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Training Horse and Rider for War? Equine Sport, Military Use, and the Industrialisation of Society: Imperial Germany in Transnational Perspective

Tatsuya Mitsuda

The endurance riding competition (*Distanzritt*) of 1892

At the beginning of October 1892, German and Austro-Hungarian military officers—mounted proudly on their own horses—set off from their respective capitals of Berlin and Vienna. Some 106 German horsemen started the race in the Tempelhof, while their 93 Austro-Hungarian counterparts embarked on their journey in Floridsdorf. They were participating in an international contest that was designed to test the courage and endurance of horse and rider over a course which took approximately three gruelling days to complete. Twenty thousand gold marks were set aside for the victor and additional prizes were awarded to the two horses arriving at the finishing line in the best condition, in a competition that was called the *Distanzritt* ('endurance riding').⁽¹⁾ At the end of this taxing contest, the Austro-Hungarian Count Starhemberg was hailed the winner, having managed to cross the line in a time of 71 hours and 20 minutes. His German opponent, Baron Reitzenstein, came a close second. In total, 145 riders managed to complete the race.

From the days before the start of the race until the end, the media provided

(1) For accounts of the race, see *Distanzritt Wien-Berlin im October 1892* (Vienna, 1893); E. von Naundorff, *Der grosse Distanz-Ritt Berlin-Wien im Jahre 1892* (Dresden, 1893).

euphoric coverage. The event was followed avidly by not only newspapers in the participating countries but also the press across Europe and the United States. Even though a similar but national endurance riding event had taken place between Münster and Hanover two decades earlier, the international nature of this contest appeared to spark greater public interest. Emile Pott, a professor of livestock breeding at the Technical University of Munich, commented that the enthusiasm generated was unprecedented, especially in the context of German indifference to the sport of horse racing: ‘Even people who had otherwise turned their noses up at events such as [horse] racing became enthusiastic sports people, expressed an intense interest in the betting race, and were enthused to such an extent as though the fortune of their fatherland depended on the results of the race’.⁽²⁾

Critical voices could be heard, however, almost immediately after the event. First, objection was raised about the cruelty that appears to have been inflicted on the participating horses.⁽³⁾ The German Animal Protection Society vented its fury at how horses were worked until they died, accusing riders of violating an 1871 law criminalising the inhumane treatment of animals. Of all the horses that took part in the event, 31 had failed to finish because they had been given little opportunity to either sleep or rest. Critics also wondered whether the horses that crossed the finishing line had been left with long-term health implications. In the United States, *Harper’s Weekly* commented that ‘such a race in America would probably have been stopped by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals’, intimating that Germany could not be considered a civilised society.⁽⁴⁾

(2) Emil Pott, *Der Distanzritt und die Pferdezzucht. Ein offenes Wort an deutsche und oesterreichisch-ungarische Pferdezzüchter sowie an andere Pferdeinteressenten* (Munich, 1893), 1.

(3) Otto Hartmann (ed.), *Bericht über die sechste Versammlung des Verbandes der Thierschutz-Vereine des Deutschen Reiches in Braunschweig vom 4. bis 8. Juni 1895* (n.a., 1895), 155.

(4) *Harper’s Weekly* 36 (1892), 1063.

Second, doubt was cast over the military justifications. Heinrich von Rosenberg, a founding member of the Hanoverian Riding Society and a military general in the cavalry, questioned whether the skills that were supposedly cultivated through the race were useful in actual war.⁽⁵⁾ Since endurance riding took place mainly on roads, and not on rough and uneven terrain, he argued that the event failed to reproduce the same kind of conditions that would render the race a fruitful exercise and preparation for real conflict. A better test of the capabilities of cavalry officers and remounts was seen to be hunt riding (*Jagdreiten*), which involved the negotiation of all sorts of terrain. This, it was argued, would provide a more unforeseeable, unpredictable, and realistic set of challenges for horse and rider alike. 'From a military standpoint', a London magazine thus concluded, 'this famous race teaches absolutely nothing new; the whole world knew previously that well-bred horses will struggle until they drop, and that Austrian and German officers have plenty of pluck and endurance'.⁽⁶⁾

Both the humanitarian and military charges were fiercely defended by the participants. Baron Reitzenstein, the runner-up in the event, countered that criticisms about cruelty were misplaced. He insisted that although several horses had expired *en route*, this failing should be judged primarily in equestrian terms: 'A good rider takes nothing more out of his horse than is required for victory; he knows the capability of his horse, his strength'.⁽⁷⁾ A lack of rational tactics and proper judgement as horsemen, he argued, should be condemned instead. Reitzenstein also countered accusations that the race had little military value. He particularly stressed how the event brought back to the fore the central importance of the relationship between horse and rider. Pointing to the extent to which the

(5) *Deutsche Landwirtschaftliche Presse* (DLP) 83 (October 1892), 861.

(6) *Graphic* (October 8, 1892), 12.

(7) Freiherr von Reitzenstein, 'Mein Distanzritt Berlin-Wien', *Beiheft zum Militär-Wochenblatt* 1 (1893), 2.

public increasingly viewed this unit as separate entities, Reitzenstein counselled that racing was not about ‘showing that a horse is better than another’.⁽⁸⁾ Rather, endurance riding was about demonstrating the ‘harmonious cooperation of rider and horse’ so crucial for executing war. The knowledge that horses could endure three days and three nights without extended periods of rest and feeding was of ‘inestimable worth’, the utility of which, he claimed, would be vindicated on the battlefield.⁽⁹⁾

Military riders also contested the kind of love for animals that protection societies promoted. They viewed the overtly sensitive remarks of humanitarians as abstract pronouncements made from the comfort of their own homes and charged that humanitarians were oblivious to the love and devotion that pertained between horse and rider in the open air. Sometimes, it was a sign of love that a horse had to be sacrificed in pursuit of noble aims.⁽¹⁰⁾ Framing the event as a useful and honourable preparation of horse and rider for war, the defendants of the *Distanzritt* were thus keen to advertise its patriotic aims and military utility to a broader audience. Fundamental to this worldview was the inseparability of horse and rider.

