspects in housing conditions.

(de Oliveira and Aurich, 2021)



From Gehlen et al., 2021



German guideline: Need for research

- Research consortium: **HorseWatch**
- “Sustainable training, husbandry and evaluation concepts for early used horses”
- 5 years, **different work packages**:
 - **Status Quo** Survey - Interviews with trainers
 - **Load/stress** of **warmblood stallions** during preparation for the licensing - influence of age and husbandry system
 - **Load/stress due to initial training in racehorses** - influence of age and husbandry system



Starting a young horse in accordance with the FN's Principles of Riding

- „usually at the age of three“
→ Compliant with guidelines
- **No fixed timepoint**, dependent on each **individual horse** and its development
- **Expertise!**



picture: FN-Archiv/Lehmann



Starting a young horse in accordance with the FN's Principles of Riding



picture: FN-Archiv/Lehmann



- Careful **introduction**, familiarisation
- **Changes** in husbandry and feed must be **carried out gently**
- **Turnout** increases **mental-wellbeing** and **welfare**, prevents tension
- **Back to the field** after „introduction-phase“, has proved to be **beneficial**

Start of training - FN's point of view

- **Starting at the first day of live**
- Individual way, **horse determines timing and speed**
- **HOW** ist much **more important than WHEN**
- **Aim: balanced, motivated, and healthy horse!**
- **Training, qualification and expertise**



Thank You!



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