



# The origin of the traits of the Icelandic Horse

An exhibition by  
The Icelandic Horse History Centre and  
The Icelandic Agricultural Advisory Centre

THE ICELANDIC HORSE HISTORY CENTRE  
HÓLUM Í HJALTADAL

# The origin of the traits of the Icelandic Horse

## Sörli from Svaðastaðir

Sörli 71 from Svaðastaðir was born in 1916 to Pálmi Símonarson at Svaðastaðir. Sörli is one of the most influential forefathers of the Icelandic horse with a genetic contribution of 4,6% and almost all of Iceland's horses today can be traced back to Sörli, with him being present in 99% of the bloodlines.

Sörli was presented at a breeding judgement in 1921 and was described as a beautiful black stallion with a good neck and pretty head, but a long back. Two years later he was shown again and said to have



PHOTO: UNKNOWN

developed and grown a lot, so well that he could now be considered the best of horses.

Sörli's influence in the breed is most apparent through Hrafn frá Holtsmúla, whose father Snæfaxi frá Páfastöðum was out of Sörli. Sörli's genetic contribution is amazing considering how many decades have passed since he himself was covering mares. Sörli can rightfully be called „The Big Bang“ of Icelandic horse breeding

and his influence will be a part of the stock all through time.

## Ragnars-Brúnka from Sauðárkrókur

Ragnars-Brúnka 2719 was born to Páll Erlendsson in 1937 at Prastarstaðir in Skagafjörður, but owned by Ragnar Pálsson who lived in Sauðárkrókur. She had six offspring and her two daughters Síða and Flugá from Sauðárkrókur are the basis of her genetic contribution to the breed. Ragnars-Brúnka was shown at the Landsmót National Horse Show at Þveráreyrar in 1954 where she placed second in the group of trained mares. The description was that she was a beautiful, well-raised horse with all five gaits, fine legs but not sturdy.

Ragnars-Brúnka's genetic contribution in the breed is 4,3% and 92% of today's horses trace their bloodlines back to her. This is primarily through her grandsons, the sons of Flugá and Síða, like Sörli frá Sauðárkróki, a son of Síða, who is one of the leading forefathers of the Icelandic Horse today. Gustur frá Sauðárkróki, Flugá's son was also a popular stallion and can be found in the bloodlines of many horses. It is safe to say that Ragnars-Brúnka has made her mark in the history of Icelandic horse breeding.



PHOTO: VIGFÚS SIGURGEIRSSON

## Skuggi from Bjarnanes



PHOTO OWNED BY GUNNAR BJARNASON

Skuggi 201 from Bjarnanes was born in 1937 to Rev. Eiríkur Helgason in Bjarnanes. Skuggi was the first stallion to ever win the famous Sleipnir Trophy, at the Agricultural show in Reykjavík in 1947. At the Landsmót National Horse Show in Þingvellir in 1950 he was described as magnificent and powerful. Five gaited and supple, but lacking in suspension. A bit coarse in appearance and temperamental which spoils his qualities as a riding horse.

Skuggi's genetic contribution is 3,0% and a little over 95% of today's horse can be traced back to him. He can be found in major stallions such as Hrafn frá Holtsmúla, Ófeigur frá Flugumýri, Gáski frá Hofsstöðum and Otur frá Sauðárkróki. His genetic contribution is therefore a part of the breed for a long time to come.

## Nökkvi from Hólmi

Nökkvi 260 was born in 1941 at Hólmur in Hornafjörður. He was first shown as a two year old and registered in the stud book. He was next shown at the Agricultural show in Reykjavík in 1947 where he placed second next to his father Skuggi 201 and earned a 1st prize. Nökkvi was shown at the Landsmót National Shows in both 1950 and 1954 and at the 1958 Landsmót he got a first prize A for offspring. In Gunnar Bjarnason's book „Ættbók og saga“ (Studbook and history) Nökkvi is described as: „Bay with a star, nice



PHOTO: UNKNOWN

facial expression, good proportions, strong legs and small hooves.“ The judging panel said he was a strong and powerful horse with five good gaits and very forward going.

Nökkvi's genes can be found in 95% of today's horses and his genetic contribution is 3,7%. His offspring that are behind most of today's horses are Hrafn frá Holtsmúla and Ófeigur frá Flugumýri. Nökkvi frá Hólmi is one of the pillars of Icelandic breeding.