There are many strands of historiography that can help make sense of the *Distanzritt*. First, animal historians can elucidate the humanitarian dimension. Most animal protection societies traditionally took aim at the lot of urban horses, whose exploitative treatment in the hands of working-class drivers disturbed middle-class sensibilities and precipitated initiatives for the correction of working-class morals.⁽¹¹⁾ Criticism directed at the *Distanzritt* could be seen as an extension of this

(8) Ibid.

(9) Ibid., 23.

(10) *DLP* 90 (November 1892), 923.

(11) The classic work on this topic, with reference to England, is Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate. The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), chapter 3. For Germany, where there were similar moves, see Jutta Buchner-Fuhs, ‘Das Tier als Freund. Überlegungen zur Gefühlsgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert’, in Paul

development, showing the extent to which the gaze, in Germany at least, extended to the military upper class.

Second, sports historians can frame the event within the context of the development of other forms of international competition. As Andrew Ritchie and Rüdiger Rabenstein demonstrated, the *Distanzritt* took place at a time when cycling events were being staged between major European cities.⁽¹²⁾ Indeed, for many observers, the timing of the *Distanzritt*, which led inevitably to a comparison between riding and cycling, was no coincidence. Only a year after the Berlin-Vienna horse ride, cyclists were keen to show they could do better by deliberately holding an event on the very same course, and the winning time of 31 hours and 22 minutes made a mockery of the time horse and rider had achieved.⁽¹³⁾

Finally, military historians can characterise the event as the latest attempt by the cavalry to defend the importance of the saddle.⁽¹⁴⁾ Within European armies, the bicycle was being publicised as a potential replacement for the costly horse. The bicycle would not only remove the need to employ farriers and veterinarians but could also be ridden with instant ease without the need for long training in the saddle that typically accompanied the schooling of horsemen.⁽¹⁵⁾

Since these three historiographical fields—animal, sport, and military—rarely confer and converge, this article aims to bring them all to bear on a deeper

Münch (ed.), *Tiere und Menschen: Geschichte und Aktualität eines prekären Verhältnisses*, 2nd. Edition (Paderborn, 1999), 286–9.

(12) Andrew Ritchie and Rüdiger Rabenstein, 'Mostly Middle-Class Cycling Heroes: the Fin de Siècle Commercial Obsession with Speed, Distance and Records', *European Sports History Review* 4 (2002), 91–133.

(13) *Harper's Weekly* 36 (1892), 1063.

(14) For this interpretation on a similar theme, see Eliza Riedi, 'Brains or Polo? Equestrian Sport, Army Reform and the Gentlemanly Officer Tradition, 1900–1914', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 84/339 (2006), 236–53.

(15) *Der Sporn: Zentral-Blatt für die Gesamt-Interesse der deutschen Pferderennen* 27 (1893), 386.

understanding of not only the *Distanzritt* itself but also the society that made the event possible. A principal aim of this article is to show how the increased separation between horse and rider is crucial to unlocking the dynamics of nineteenth-century equine society, of which warhorses were an integral part. By referencing developments in Germany but also in France and England, whose influences on the view of horses were strong, this article explores a distinct German attempt to breed, rear, and train both warhorses and warriors within shifting military, social, and economic circumstances.

Pressures on cavalry, the demise of the *haute-école*, and the rise of foxhunting

Both the *Distanzritt* itself and the reaction it generated must be set within the broader context of military changes, especially those affecting the cavalry. Ever since firearms had entered the field of combat, mounted troops had faced an existential challenge, not least an assault on the central cavalry doctrine of the charge, which had for so long been considered the preeminent shock tactic that decided the fate of wars.

As a result of the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), in which spectacular individual charges were found to be woefully ineffective, the cavalry skilfully adapted to a new military world. Exploiting both the time it took for the infantry and artillery to load cannons and rifles and the long distances that both combat arms needed to achieve maximum effect, a ‘well-conducted cavalry charge’ could, if it moved in closely and at speed, render ineffective the superiority of firearms.⁽¹⁶⁾ By coordinating tactics with the infantry and the artillery, the cavalry could take better advantage of the opportunities created by them.⁽¹⁷⁾ As military historians point out,

(16) Louis A. DiMarco, *War horse: a History of the Military Horse and Rider* (Westholme, 2008).

(17) Dennis Erwin Showalter, ‘Prussian Cavalry 1806–1871: the Search for Roles’,

such opportunities were rare; isolated examples of successful charges, such as that at Balaclava (1854) in the Crimean War, were elevated to mythological status, resulting in the chimera that ‘shock tactics’ still had a useful purpose on the battlefield. Despite the lessons of the American Civil War (1861–1865), which had demonstrated the futility of the charge and forced horsemen to dismount to fight, European students of the cavalry remained attached to the belief that the ‘mounted arm’s first duty was to stay mounted, avoid dismounted combat unless absolutely necessary, and attack with cold steel’.⁽¹⁸⁾ As Michael Howard put it:

For them shock-tactics still offered a fatal fascination; and whenever new roles had been found for the cavalry - the light horse of the sixteenth century, the mounted infantry dragoons of the seventeenth - these had been gradually abandoned, and the regiments concerned grew in likeness of the socially superior, sartorially more ornate heavy cavalry, trained only in meticulous formations for the consummation of the horseman’s purpose in life - the charge en masse.⁽¹⁹⁾

What did change, at least among the general staff, was the increasing realisation that the most suitable role for the cavalry lay less in the mounted charge delivered by heavy cavalry and more in reconnaissance, communications, and raids behind enemy lines conducted by light cavalry. During the Austro-Prussian War (1866) an attempt was made to task the Prussian cavalry with a subsidiary role for what appears to have been the first time in a major battle. Cavalry divisions were either assigned to the infantry or placed directly under the control of the high command,

Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen 19/1 (1976), 8.

(18) David R. Dorondo, *Riders of the Apocalypse: German Cavalry and Modern Warfare, 1870–1945* (Annapolis, 2012), 56.

