

HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein
President
Federation Equestre Internationale
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29th October 2009

Your Royal Highness,

You cannot be unaware of the disquiet – not to say anger – which has arisen following the depiction on Epona TV of Patrik Kittel's horse in apparent distress as it competed in Odense on 18th October.

As you are doubtless aware, in terms both of membership and breadth of interest, The British Horse Society (BHS) is the largest single equestrian organisation in the UK. Our examinations system, and the training and education which underpin it, have earned for the Society international recognition. No less important is our work to promote the highest standards of equine welfare, which suffuses every facet of our work. I am pleased to report that our commitment to equine welfare is shared by all our colleagues within the British Equestrian Federation, although on this occasion I am writing solely on behalf of the BHS.

Let me acknowledge straight away that no representative of the BHS was present in Denmark to witness the horse's apparent distress, nor do we have the benefit of a contemporaneous veterinary report. Moreover, we do not for one minute suggest that Patrik Kittel at any time sought to treat his horse other than with proper care and respect. Nevertheless, in matters of equine welfare, the precautionary principle must always apply: if, despite the absence of conclusive proof, the wellbeing of a horse is called into question, there will exist a strong moral obligation on the FEI to respond immediately. In our view, the concerns so widely expressed are reasonable and therefore deserving of an urgent two-part investigation: first, an inquiry into the treatment of this particular horse on this particular occasion; and, second, a broader inquiry into the ethics and consequences of hyperflexion. In this second aspect The British Horse Society stands ready to assist the FEI in any way it can.

Please note that we pass no comment on the aesthetics of seeing a competition horse contorted in a way it never appears to choose for itself when in its natural state. Our concern is only to speak out when we believe that the welfare of horses demands it.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Print FBHS
Chairman, The British Horse Society