## Goði from Sauðárkrókur

Goði 401 was born in 1947 to Jón Pálmason at Axlarhagi, but is said to be from Sauðárkrókur. He was shown in 1953 but did not receive recognition as a breeding horse since he only had one testicle. At the Landsmót National Horse Show at Þveráreyrar he received the same verdict even though both testicles were there (considered too late). However, he was used as a stallion but only for a short time, castrated in 1955. Therefore he only has 47 registered offspring. Goði was described in Gunnar Bjarnason' s book „Ættbók og saga“ as:

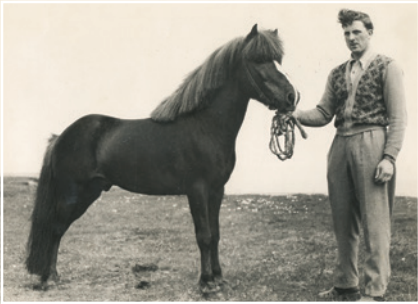


PHOTO: UNKNOWN

„Rather small, but well proportioned, a good horse with all gaits, powerful pace and lots of energy, a strong mind and temper.“

Goði' s genetic contribution is 2,3% today and 95% of today's horses can trace their bloodlines back to him. Those who have carried his genes forward are for example Hrafn frá Holtsmúla, Hervar frá Sauðárkróki, Feykir frá Hafsteinsstöðum, Krafla and Kveikur frá Miðsítju and Óður frá Brún. They are all major pillars in Icelandic breeding and therefore explain Goði' s great genetic contribution.

## Síða from Sauðárkrókur

Síða 2794 from Sauðárkrókur was born in 1952. Her breeder and owner was Sveinn Guðmundsson. Síða was shown in 1959 and said to be a five gaited „gæðingur“ with beautiful head carriage and look, but crooked heels. Síða had eleven offspring of which four got prizes for offspring. She also received an honorary prize at the Landsmót National Horse show at Vindheimamelar in 1974. The judges commented: „Síða's offspring have gotten good breeding judgments, five of them first prize. They are pretty and spirited with good gaits and a nice temperament. The conformation



PHOTO: FRIDÞJÓFUR ÞORKELSSON

is sometimes lacking, but pretty features make up for the lesser ones. Síða is definitely the best breeding mare to come to judgement in recent years.“

Síða is the primary foremother of the Icelandic horse breed today with 7,1% genetic contribution and 92% of all of today's horses can trace their bloodline back to her. She is the mother of Sörli frá Sauðárkróki and her daughters, Hrafnkatla, Hrafnhetta and Hervör all had influential sons, such as Ótur, Kjarval and Hervar. Síða has made a great and valuable impact on Icelandic breeding forever.

## Hörður from Kolkuós

Hörður 591 was born in 1957 to Sigurmon Hartmannsson in Kolkuós. He was shown at the Landsmót National Horse Shows in Þingvellir in 1962 and at Hólar in 1966, as well as at the Agricultural show in Reykjavík in 1968 where he got 8,31, including 9,0 for overall look and pace. In Gunnar Bjarnason' s book „Ættbók og saga“ Hörður is described as a dashing and spirited horse. Hörður was awarded a first prize for offspring at Landsmót in Hólar in 1966. The judges description said amongst others: „Hörður's offspring have a milder temperament than their father. They do not have as much extension in the gaits as



PHOTO: EINAR EYLERT GÍSLASON

their father, especially in pace. They are well raised and handsome and seem to have good energy and are forward going.“

Hörður's genetic contribution today is a little less than 2% and his relatives can be found all over. Many of his sons were popular stallions, such as Stígandi frá Kolkuósi, Héðinn frá Vatnagörðum and Þokki frá Viðvík. Many of his daughters have also been important in breeding, such as Perna frá Kolkuósi, Nótt frá Kröggólfsstöðum and Sæla frá Gerðum. Hörður is one of the major forefathers in Icelandic breeding.

## Sörli from Sauðárkrókur

Sörli 653 was born in Sauðárkrókur in 1964. His breeder and owner was Sveinn Guðmundsson. Sörli was first shown as a two year old at the Landsmót National Horse Show in Hólar and then again in 1969 at Einarssstaðir where he was the highest judged stallion and described as a spirited and talented. Sörli got an honorary prize for offspring and the Sleipnir Trophy at Landsmót in Þingvellir in 1978.



