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The prepurchase examination of horses in the Netherlands
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Introduction
The Netherlands is a horse breeding country and its top ranking on the international breeding index confirms that breeding and trading of horses are economically important. Several studbooks exist; the KWPN and the Friesian Studbook are the most famous of these. Since Dutch horses have a high reputation and are sold worldwide, the protocols used by Dutch veterinarians for prepurchase examination need to be of an exemplary standard. Since 1983 prepurchase examination (PPE) has been standardised through the use of a handbook and a prescribed protocol (Wagenaar 1983). The prepurchase examination protocol and the manual have been updated regularly with the latest version (2007) being widely accepted as the gold standard for the procedure (Sloet van Oldruitenborgh-Oosterbaan et al. 2007).

Selection of a veterinarian
In the Netherlands both the vendor and the purchaser can select a veterinarian to perform the prepurchase examination. This is different from some other countries where horses are examined on behalf of the prospective purchaser. Of course the client (vendor or purchaser) may choose a veterinarian he likes and trusts, but since 2000 an official register of ‘certified prepurchase examination veterinarians’ has existed; 46 equine veterinarians were registered by May 2009. In order to qualify for registration veterinarians must have successfully completed an evaluation of their clinical skills (mainly centred on the quality and correct interpretation of radiographs) and an inspection of their facilities. The latter includes a soft-surface lungeing area, a hard surface track and a hard surface lungeing circle. The evaluation of the facilities and the subsequent random checking of completed prepurchase examinations (including complete sets of radiographs) is undertaken by an independent, certified, quality control organisation, aided by a group of veterinary experts. The overall organisation and registration is supervised by an independent group ‘Stichting Paard’, which consists of ‘stake holders’ in the equine industry such as insurance companies, breeding associations and dealers. Certified PPE-veterinarians are obliged to attend specific CPD courses and seminars. Certified PPE-veterinarians are registered by May 2009. In order to qualify for registration veterinarians must have successfully completed an evaluation of their clinical skills (mainly centred on the quality and correct interpretation of radiographs) and an inspection of their facilities. The latter includes a soft-surface lungeing area, a hard surface track and a hard surface lungeing circle. The evaluation of the facilities and the subsequent random checking of completed prepurchase examinations (including complete sets of radiographs) is undertaken by an independent, certified, quality control organisation, aided by a group of veterinary experts. The overall organisation and registration is supervised by an independent group ‘Stichting Paard’, which consists of ‘stake holders’ in the equine industry such as insurance companies, breeding associations and dealers. Certified PPE-veterinarians are obliged to attend specific CPD courses and general equine CPD. The advice provided by the certified PPE veterinarian will be accepted by the insurance companies without further examination.

Prepurchase examination report
The official form as issued by the Royal Netherlands Veterinary Association (KNMvD), shown in Figure 1 (original A3 format), is widely used by Dutch equine practitioners to report the results of PPE. These are uniquely numbered carbon copy forms: one for the client (often laminated to prevent unauthorised alterations) and one for the clinician to store in the archives (mandatory retention for 10 years). On these forms it is stated that: “The prepurchase examination was performed using the handbook ‘De veterinaire keuring van het paard’ issue 2007 as a guidance”

The left half of the form deals mainly with information concerning the client, the horse and the clinician performing the examination. Information on behavioural vices and blood samples is also included here. The client (vendor or purchaser) is required to sign the form before the examination starts to confirm that an agreement exists concerning the general conditions of the examination. At the end of the process the veterinarian will provide the conclusion of his findings and sign the form.

Clinical examination
On the right side of the form the results of the clinical and radiological examinations are described. As mentioned previously the full examination is performed following the standard protocol and thus the description on the form can be brief.

Clinical examination consists of:
- general physical and clinical examination
- inspection palpation and percussion of head, rump and limbs
- inspection and percussion of hooves
- inspection at walk and trot on a hard surface and walk, trot and canter on a soft surface
- performance of flexion tests

Radiographic examination
Most horses that are subjected to a prepurchase examination will also be examined radiographically. If the horse is to be insured for over €4500, a radiographic examination is mandatory.

On the right side of the form the number of radiographs and the radiological report are entered. Based on the information gained by 20 standard views, further radiological investigations may be indicated.

Basic standard views used in the Netherlands:
- LF and RH feet – lateromedial and dorso 55° proximal-palmarodistal oblique = upright pedal view, centred on the navicular bone (4 views).
- LF and RF fetlock – lateromedial + dorsolateral palmaromedial oblique and dorso 45° medial-palmarolateral oblique (6 views).
- LH and RH tarsal (2 views).
Fig 1: The official prepurchase examination form issued by the Royal Netherlands Veterinary Association (KNMV)

- LH and RH fetlock joint - lateromedial (2 views); where there are questionable findings additional oblique views are undertaken.
- LH and RH stifle joint – lateromedial; if suspicious changes are identified additional plantar-dorsal view and/or caudal 10° proximal 60° latero-cranio medial oblique views are obtained (2–6 views).

