

Putting a single horse breed on the centre stage in a long list of equitation disciplines, the Championship is in all probability unique in the world: It unites dressage, show jumping, eventing, carriage driving, the Western disciplines, free jumping and Mountain Trail riding – and a Nations Cup to top it all off.

But let's look at some facts and figures:

Over the course of three days, participants from a grand total of 13 different nations will compete 370 times and with an impressive 330 horses, fighting for 20 Championship titles in a series of different classes and disciplines. That makes this year's tournament the edition with the largest number of participants since its première in the now distant year of 2003 – which is more than vivid proof that the European Haflinger Championship has taken the right course over the years.

### **Meet the very best sport Haflingers from around the world**

By now a staple of the international Haflinger calendar, the Championship takes place every three years. This allows breeders and anyone actively involved in Haflinger sports to pick and train the right horses and disciplines with considerable time, also because the tournament has a number of different classes according to the horses' age.

Organising the event and taking care of the logistics is a major challenge which the World Haflinger Breeding and Sports Federation (WHBSF) faces in every edition – and Stadl-Paura with its spacious facilities and long track record of international tournaments has proven to be a highly competent partner and host. There will be two vets, four course designers, two time keepers, fifteen judges and three stewards on site.

The technical director of the tournament, Roland Morat, who has closely followed the Championship's development over the years, is very satisfied with the process: "The growing numbers are proof of the increasing popularity and significance which not only equestrian sports athletes but also breeders attribute to the Championship. The atmosphere, even now that we're well ahead of the event, is already a very positive one, and Stadl-Paura as a location stands for smooth processes in all things related to technical and logistic matters. Chosen with great care, the members of the judges' teams are very high-profile and headed by FEI judges in every discipline. Another positive novelty: Thanks to the many registrations for the dressage contests, the numbers of dressage judges had to be further increased only just recently."

### **One breed for all equestrian sports disciplines**

For the Haflinger world, the Championship is especially interesting because it offers a chance to spot the different focus points applied in breeding and sports throughout the individual nations – a trend typically reflected both in the number of participants registered for each discipline and in the medal count.

All across the participating nations, for instance, driving is practised at an exceptionally high level: There are a variety of drivers and teams who with their Haflinger horses compete at the very forefront of countless international tournaments open to all breeds.

The conditions, however, differ greatly throughout the individual countries, as Bettina Aeschbach of the Swiss Haflinger Federation explains: "Team Switzerland might be small, but it has certainly proven its worth and talent. And even though our Federation faces a series of financial difficulties and the athletes have to pay for everything out of their own pocket, we have an outstanding team: The athletes competing in the EUHC are very well-prepared and greatly look forward to the tournament. In our small team, eventing and the Western disciplines are the most popular ones, and

although we only have three contestants in each speciality, they are extremely motivated, and the preparations have gone very well. The only downside is that, with Switzerland not being in the EU, we have quite a lot of costs and customs bureaucracy to master. But we don't know any different, anyway..."

In Germany, where the umbrella federation Deutsche Reiterliche Vereinigung (FN) handles all participations, the scenario is an entirely different one, as FN official Teresa Dohms Warnecke reports: "With the registrations of all German participants now concluded, we are thrilled to send 40 horses from Germany. Most of them – a total of 21 contestants ranging from the Young Horses to the Advanced class – will compete in the dressage tests. And we very much hope to take home a few medals not just in dressage but also in the other disciplines!"

Austria – with a clear geographic advantage – has the most contestants: 138 horses registered predominantly in dressage, show jumping, eventing and driving.

### **Motivation, passion and success**

The 2015 edition of the EUHC was held in Vermezzo near Milan. Thanks to the convenient location for many Italian athletes, the number of contestants from Italy was considerably higher than this year. "The Italian team is predominantly female – including in traditionally male-dominated disciplines such as driving. The Western riders, who have achieved very good results in the past few editions, make up a sizeable group this year. While a number of familiar faces can be found among the show jumpers, for some of the dressage contestants this will be their first Championship", as Luca Agosti of ANACRHA, the National Association of Breeders of Italian Haflinger Horses, points out.

There are plenty of small but highly motivated teams from a range of WHBSF member countries including France, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, all of which have already earned their peers' respect with their considerable commitment and are sure to be rewarded with their share of medals.

### **The Haflinger breed's biggest advocate in breeding and sports**

WHBSF President Lukas Scheiber is proud of the event – and rightly so: "With the Championship, the WHBSF has taken over a successful tournament, and we are delighted that it continues to grow: The number of people involved, the horses competing, the disciplines and the quality of it all - they are all constantly on the rise. Three-year intervals leave plenty of room to plan ahead, and now we can focus on identifying centrally located venues to ensure this upward trend lasts," he summarises.

In doing so, it is one of the core responsibilities of the WHBSF to keep track of the added value the event generates not just for athletes but also for breeders: Because the horses' athletic performance is a key criterion for breeding, it is essential to make the results available and accessible to breeders, Scheiber continues.

After all, he adds, in the end all of the Championship visitors, volunteers, participants and officials across all disciplines, nations and languages are part of one big Haflinger community – one whose passion remains virtually unparalleled to this day.