PHOTO: EINAR EYLERT GÍSLASON

In his judgement there his offspring are described as having some conformation flaws, but a strong spirit. They are courageous and forward going and become quite powerful with age and maturity. Most of them are five gaited with

good clear gaits, good extension and high leg action. The offspring are not always pretty, but the talent rarely fails. Sörli got a score of 8,11 for the 12 best offspring shown and judged. Sörli has had a tremendous influence on Icelandic breeding and his genetic contribution is 6,6% with 89% of today's horses tracing their bloodlines back to him. Sörli had many daughters that proved to be valuable brood mares and his sons, like Náttfari frá Ytra-Dalsgerði, Blossi frá Sauðárkróki, the father of Hervar frá Sauðárkróki and Gustur frá Sauðárkróki. Sörli frá Sauðárkróki is one of the major pillars in Icelandic horse breeding.



## Páttur from Kirkjubær

Páttur 722 was born in 1967. His breeder and owner was Sigurður Haraldsson in Kirkjubær. Páttur was shown at the Landsmót National Horse Show in Þingvellir in 1978 and got a first prize. He was described as a beautiful and well-tempered horse with good spirit. Páttur got an honorary prize for offspring at Vindheimamelar in 1982 where he was said to breed beautiful riding horses with good temper and clear gaits. His score was 8,17.



PHOTO: EINAR EYLERT GÍSSLASON

Páttur's genetic contribution today is 2,2% and his sons Stígandi frá Sauðárkróki, Öngull frá Kirkjubæ and Hlynur frá Báreksstöðum have carried his genes on amongst others. Many of his daughters were also good breeding mares. The most famous and influential is Þrá frá Hólum, but one can also mention Hylling frá Kirkjubæ, the mother of Páfi frá Kirkjubæ, and Sara frá Kirkjubæ, the mother of Ljóri frá Kirkjubæ. Páttur frá Kirkjubæ is one of the leading forefathers in Icelandic horse breeding.

## Hrafn from Holtsmúli

Hrafn 802 was born in 1968. His breeder was Sigurður Ellertsson in Holtsmúli. Hrafn was shown at Vindheimamelar in 1972 and at the Landsmót National Horse Show in 1974 where he was described as a beautiful and versatile „gæðingur“ scoring 8,40 for conformation, 8,72 for ridden abilities and 8,56 overall. Hrafn got an honorary prize for offspring and the Sleipnir Trophy at Landsmót in Vindheimamelar in 1982. His offspring were described as great, handsome and tall. Ridden abilities very good with lots of spirit. Their character a little moody, but still trustworthy and stable. All gaits are good and clear with good leg action. Hrafn's offspring are charismatic and charming and Hrafn is

definitely a great breeding horse. His score was 8,19 for 12 judged offspring. Hrafn is the breeding horse that hold the greatest genetic contribution in all of Iceland's horses today. His genetic contribution is 12% and over 90% of all horses in Iceland now are his descendants. He had many good sons, including Kolfinnur frá Kjarnholtum, Þokki frá Garði, Viðar and Safir frá Viðvík, Adam frá Meðalfelli and Fáfnir frá Fagranesi. Hervar frá Sauðárkróki is also his descendant and has carried his genes on. Also, the very popular stallion Orri frá Þúfu is closely related to Hrafn. Hrafn frá Holtsmúla has left a lasting mark on Icelandic breeding and is without doubt the most influential forefather of Icelandic horses today.



PHOTO: EINAR EYLERT GÍSSLASON

## Náttfari from Ytra-Dalsgerði

Náttfari was born in 1970 to Jakobína Sigurvinsdóttir. He was first shown as a four year old and got a first prize at the 1974 Landsmót National Horse Show at Vindheimamelar. He got his highest judgement at the 1978 Landsmót at Þingvellir. He got 8,0 for conformation and 9,08 for ridden abilities, including 10 for pace and was called: „The greatest gæðingur amongst stallions,“ highly spirited, yet supple with great gaits and versatility.

Náttfari got an honorary prize for offspring at Landsmót in 1986 where his offspring were described as great riding horses, with good

temperament and spirit although some take their time developing energy and action. The tölt is a little pacey but the trot is excellent and the pace impressive. Náttfari got a score of 8,11 for his 12 judged offspring.