(19) Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870–1871* (London, 1961), 8.

for whom they would provide strategic information by acting as messengers, monitoring the movements of opponents, and disrupting the enemy by carrying out raids.⁽²⁰⁾ Despite these instructions, the post-war assessment of Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800–1891), Chief of the Prussian General Staff, was scathing: ‘the Prussian cavalry found itself incapable not only of providing effective reconnaissance in the days before the battle [of Königgrätz] but also of effective pursuit of the defeated Austrians afterwards’. He concluded that this was due to the deeply ingrained belief that the cavalry should be ‘held back primarily in order to deliver a massed charge at a decisive moment’.⁽²¹⁾

This insistence on the centrality of shock tactics continued into the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). On the eve of the outbreak of fighting, 29 of the 46 regiments of the cavalry division were heavy cavalry, most of which saw limited action.⁽²²⁾ There were initial successes, such as that at Vionville, but the casualties sustained to both mount and horse over the duration of the War were critical; rapid fire and breech-loading rifled weapons employed by the infantry and artillery could exact devastation. Most infamous of all the charges was the ‘death ride’ that Prussian hussars undertook at Mars la Tour, where the impotence of heavy cavalry against gunfire was made ignominiously apparent.

Following the War, German military leaders agreed, if they had not done so before, that the eras of ‘gigantic cavalry success, such as those at Rossbach, Leuthen and Zorndorf, are forever past’.⁽²³⁾ From then on, light cavalry, if used at all, was to be employed in ‘scouting, screening, foraging, and deep raiding into the enemy rear’.⁽²⁴⁾ Subordinated to the ancillary role of raiding and reconnaissance, the

(20) Showalter, ‘Prussian Cavalry’, 15.

(21) Dorondo, *Riders of the Apocalypse*, 35–6.

(22) Showalter, ‘Prussian Cavalry’, 16.

(23) Quoted in Antulio J. Echevarria II, ‘A Crisis in Warfighting: German Tactical Discussions in the Late Nineteenth Century’, *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 55/1 (1996), 52.

main skill that the cavalry now needed to cultivate was the ability to cover long distances over inhospitable terrain. Such a new role did not go as far as to unseat the horseman, as it did within the American context, but it did require riders and horses to develop more stamina than speed. It also made it necessary to breed light rather than heavy horses, a shift that set military society against industrial society, which demanded more of the latter.

What this analysis does not explain, however, is why the *Distranzritt* had to take place in public. To answer this question, one must move beyond a narrow preoccupation with the battlefield, look back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and grapple with the social context. During this period, equestrian academies flourished as finishing schools for the European nobility, with absolutist France taking over from Renaissance Italy to become the centre of the so-called *haute-école*. Following the establishment of the Parisian academy by Antoine de Pluvinel in 1594, the number of equestrian academies had increased rapidly. By the end of the seventeenth century, seven to eight schools operated in the French capital alone, while 18 to 20 were to be found in the provinces.⁽²⁴⁾ At the academy in Angers, where records survive, nobles from all over Europe attended, with German and English students particularly well represented. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, enrolled in 1615; Frederick von Pappenheim registered in 1629; and Count Buffon and the Duke of Newcastle also attended.⁽²⁵⁾

For the purposes of this article, the schools of horsemanship were significant because they aimed to decouple the act of riding from its medieval moorings in war and violence. Keen to show off the horseman as civilised and enlightened, the

(24) Charles Townshend, (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War* (Oxford, 1997), 188.

(25) Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat: the Education of the Court Nobility 1580–1715* (New Jersey, 1990), 127.

(26) Corinne Doucet, 'Les Académies équestres et l'éducation de la noblesse (XVIe – XVIIIe siècle)', *Revue historique* 308/4 (Octobre 2003), 817–36, 831.

equestrian academies re-invented riding as a practice that appeared to have very little to do with brute force. Indeed, rather than aggressively order the horse using punitive methods, riders were taught to maintain a graceful posture, and the ease with which they could guide the horse was seen as an indication of their ‘potential to rule and lead’.⁽²⁷⁾ As Pasquier put it, he who ‘knows how to place the horse under his reason is both destined and capable of being ruler’.⁽²⁸⁾ Both the paintings commissioned and the monuments constructed during this time, in which mounted monarchs and aristocrats are depicted in the manner of the *haute-école*, attest to the political and social importance the equestrian academies assumed in the early modern period.⁽²⁹⁾ Equestrian portraits such as those of Philip IV by Diego Velazquez and equestrian statues such as those of the Sun King, Louis XIV, are notable examples. By showing their ability to mount and ride horses with grace and ease, rulers were conscious to create an image of themselves as enlightened elites whose gentle control of horses promised similar treatment of those who looked up to them.

Due to the *haute-école*’s strong associations with absolute monarchy, however, the equestrian academies faced an existential crisis during the French Revolution. Most schools of horsemanship had little choice but to shut down—most of them during the early revolutionary years—and equestrian statues were also targets for decapitation as a chief vestige of the despised feudal order.⁽³⁰⁾ One

(27) Denise Carabin, ‘Deux institutions de gentilshommes sous Louis XIII: Le Gentilhomme de Pasquier et L’instructions du Roy de Pluvinel’, *Dix-septième siècle* 218/1 (Janvier-Mars, 2003), 37.

(28) Quoted in Carabin, ‘Deux institutions’, 32.

(29) See Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London, 1992); Walter Liedtke, *The Royal Horse and Rider: Painting, Sculpture, and Horsemanship 1500–1800* (New York, 1989); Michel Martin, *Les Monuments équestres de Louis XIV: une grande entreprise de propagande monarchique* (Paris, 1986).

(30) Charles-Alphonse Duplessis, *L’Equitation en France, ses écoles et ses maîtres depuis le XVI^e siècle jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris and Nancy, 1892), chapter 3; Ernst Steinmann, ‘Die Zerstörung der Königsdenkmäler in Paris’, *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 10 (1917), 337.

major result of the Revolution was that the *haute-école*, having lost its schools, struggled to play a role in the education of civilians, and eventually had to limit itself to training soldiers. At the military riding school in Saumur, future army officers continued to be taught because the *haute-école* imparted the basic principles of riding; but attempts to reinstate the art of horsemanship for broader society were invariably unsuccessful.⁽³¹⁾ In the pages of the *Journal des haras*, calls were made, in 1829, to resurrect equestrian academies through which a ‘taste’ for horsemanship could be encouraged. For one correspondent of the journal, it was imperative to train the instructors of the ‘*manège civil*’ since they were crucial to the creation of the upper class.⁽³²⁾ Civilian schools were also vital for maintaining the production of saddle horses in the event of war. In the German states, where the backlash against the *haute-école* was not as severe, the equestrian academies managed to survive into the mid-nineteenth century. The riding schools in both Dresden and Hannover, however, were eventually shut down, in 1848 and 1866 respectively, and both were superseded by military riding academies.⁽³³⁾ Within both France and Germany, riding thus increasingly became the preserve of the army, and the extent to which military officers dominated the *Distanzritt* testifies to this development.

