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Abz Lambach being Guest in Sweden October 31st – November 4th 2023

The Equestrian Educational Network

<https://www.equestrianeducationalnetwork.net/>

Since 1999 ten prestigious national horse-riding schools are organizing a collaboration, the so-called EEN “Equestrian Educational Network”. The main idea of this network is a student competition, where horse schools send representatives of their students from all of Europe. The network’s goals are the development of equestrian education by international exchanges as well as sharing experiences and information. The network helps students, coaches and schools to develop their individual networks and encourages students to go abroad. All goals of this organization are aimed to improve the equestrian industry specially in an international perspective. The demands on horse training and riding lessons have increased significantly in recent years. The close monitoring by animal welfare organizations and the widespread distribution of offers on YouTube or Instagram make solid horse-friendly training increasingly important. All schools are facing this problem, not just the Austrian ones.



Figure 1: EEN Family

The organization of championships each year

The procedure is the same every year. Various competitions are held over the course of four days, each of which is judged. In addition to dressage and show jumping skills, pedagogical knowledge is also tested. For the competition itself, teams are formed, each consisting of three riders plus a trainer. On purpose the teams are build cross-national. After all, the idea behind it is precisely the exchange and especially the communication with each other in English. There is also a jury of accompanying persons or teachers who have accompanied their students to the EEN. Just as with the students, the aim here is to exchange ideas in English - training in the horse sector, approaches, pedagogical methods.

The judges evaluate the students and award marks between 1 and 10, as in regular equestrian sport. The evaluation focuses on criteria such as:

- Balance and empathy of the rider
- Application and correct implementation of aids
- Handling and interaction with the horse
- In jumping training, the feeling for the horse's balance and rhythm as well as the correct riding of distances

The practical tests are carried out on guest horses, the mode is slightly different. As a rule, two or three riders present the same horse. The individual preparation time is only ten minutes. It is therefore also a question of who can best adapt to an unfamiliar horse in a short time. But it is not only the rider's own riding that is assessed, but also the pedagogical skills as taught in the schools. Therefore, the second pillar is the evaluation of teaching. In twenty-minute units, the team members teach themselves and are allowed to choose their own focus. The judges look at the way the lessons are conducted, how the individual steps are structured, what vocabulary is used to explain the correct aids, how the needs and problems of the individual horse are addressed. It goes without saying that horsemanship and correct handling of the horse are the main focus here. Testing is normally carried out in a knockout procedure until a winning team is determined in all areas. The organization of the meeting changes every year, this year it was in the hands of the Swedish school Flyinge.



Figure 2: Riding facility Flyinge



Figure 3: Riding stable Flyinge

Our EEN championship experience

From the abz Lambach Romana Winter and for the HAK Lambach Helena Michlits took part at this year's event. In addition to the aforementioned students, our team consisted of two teachers, Sabine Leitner und Heinz-Jörg Wächter.



Figure 4: The Austrian coaches Sabine Leitner and Heinz-Jörg Wächter

The Swedish school Flyinge is in Lund in the south of Sweden, so they first flew from Vienna to Copenhagen. In a rental car we set off for Sweden. Our Swedish-born teacher, Pernilla Markusson-Tesarsch, was unfortunately unable to accompany us due to illness, but she had organized a visit to the famous Swedish show jumper (World Champion and European Champion in Team) Jens Fredricson as our first stop on the way. What an opportunity to get to know this personality and his fantastic riding facility. We were given an insight into the organization of the show stable and were allowed to join his training.



Figure 5: Helena Michlits and Romana Winter with Jens Fredricson

In a good mood, we continued on to Lund. The first evening here was spent getting to know the other participants over a beer. The actual competition then started on Wednesday morning. On the first day there was an introduction of the jumping and dressage horses for the first round. The teams were drawn as well, all the students were mixed up, one team included three students and one or two teachers from different nations. In the first round every rider needed to perform a dressage test and jumping course, not so easy if you only have ten minutes to get to know your horse. Only the best rider of each team qualified for the semi-finale, where they had to jump and ride a dressage test, they also needed to prepare a dressage riding lesson and hold it with his other team members. Only the two best riders reached the final. The final round included again a dressage and a jumping test and this time giving a jumping lesson. The level did increase in every round, for the semi finale it was L level (110 cm jumping), for the final round L/M level (120 cm jumping). As a team we also made clinics about a special topping, which counted to our team score.

On evening, during dinnertime, each team of each nation presented their country and school to entire assembly. This was the opportunity to observe the overall organization in other European countries and to share some educational and cultural aspects.



Figure 6: Joint tour of the jumping course

From our perspective the competition was tough but very instructive. We tried hard to perform as good as the other nations in riding, but being the youngest and unexperienced ones, we unfortunately did not make it to the final round. “Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn.” For us, it wasn’t all about winning, the focus was on getting to know each other and give our personal best. We went good along with the horses and our performance in giving clinics was actually pretty good. We both were riding in a dressage lesson from our teammate. We learned a lot and got better in our English riding vocabulary throughout the lesson. Overall, we practiced our English a lot, also the riding vocabularies. It was nice to realize how one improves over the days. In the beginning we were a bit shy but being forced to talk in English but from day to day it became easier. In the end, we managed to talk with the other nations as well and we won some new friends.



Figure 7: Look into the riding hall



Figure 8: Romana Winter

We thank our teachers Sabine Leitner and Heinz-Jörg Wächter for making our participation in this event possible. Thank you to all the teaching teams and the Swedish school Flyinge for making this experience so rewarding. The championship each year is a real opportunity for the students and trainers to develop skills, knowledge, open mindedness and network.



Figure 9: Austrian team at the prize giving ceremony

We are particularly looking forward to the next students competition, which will take place in Lambach, **Austria from May 13th – 17th 2024** – save the date quite now!

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