PHOTO: SIGURGEIR SIGURJÓNSSON

About 30% of all horses today can be traced back to Náttfari and his genetic contribution is 2,6%. His sons, Baldur frá Bakka, Stígur frá Kjartansstöðum and Sólon frá Hóli have been most influential in carrying on his genes, but many of his daughters also. Náttfari's influence can be found in many places and his input in Icelandic horse breeding is invaluable.

## Gáski from Hofsstaðir

Gáski 920 was born in 1973 to Kristfríður Björnsdóttir at Hofsstaðir. Gáski was shown at the 1978 Landsmót National Horse Shown at Þingvellir where he ranked highest in the group of five year old stallions, scoring 8,32 and described as a well raised and well-proportioned talented riding horse.

Gáski got an honorary prize for offspring at the 1990 Landsmót and his offspring were described as having beautiful eyes and good proportions. The gaits good, with high leg action in tölt although a little stiff sometimes, but good in pace. The



PHOTO: EINAR EYLERT GÍSSLASON

temperament not easy and lots of energy in very forward going horses. Gáski's genetic contribution is 2,6% in the breed today and over 20% of all horses can trace their bloodlines back to him. His most influential son is Gustur frá Hóli and many of Gustur's daughters proved to be great breeding mares, such as Löpp frá Hvammi, Harpa frá Hofsstöðum, Herva frá Sauðárkróki, Vænting frá Haga, Hátið frá Hellu and Bryðja frá Húsatóftum. Gáski frá Hofsstöðum is one of the great forefathers of the Icelandic horse breed.

## Gustur from Sauðárkrókur

Gustur 923 was born in 1973 to Sveinn Guðmundsson and quite inbred out of Fengur frá Eiríkurstöðum and Ragnars-Brúnka frá Sauðárkróki. Gustur was shown at Kaldármelar in 1980 where he was described as having a beautiful neck and good shoulders but bad feet, excellent ridden abilities. He was shown with offspring at the 1982 Landsmót National Horse Show at Vindheimamelar where he was awarded a first prize for offspring. His offspring were described as being well developed, although not finely built. The temperament strong but

forward going, good gaits with acceptable leg action. Score 7,99.

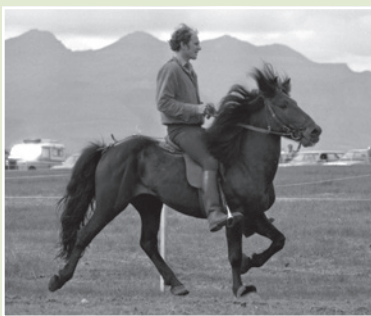


PHOTO: EIRÍKUR JÓNSSON

Gustur's genetic contribution is 2,2% and today 25% of all horses can be traced back to him. The full siblings Krafla and Kveikur frá Miðsitju have carried his name, as well as Siggubrúnka frá Ásmundarstöðum and Litla-Þruma frá Múla. You can still recognize Gustur's descendants by their fascinating look, good front part and head carriage. Gustur frá Sauðárkróki is one of the pillars of the Icelandic horse breed.

## Ófeigur from Flugumýri

Ófeigur from Flugumýri was born in 1974 to Sigurður Ingimarsson in Flugumýri. Ófeigur was inbred, a son of two full siblings. He was first shown as a four year old at the Landsmót National Horse Show in Þingvellir in 1978 and described as a well-raised and forward going young horse, with good leg action and extended gaits. He got a first prize in 1981 but his highest judgement came at Vindheimamelar at Landsmót in 1982, 7,80 for conformation, 8,52 for ridden abilities and 8,16 overall. At the Landsmót at Vindheimamelar in 1990 Ófeigur was awarded an honorary prize for offspring. His offspring were described as being rather coarse and



PHOTO: JÓN TRAUSTI STEINGRÍMSSON

lacking mane and tail. The neck well raised but the torso heavy. Most of them showing all gaits with a high stepping tölt, although sometimes lacking balance. Great trot and good pace when shown.

Ófeigur's genetic contribution is 2,6% and over 40% of today's horses are traced back to him. Ófeigur had a lot of sons that have been popular stallions, such as Keilir and Spuni frá Miðsitju, Galsi frá Sauðárkróki and Reykur frá Hofúni. Many of his daughters also

turned out to be great brood mares, such as Gyðja and Sæla frá Gerðum. Ófeigur frá Flugumýri is one of the leading forefathers of the Icelandic horse.