In England, the fallout was decidedly different, with foxhunting largely filling the void left behind by the closure of the French academies. During its early years, however, foxhunting had very little to do with horsemanship. As David Itzkowitz has shown, the father of modern foxhunting, Hugo Meynell, a country gentleman from North Leicestershire, was initially merely interested in the breeding of his bloodhounds. Therefore, it was a canine rather than an equine interest that had been

(31) Antoine-Henri-Philippe-Léon d’rCte Aure, *Utilité d’une école normale d’équitation. De son influence sur l’éducation du cheval léger, sur les besoins de l’agriculture et sur les ressources qu’elle peut offrir à la classe pauvre* (Paris, 1845), 2.

(32) *Journal des haras* (Juli 1829), 248.

(33) *Der Sporn* 12 (1872), 91–3.

responsible for the birth of the sport.⁽³⁴⁾ However, as the popularity of foxhunting spread, with Melton Mowbray becoming the ‘centre of the hunts’, men were drawn to the sport by ‘the opportunity afforded for hard and exhilarating riding’.⁽³⁵⁾ When fences were erected, because of the spread of enclosures, the emphasis on riding was further strengthened. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Itzkowitz concludes, the turnaround had been completed: ‘Many of those who came to hunt with their hounds had far less interest in the hounds than in their own horsemanship; they hunted to ride, and by 1800, the end of Meynell’s reign at Quorn, the hard riders, led by Lords Forester and Jersey, were by far the most prominent horsemen in the field’.⁽³⁶⁾

Eventually, foxhunting, insofar as it upheld the taste for riding and encouraged the breeding of remounts, acquired a military justification. As James Yorke put it to Countess de Grey: ‘I need not enlarge upon the political advantages of encouraging a sport which propagates a fine breed of horses, and prevents our young men from growing quite effeminate in Bond Street’.⁽³⁷⁾ Based on this very rationale, army officers stationed near to the hunts were allowed to participate without having to pay subscription fees, and officers on home leave would avidly take part. So much popularity did foxhunting acquire that the ‘hard-riding and reckless, devil-may-care bravery’, which characterised the hunt was held responsible for such reckless cavalry charges as those made during the Battle of Balaclava.⁽³⁸⁾

The horse riding of foxhunting differed significantly from that in equestrian academies. The former was a sport that took place in a rural as opposed to an urban setting; it was conducted outside in the open air, compared to the indoor setting of

(34) David C. Itzkowitz, *Peculiar Privilege: A Social History of English Foxhunting* (Hassocks, 1977), 8.

(35) *Ibid.*, 10.

(36) *Ibid.*, 10.

(37) Quoted in Itzkowitz, *Peculiar Privilege*, 20.

(38) *Ibid.*, 21.

the *manège*; the style of riding was ‘hard’ rather than ‘soft’, and it was also faster; its teaching was less regulated than the elaborate rules to which pupils needed to adhere in the schools of horsemanship; and it was also less of a public spectacle (at least until the advent of railways) than the *haute-école*, which was designed to appeal to the broader middle-class public. Despite these differences, foxhunting and the *manège* shared one important tenet: the pre-eminence of the horseman. Rather than standard horse racing, which places more emphasis on the performance of the thoroughbred itself, the focus of attention in foxhunting and the *manège* is on the capabilities of the rider. To be sure, there were criticisms of foxhunting that placed doubts on its ability to uphold the art of horsemanship. In 1763, Charles Thompson declared that the English were ‘bad horsemen’ because they engaged more in hunting and racing than with the *haute-école*, which was considered a purer form of riding.⁽³⁹⁾ Even so, both hunting and horse racing—while being seen as inferior to the *manège*—shared a belief in the inseparability of horse and rider. Later criticisms levelled at horse racing were, as the next section reveals, of a totally different order, because the turf, especially its short-distance variant, appeared to present an existential threat to this doctrine.

The rise of flat racing, the de-militarisation of the horse, and the elevation of the Arab

Parallel to the demise of equestrian academies was not only the emergence of foxhunting but also the concomitant rise in the popularity of English horse racing. Before the 1830s, most races took place in heats. Racehorses, mounted by their heavy owner-riders, ran at least twice over long distances. Based on the records in the *Racing Calendar* of 1809, Mike Huggins has calculated that 52 percent of races took place in such heats.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Such an arrangement arguably pertained because, as

(39) Charles Thompson, *Rules for bad horsemen* (London, 1763), 2–3.

(40) Mike Huggins, *Flat Racing and British Society, 1790–1914: a Social and Economic*

Wray Vamplew observed, there was an insufficient number of horses that could race—a problem that was later surmounted thanks to the development of a national rail network, which allowed horses to be transported around the country. By the 1830s, however, an increasing number of young horses were being run over shorter distances.⁽⁴¹⁾ Rather than allow amateur owner-riders to mount their horses, professional jockeys, boasting specialist expertise in bringing out the best in the horses, replaced them. In his classic study of the turf, Vamplew explained how the shift to shorter races with younger horses reflected the frustration that many heats amounted to ‘little more than walking’ and that owners’ investment needed to be recouped earlier.

Such a shift was accelerated by the railway, which made it possible for racehorses to compete in a greater number of meetings, and by the emergence of enclosed racecourses such as Sandown Park. Since the new urban mass public needed to be attracted, the ‘long-distance ridings in which the best horse might come in well ahead of the field’ were seen to be less exciting than ‘two-year-races, sprints and handicaps, all of which had a sufficient degree of uncertainty about the result to make for exciting racing’.⁽⁴²⁾ For the government, whose support for long distance racing had been based on the military need to encourage the breeding of cavalry horses, flat racing appealed less and less.⁽⁴³⁾ During most of the nineteenth century, however, voices that criticised this development remained rare. One reason was that foxhunting offered opportunities for cavalry officers to develop their skills of horsemanship; another reason was the extent to which the country could depend on the Empire for the provision of cavalry horses. It was only following the Boer War (1899) that criticism of the quality of horseflesh became vocal within the

History (London, 2000), 33.