The interpretation of the radiographs is based on the grading system published by Prof. K.J. Dik (Wagenaar 1983; Sloet van Oldruitenborgh-Oosterbaan et al. 2007): grade 1 being ‘ideal’ and grade 4 being ‘poor’. All other radiographic detectable changes, not included in the grading system descriptions are described in full. The implications of the clinical interpretations may, however, vary between observers. Variations in interpretation can arise from the age and use of the horse and its intended purpose. Joint fragments (osteochondrosis, chip fragments etc.) frequently give rise to discussion when considering the clinical relevance and risk assessment. For this reason the major Dutch insurance company Hippo Zorg BV, in dialogue with experienced senior equine clinicians, have developed a transparent scheme for the evaluation of osteochondrotic lesions and fragmentation of the fetlock, the tarsal and the stifle joints. This scheme is now the accepted standard in the Netherlands (Sloet van Oldruitenborgh-Oosterbaan et al. 2007).

The standard clinical and radiological protocols should be considered to be a starting point. Additional diagnostic procedures such as ultrasound or endoscopy can be performed if indicated or if specifically requested by the purchaser (etc.). The results of any extra examinations are described under ‘other remarks’.

Conclusion
The summary conclusion of a prepurchase examination should state all abnormal findings and give a qualified opinion and motivated risk assessment based on up-to-date veterinary knowledge. The conclusion of the examination is not a declaration as to whether the horse is suitable for a particular rider or a specific future athletic use.

The copy of the form, the radiographs in hard copy or digital format and all other relevant information should be retained by the examining veterinarian for 10 years.

References
The prepurchase examination of horses in Germany

Thomas Weinberger
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The PPE has a high incidence of legal problems for the equine practitioner. In Germany there is no relationship between the PPE and horse insurance. The standard protocol is more or less defined by the German Association of Equine Practitioners (GPM). The standard protocol was adapted by the Association. These changes were not made on the basis of scientific research results, but forensic reasons which were produced by legal cases. A new point is that even in the official standard form it is necessary to consider the value/purchase price of the horse. This is important to calculate the economic risks for the veterinarian in relation to his possible liability and to evaluate a fair price for the PPE. Usually the price charged by a veterinarian for conducting a PPE will be calculated as a percentage of the value/purchase price - typically 0.6–0.8% of the value/purchase price. Beside the clinical examination the standard radiographic classification system (Roentgenleitfaden) was reviewed in 2007 to take into account new scientific research results and the experience of the committee members.
09.00–09.15
Prepurchase examination of the competition horse in Belgium

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This presentation briefly describes the prepurchase examination (PPE) of horses at a large referral Hospital in Belgium. Competition horses and pleasure horses make the vast majority of the horses presented for a PPE. The age of the horses at presentation varies very much, from yearlings up to elderly horses. PPE of Standardbreds and Thoroughbreds are rather rare.

A standard PPE consists of an identity and narrative check, a thorough clinical examination, an endoscopy of the upper airways and a radiographic screening. The findings at the clinical examination can demand further in depth but optional examinations such as (cardio-)ultrasonography, transcranial magnetic stimulation, MRI or gamma-scintigraphy. Horses are evaluated at stance, walk, trot and canter. They are lunged on hard and soft surfaces. Flexion test of the distal limbs consist of flexing the limb at a 10 kg extra force for one minute. Also the hock and stifle are flexed for one minute. The horses need to be sound in all conditions. Endoscopy is used to evaluate the degree of laryngeal hemiplegia. A standard radiographic protocol includes 2 views of the frontfeet (LM, DP-PaDiO), one LM view of all 4 fetlocks, 3 views per hock (LM, DM-PLO, DL-PMO) and one LM of the stifle. Extra views are taken if required. Routine radiography of the vertebral column is optional. The focus of the radiographic examination is to detect navicular disease, OCD, bone spavin, osteoarthritis and more uncommon abnormalities.

The PPE report is an objective inventory of all the findings. At the end some kind of risk analysis (high risk, elevated risk, normal risk) or advice (favourable, guarded or unfavourable) is given based on the interpretation of the findings and taking the anamnesis, age, breed and intended use into account. Horses are not rejected or approved. The potential buyer takes the end decision and takes responsibility. Legally only a very few conditions (malleus, infectious anaemia and chronic intermittent lameness) are considered defects that give grounds for annulment of sale.
Vettings in Europe: Do you get what it says on the tin?

Jeremy Mantell
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Following a questionnaire sent to various equine veterinary organisations in Europe I will compare and contrast the different types of examination currently carried out in different countries and the varying types of certificate, advice and/or opinion that potential purchasers from this country might receive when instructing a Continental vet to carry out a PPE on their behalf. The attitudes and observations of UK insurers to European PPE certificates will also be noted.

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