## Hervar from Sauðárkrókur

Hervar was born in 1976 to Guðmundur Sveinsson in Sauðárkrókur. He was shown at the Landsmót National Horse Show at Vindheimamelar in 1982 where he ranked second in the group of six year old stallions with a total of 8,27. Hervar was described as well-raised, but with coarse ears and a hard back. Good tölt and trot, scoring 9,0 for both, and pace. Spirited, with a good temper. He was awarded an honorary prize for offspring and the Sleipnir Trophy at the 1990 Landsmót in Vindheimamelar. His offspring were described as having coarse heads with outward pointing ears. Long necks and usually a light torso. Feet not very strong. Versatile in ridden abilities, but not



PHOTO: VALDIMAR KRISTINSSON

always a lot of leg action. Strong will and high spirit, quite cold.

Hervar's genetic contribution is 5,2% and about 60% of today's horses can trace their bloodlines back to him. Most of that is through his son Otur frá Sauðárkróki, the father of Orri frá Þúfu, honorary prize stallion Kraflar frá Miðsitju, Þrúður frá Neðra-Ási and Hektor frá Akureyri. Many of his daughters also proved to be valuable brood mares, such as Askja and Katla

frá Flugumýri, Gnótt frá Sauðárkróki, Daladís frá Leirulæk, Aísa frá Vatnsleysu and Virðing frá Flugumýri. Hervar frá Sauðárkróki is one of the most important pillars in Icelandic breeding.

## Orri from Þúfa

Orri was born in 1986 to Indriði T. Ólafsson in Þúfa. He was first shown as a four year old at the 1990 Landsmót National Horse Show at Vindheimamelar where he ranked second. He was shown again in 1991 scoring 8,34, including 9,5 for tölt and form under rider. He was awarded an honorary prize for offspring and the Sleipnir trophy at the 2000 Landsmót in Reykjavík. His offspring were described as handsome, but often with big, coarse heads, a well-raised, but thick neck, great shoulders and withers. Excellent mane and tail. Most of them four-gaited though not all, lots of charisma and look. Orri's offspring develop very young and they are courageous and strong. Orri is at the top in



PHOTO: EIRÍKUR JÓNSSON

Icelandic horse breeding.

Orri's genetic contribution has grown a lot in recent years and now stands at 8,4% and will probably become even higher in the coming years. This is mainly because so many of his sons have become popular and successful as stallions and 15 of them have received awards for offspring, which is unique. Many of his daughters have also proven valuable brood mares.

Orri has 1346 offspring registered, with 589 having been judged (WF June 9th 2016), which is unusually high and best describes his strength in breeding. All this confirms that Orri frá Þúfu is the greatest breeding horse in the history of Icelandic horse breeding.



# The origin of the traits of the Icelandic Horse

The Icelandic Horse has remained isolated and purebred since Iceland's settlement. For centuries nature ran its course when it came to breeding and the history of organized horse breeding in Iceland is short: The first breeding advisor was hired in 1902, the first breeding association formed in 1904 and the first horse breeding show took place in 1906.



The offspring of Orri from Þúfa at the Landsmót National Horse Show in Reykjavík in 2000.  
PHOTO Eiríkur Jónsson.

Despite this short period great progress has been made in the breeding of the Icelandic Horse through the years and it is interesting to see who are the forefathers- and mothers behind our breed today. Certain bloodlines are stronger than others, the reason being they possess certain desirable traits according to the breeders who choose them. The breeding horses introduced at this exhibition have all had a serious impact on Icelandic breeding and contributed to the progress and positive development of the breed in recent decades.

When figuring out who those main forefathers- and mothers are the genetic contribution is calculated. This is done by calculating the genetic contribution for each individual. The study is based on all foals born in Iceland in 2014 and the best example is Hrafn frá Holtsmúla, the stallion most horses in Iceland can trace their lineage to, his genetic contribution to all foals born in 2014 is 12%.

FRONTPAGE PHOTO The offspring of Hrafn from Holtsmúli at the Landsmót National Horse Show at Vindheimamelar in 1982.  
PHOTO Eiríkur Jónsson.



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