(41) Wray Vamplew, *The Turf: a Social and Economic History of Horse Racing* (London, 1976), 23–4.

(42) *Ibid.*, 43.

(43) Huggins, *Flat Racing*, 34.

English context.

By contrast, in Germany, the development of English horse racing was viewed with incomprehension, anxiety, and hostility because it appeared to make a mockery of the pre-eminence of horsemen.⁽⁴⁴⁾ At the most fundamental level, the difference was an epistemological one: it was essentially a matter of how the true capabilities of a horse could be known. When Carl Friedrich von Burgsdorf, the stud director at Trakehnen in East Prussia, made his trip to England in 1826, he was aghast at the 'sole' emphasis on 'the highest speed', which bypassed the importance of appearance in the assessment of equine quality. In his view, a good horse should have 'a regular build, possess healthy bones, be nimble, exhibit a proper gait and demonstrate beauty'.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Such an emphasis on visible features, it hardly needs adding, relied on the expert eyes of horsemen like Burgsdorf, who would inspect and touch horses before the 'truth' was declared. For this reason, the Prussian stud director found it difficult to find 'proper' horses during his sojourn: the kind of horses he came across were not the 'right colour', suffered from 'crooked legs', and appeared 'exhausted'.⁽⁴⁶⁾

However, the English turf turned a blind eye to these externals and distrusted the people who delivered assessments based on them. It contended that the human eye could not be trusted to deliver an objective verdict and deferred to the 'invisible hand' of the racecourse on which the internal qualities of the horse were thought to be rendered most truthfully manifest when horses were raced at maximum speed.

(44) See Tatsuya Mitsuda, 'The Politics of Reproduction: Horse Breeding and State Studs in Prussia, 1750–1900', in Kristen Guest and Monica Mattfeld (eds), *Equine Cultures: Horses, Human Society, and the Discourse of Modernity, 1700–Present* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019).

(45) Carl Friedrich Wilhelm von Burgsdorf, *Versuch eines Beweises, dass die Pferderennen in England so wie sie jetzt bestehen, kein wesentliches Beförderungsmittel der bessern edlen Pferdezucht in Deutschland werden können* (Königsberg, 1827), 5.

(46) *Ibid.*, 8.

Due to the experience that ugly and deformed racehorses could prove to be the best performers, the English had reached the conclusion that the ‘real’ worth of the horse could only be ascertained by subjecting it to tests in which similar conditions were met. By using weights as handicaps, removing obstacles, unifying the skills of the rider in the diminutive body of the jockey, and encouraging the horse to gallop to its extreme, English flat racing aimed to keep coincidence to a minimum and control the variables that impinged upon results. Such shifts represented a diametrically different doctrine, whose final outcome was to dethrone horsemen by reducing their authority. Both as riders who competed in events and as experts who pronounced upon the quality of horses, horsemen were thus made surplus to requirements in the English system.

What had been crucial to maintaining the centrality of the horseman had been the art of horsemanship, whose decline in England was commonly bewailed by German observers. Similar to Burgsdorf, Freiherr von den Brincken, a Prussian riding master, took the same dislike to English racehorses: ‘The reputation, which has been gained either through having won prizes at some famous racing events or for having successfully gambled large sums of money, is almost the sole criterion which decides the capability of stud horses in England’.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Such a view could be seen, he continued, in the extent to which riders in their daily lives went about ‘galloping’ in imitation of scenes on the racecourse, seemingly oblivious to some of the fundamental laws of horsemanship. For Brincken, the definition of a good horseman lay in his ability to effortlessly control the animal, to direct it in all sorts of directions and paces, and to bring out its potential without causing damage to its constitution.⁽⁴⁸⁾ What the turf had done, in his view, was to turn this arrangement upside down. Without horsemen in control, horses could gallop mindlessly at a

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Freiherr von den Brincken, *Bemerkungen über das Englische Pferd: dessen verschiedene Racen, und die Pferdezucht im Allgemeinen* (Weimar, 1827) 49.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, 7.

single pace and do damage to themselves because of the belief that minimal intervention would bring out the best in them. What was additionally important was military utility. Viewing England in general, Brincken praised foxhunting not only because it upheld the principles of horsemanship but also because it produced army officers and saddle horses for the battlefield.⁽⁴⁹⁾ On this point, the turf had become an irrelevant military training ground, and it was for this reason that the blood of English thoroughbreds could not be used to improve other breeds because they were bred exclusively for betting purposes.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Taking thoroughbreds back to Germany was thus out of the question: quality saddle horses could not possibly be bred from them.⁽⁵¹⁾

One consequence of this scepticism towards English flat racing was that it helped elevate the assessment of Arab horses over that of the thoroughbred. In Brincken's view, the much-touted superiority of the English thoroughbred was a mirage that derived its power from the mistaken results obtained from the racecourse.⁽⁵²⁾ Compared to this 'artificial' environment, the conditions under which Arab horses were bred and reared, he emphasised, were naturally suited to riding. Evidence of this superiority seemed nowhere clearer than in the war games that Bedouins played in the harsh environment of the desert.⁽⁵³⁾ Equally enthusiastic about the worth of the Arab horse was K.W. Ammon. Like Brincken, he stressed the closeness to nature of both the horse and its owner, pointing to the care foals received, being fed on milk and raised in the tents of their owners.⁽⁵⁴⁾ He dismissed claims that the Arab horse was inferior, pointing out that this understanding derived

(49) Ibid., 149.

(50) Burgsdorf, *Versuch eines Beweises*, 78.

(51) Ibid., 158.

(52) Brincken, *Bemerkungen über das Englische Pferd*, 157.

(53) Ibid., 155.

(54) Karl Wilhelm Ammon, *Bemerkungen über die Nutzen der landlichen Hof- und Stammgestüte, und der Wettrennen nach englischer Art* (Nuremberg, 1831), 63.

from the importation to Europe of low-quality Barb, Egyptian, and Syrian horses. Rather than rely on trading intermediaries, he recommended Damascus as the place to procure better Arab horses directly. Consequently, the Prussian state studs, which monopolised breeding policy, took a greater liking for the Arab over the thoroughbred.

Such enthusiasm for the Arab horse was not universally welcomed, however. A chief German opponent to the introduction of Arab horses was Friedrich von Biel, a flat racing enthusiast from Mecklenburg, where the first racing events adopting the English model had been organised. For Biel, the romantic esteem in which Arab horses were held was deeply flawed. He castigated publications that enthused over the ‘pearls’ and ‘gems’ that could be found in the East.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Though conceding that many of the Arab horses imported to England for breeding purposes had been successful, he contended that this only applied to the limited period between 1760 and 1780 when the Godolphin Barb—one of the foundation sires of the thoroughbred—was introduced. Since then, he argued, successes had been rare. Furthermore, a closer look at the performance of the Arab horse revealed its glaring inferiority to the English thoroughbred. Even the most inferior of English racehorses, he argued, had little difficulty beating the best of the East. Following a gruelling journey to Calcutta, they were able to trounce Arab horses in races, despite the unfavourable climatic and dietary conditions.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Closer to home, Biel pointed to the disappointing experiments that Major von Wachenhausen had conducted, in which the Arab was cross-bred with indigenous mares. There was much promise over the long term of investing in Arab horses, Wachenhausen concluded, but like the felling of an old and fat birch tree, it took an extraordinary amount of time for a new tree to grow. Why not, the argument thus ran, import the English thoroughbred, which had already undergone this lengthy procedure. The

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Friedrich von Biel, *Einziges über edle Pferde* (Dresden, 1830), 172–3.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, 180.

fact that the English racehorse was more accessible and better acclimatised to the European environment meant that importing it was less problematic. Putting together an expedition to the Middle East in an uncertain search for the true Arab horse was a risky and costly venture. For all these reasons, Biel concluded, it made sense to favour the English thoroughbred.

Criticism levelled at the turf and its protagonist, the thoroughbred, dwarfed the support for it. Not least because those hostile to horse racing tended to be administrators of state studs, which England did not have, critics felt threatened by a venture that potentially dispensed with their expertise. In reality, of course, difficulties in procuring Arab horses meant that German state studs eventually had little choice but to breed thoroughbreds. Yet when the state chose to do so, it was careful to defend its decision by making a distinction between the racecourse and the thoroughbred, reassuring sceptics that by favouring the thoroughbred, it was not importing a Trojan horse. The need for such a distinction indicates the extent to which the thoroughbred could not be disentangled from the broader significance it appeared to embody, and one predictable reaction was to turn away from the racehorse itself and embrace the Arab as an alternative stud horse. Preference for the Arab not only masked a longing for the declining art of horsemanship but also a need for races to serve broader military and patriotic objectives. Critics accused flat racing of descending into a betting exercise in which entertainment, money, and profit-seeking were the main aims, and the importance of preparing horse and rider for war appeared to be lost. By nullifying the central role of the horseman in the assessment of equine quality, depriving army officers of the chance to develop riding skills by replacing them with jockeys, and simplifying the ability of the horse to that of speed, English flat racing seemed to de-militarise and thus belittle the significance of riding for the battlefield.

**Pressure on steeplechase racing, the rise in economic demand.
and new experts**

Faced with the challenge of the English system, the Germans not only expressed a preference for the Arab horse but also came to embrace a sport in which the rider and not the horse gained attention: steeplechase racing. In contrast to flat racing, where speed became the ultimate test of equine ability, the steeplechase included various obstacles that limited the influence of speed on the outcome of races, helping to deflect spectators' gaze away from the abilities of the horse and onto the skills of the rider. Receiving patronage from the likes of the Prussian king, the House of Mecklenburg, and the House of Schleswig-Holstein, spectators flocked to these riding events and were interested in how horsemen were able to ride their horses. In her book on the reception of English sports in Germany, Christine Eisenberg suggests that the steeplechase was an extension of 'court dressage riding', with the broader public coming to see in it a more 'democratic way of riding'.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Flat racing took a clear backseat to the steeplechase in Germany. In 1884, around 500 of the 700 horse races held in Germany were steeplechase races in which amateur riders—not professional jockeys—made up the majority of participants. By the turn of the century, approximately 700 riders enthusiastically participated, most of whom were cavalry officers drawn from the nobility. They exploited the very public opportunity to perform so as to develop skills considered necessary for the battlefield, affirm their self-identities as horsemen, boast of their bravery to the nation, and advertise the continued importance of riding as an esteemed mode of movement. Even middle-class artillery officers increasingly took

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Christiane Eisenberg, *'Englische Sports' und deutsche Bürger: Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte, 1800–1939* (Paderborn, 1999), 164–5.

part in the steeplechase and answered the call for any self-respecting army officer to be able to ride just as well as his counterpart in the cavalry.⁵⁸

Even though steeplechase races remained popular throughout the period in question, pressures to reform built up, following the disappointing results from German officers who had participated in international events during the 1870s. Drawing on the testimony of Count Fritz Metternich, reputedly the best steeplechase rider in Germany at that time, the *Sporn* complained that military riders were unable to make their mark on the global stage, not least because of the vastly superior abilities of professional jockeys. It was argued that this weakness was being exploited back in Germany: foreign jockeys of average competence, riding on average horses, were easily defeating German riders and horses in domestic competitions, igniting worries about the impact on national security.⁵⁹

Reaction to such charges was forthright. One repeated objection to reform was the defence that officer riders competed not for monetary gain but out of patriotic spirit: 'The steeplechase races, or gentlemen rides [*Herren Reiten*] are characterised by the training of horse and rider, not by financial gains, and should remain that way'.⁶⁰ Since professional jockeys looked to triumph at all costs, it was argued that spectators would be deterred since the purpose of the races was to prepare horsemen for war.⁶¹ Humanitarian reasons were also introduced into the debate. It was claimed that while professional jockeys would be undeterred about riding a horse (which they did not own) to extremes, officer riders would take more care when exposing their horses (which they did own and would be concerned about) to health risks.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁹ *Der Sporn* 15 (April 1876), 133.

⁶⁰ *Verhandlungen der Commission zur Förderung der Pferdezucht in Preußen im Monat Juni 1876* (Berlin, 1876), 28.

⁶¹ *Der Sporn* 15 (April 1876), 134–5.

⁶² *Verhandlungen der Commission zur Förderung der Pferdezucht in Preußen im*

What these objections failed to diminish, however, were concerns about the quality of the horses. In the Prussian horse breeding commission, which discussed the issue from 1876, the argument that the steeplechase was useful preparation for war among army officers had little support since members could not disregard the performance of the horses themselves. A chief problem with the steeplechase lay in the discrepancy between the abilities of officer riders, whose individualities presented a barrier to an accurate comparative assessment of the horses. In the view of Nathusius-Königsborn, a landowner, the introduction of professional jockeys had to be accepted in order to lessen the element of chance and to generate more trustworthy data. 'In the least', he pleaded, 'the weight of good riders should be manipulated'.⁶³ For the Union Klub, the driving force behind the proposals and the German equivalent of the British Jockey Club, the introduction of what amounted to the principles of the flat had the added advantage of providing a safety net for breeders of thoroughbreds. Steeplechase events could provide a second-tier testing ground for racehorses that could not compete in flat races.⁶⁴

For the Ministry of Agriculture in Germany, which had taken over responsibility from the War Ministry for the state horse breeding policy, the narrow focus on military use was inappropriate. Since the priority for agriculture was to breed working horses rather than army remounts, state support for steeplechase events through the provision of premiums was becoming increasingly difficult to justify. To make the proposal more palatable, the Union Klub suggested that it would limit the employment of professional jockeys to steeplechase races where the prize money was high. Even this idea, however, encountered stiff resistance: it merely meant that senior officers would participate in smaller meetings, depriving

Aufträge des Königlich Preussischen Ministers für die landwirtschaftlichen Angelegenheiten (Berlin, 1876), 26.

⁶³ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 45–9.

young officers of the opportunity to compete and improve their riding.⁶⁵ When the introduction of professional jockeys was finally approved, the majority of the German riding clubs reacted angrily: the Union of German Riders and Horse Breeding Societies (*Verband deutscher Reiter und Pferdezeit Vereine*) announced on 1 April 1891 that members who chose to compete with jockeys in steeplechase races would be banned from the races that it organised.⁶⁶

As to why the steeplechase came under pressure, a broader look at new demands being placed on horses is needed. Two decades prior to the moves to reform the steeplechase, economic pressures—the likes of which had not been felt before—had become apparent in the west of the country, above all in the Rhine province, which had been experiencing rapid industrialisation since the 1850s. Many historians have established that, rather than weaken demand for horses, industrialisation renewed the thirst for horsepower, and Germany was no exception.⁶⁷ By the 1860s, heavy breeds were attracting double the prices they had been able to command a decade previously, transforming the breeding of cold-blooded horses into a lucrative business.⁶⁸ While the military had overwhelmingly taken the initiative in the first half of the nineteenth century, dictating what should and should not be bred through the state studs, industry and commerce now increasingly exerted influence on national horse breeding policy (*Landespflegezeit*). The latter demanded state support, contested the narrow definition of *Landespflegezeit*, which was synonymous with warhorses, and argued that cold-

(65) *Der Sporn* 13 (März 1876), 98.

(66) *Verhandlungen der Commission zur Förderung der Pferdezeit in Preußen im Auftrage des Königlich Preußischen Ministers für die landwirtschaftlichen Angelegenheiten* (Berlin, 1881), 108.

(67) For a relatively recent and influential restatement of this point, see David Egerton, *The Shock of the Old. Technology and Global History since 1900* (London, 2006), 32–36.

(68) Waldschmidt, *Vorschläge zur Förderung der Pferdezeit mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rheinprovinz* (Bonn, 1865), 6.

blooded horses were crucial to developing the national economy.

Due to this economic pressure, competing demands for two different types of horses—one light, the other heavy—required negotiation. One early battleground in this contest was the Westphalian state stud in WIKRATH, which had relented to pressures from commerce and industry to import heavy Belgian and Flemish breeds.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Much of the conflict over the use of horsepower came to a climax in the Horse Breeding Commission established in the 1870s. For BOCH, a senior commercial councillor (*Kommerzienrath*), the imperial government had done precious little to elevate the breeding of working horses (*Arbeitspferd*).⁽⁷⁰⁾ This was a national calamity, he suggested, since the Rhine province had to satisfy its demand for draught horses by importing them from neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands and France, due to the German state's failure to promote the breeding of cold-blooded horses. Such a view was strongly contested, however. In the opinion of East Prussian aristocrat von SAUCKEN, who remained convinced of the importance of warhorses, pressures from the west for the state to take more seriously the breeding of horses for industry and commerce were unwelcome. Provisioning appropriate horses for 'the large industrialists of the Rhine province', he argued, had nothing to do with the state, which 'must intervene for the purposes and the demands of the army'.⁽⁷¹⁾

By the end of the nineteenth century, economic pressures had built up further, forcing horsemen to change their opinion. One of the most noticeable figures to change their mind was ARNDT VON PLOETZ, a former cavalry officer and riding master from the Rhine province, who believed that market principles should form the basis for a more rational and realistic breeding policy. In a book that directly tackled the

(69) Karl Simons, *Die Entwicklung der rheinischen Pferdezzucht (Rheinisch-belgisches Kaltblut)* (Berlin, 1912), 18.

(70) *Verhandlungen der Commission zur Förderung der Pferdezzucht in Preußen im Monat Juni 1876* (Berlin, 1876), 70.

(71) Ibid.

economic principles underlying horse breeding, he shared his horror at Germany becoming a net importer of horses while concurrently spending vast sums of public money on domestic horse breeding, most of which was consumed by the state studs.⁽⁷²⁾ Focusing on the powers that the state studs exercised, he particularly criticised that military demands for light horses could be dictated to farmers through the state surveying process known as *Körordnung*. In calling upon the state to restrict this practice, Ploetz expressed concern that otherwise conservative farmers would turn in protest to the Socialists; this social and political concern made prudent the accommodation of new economic realities.⁽⁷³⁾

Yet, rather than effect a complete turn away from warm-blooded to cold-blooded horses, Ploetz sought a middle ground and suggested forming private breeding societies that would produce 'half-blooded' horses. For Ploetz, the cleverness of the English lay in their ability to breed 'half-blooded' horses that could satisfy both economic and military demands. He was impressed that the horses employed to draw cabs and omnibuses in London also doubled as remounts in reserve, serving the potential demands of the cavalry and the artillery when the need arose. Such a shift to embrace the marketplace was, given the hostility of German riders towards the English, a major turnaround; but Ploetz's pronouncements were not without their detractors. Former cavalry colleagues tried to disassociate themselves from Ploetz, pointing to his short military service and accusing him of wanting to introduce heavy horses into traditional remount regions such as East Prussia—a proposition feared to threaten the breeding of light horses for the army.⁽⁷⁴⁾

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the literature on horse breeding was dominated by publications which raised repeated concerns about the breeding and

(72) Arndt von Ploetz, *Die Pferdezucht in ihrer volkswirtschaftlichen Bedeutung. Ein Wegweiser für die deutschen Pferdezüchter* (Berlin, 1896), 5.

(73) Arndt von Ploetz, 'Vollblut-, Halbblut-, Kaltblutzucht und Armee', *Pferdefreund* 5 (Februar 1899), 36.

(74) Arndt von Ploetz, 'Zur Landespferdezucht-Frage', *Pferdefreund* 13 (Mai 1899), 100.

rearing of heavy horses for use in intensive agriculture, haulage, construction, or transportation. Such a surge marked a significant shift away from the many hippological treatises focusing on lighter breeds that had been dominant at least until the mid-nineteenth century.⁽⁷⁵⁾ A common characteristic of most of these new works was the extent to which new experts contested accepted knowledge about horses. Unlike the stud officials, hippologists, and riding masters who had dominated equine knowledge, the interests of industrialists, engineers, veterinarians, and breeders did not lie in serving the ‘state-military complex’. For this reason, these groups shared little of the romanticism that the former group expressed about riding, horsemanship, or saddle horses, castigating it for the old-fashioned, irrational, and detrimental ways in which it had looked at horses. As Stuttgart veterinarian Leonhard Hofmann sarcastically noted, ‘the eye’ developed to assess the quality of ‘noble’ horses had little use in judging the ugliness of heavy horses.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Though some farmers, especially in East Prussia, still maintained a residual attachment to lighter breeds, due to their historic relationship with the state, it was now time to sever that tie. By doing so, one could embrace a more modern, rational mode of thinking in which horses would be separately assessed from the men who rode them.

Conclusion

Despite criticism of the *Distanzritt*, the fantastic success of the 1892 Vienna-Berlin event ensured it was repeated, albeit with concessions made to humanitarians’ demands. In 1909, the same competition took place between Vienna and Berlin. This time the organisers created more stops at appropriate intervals along the way,

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Frederick H. Huth, *Works on horses and equitation. A bibliographical record of hippology* (London 1887).

⁽⁷⁶⁾ L. Hoffmann, *Spezielle Pferdezzucht. Zugleich eine Lanze für die Zucht des schweren Pferdes* (Leipzig, 1902), 31.

where horses were subjected to veterinary examinations. They also banned competitors who pushed their horses too hard, and, in cases where intervention was necessary, permitted exhausted horses to be withdrawn from the competition.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Criticism still raged as to why an event sold as a test of speed and stamina was at all necessary ‘in the age of the railroad, the automobile, the bicycle and the steam boat’.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Though the concessions demonstrated the power of the humanitarian movement, the *Distanzritt* should not merely be viewed through this narrow lens. Nor would it be helpful to adopt a determinist interpretation—as revealed in the questioning of why technologies such as rail and cycle could not serve as replacements—since this would suggest that the demise of horse and rider was inevitable. A chief objective of this article has been to place this event in a broad and multi-faceted context in an attempt to understand why such a seemingly anachronistic event took place, why so much emotion was invested, why it garnered public attention, and the kind of society it represented.

First, this article has demonstrated how the event reflected changes in the military. Pressured to move away from shock tactics, the role of the cavalry—especially after the Franco-Prussian War—shifted to reconnaissance, observing, foraging, and raiding behind enemy lines. Such a change in tactics, although initially unpopular, had meant that a different set of skills needed to be cultivated. Rather than show deadly speed, which had been required for the charge, horse and rider needed to show that they could endure longer distances and inhospitable terrain. While the *Distanzritt* did not faithfully replicate the realities of the battlefield, it nonetheless served as an occasion through which new types of skill could be developed and paraded before the public, showing that the cavalry, from which most competitors came, remained an important arm of the military. In this sense, endurance riding represented a public relations exercise for re-inventing the

⁽⁷⁷⁾ *Anwalt der Tiere* (November 1909), 164.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, 165.

image of the cavalry.

Second, this article has shown how the *Distanzritt* can be better understood when placed within the context of the art of horsemanship. Following the demise of the equestrian academies during the French Revolution, the *haute-école's* influence over riding declined. Together with the general demise of riding itself as a civilian pursuit and mode of conveyance, horsemanship became an almost exclusively military preserve. Alternative riding events emerged to fill the void left behind. In England, foxhunting and flat racing gained ascendancy, while in Germany the steeplechase appears to have been preferred. The controversial feature of flat racing was its sole pursuit of speed through which the horse's internal qualities were thought to become manifest, presenting a major challenge to the expertise of horsemen. In Germany, the pressures to reform the steeplechase were an extension of this shift from rider to horse, and endurance riding was arguably a reaction to this.

Third, this article has demonstrated the importance of placing the *Distanzritt* within changes in broader equine society. At the start of the reviewed period, the breeding of saddle horses was indisputably the most important form of horse breeding. Seen as both a noble and patriotic pursuit, given its ties to national defence, the Prussian state was very much involved in the provision of remounts, looking abroad to England and Arabia to procure horses for its state studs. However, as growing industrialisation increasingly demanded horses with the strength to carry haulage, engage in intensive agriculture, or aid in construction, heavier breeds rose in importance to develop the nation's economic strength. Despite initial success in resisting the introduction of market principles when the English turf presented an existential threat, Germany, especially in the west of the country, experienced a major shift away from warm-blooded to cold-blooded horses. Critics of the *Distanzritt* tended to be supporters of the cold-blooded horse. They struggled to fathom why an event with very little economic rationale could

take place at all, pointing to other forms of technology as viable replacements. Supporters, however, refused to see the event in such utilitarian terms, boasting its importance for national security, and insisting on the inseparable nature of horse and rider against attempts to separate the two.

By bringing together seemingly disparate phenomena—the art of horsemanship, flat racing, steeplechase, cavalry tactics, commerce, and industry—this article has argued that the relationship between horse and rider is crucial to understanding the nineteenth-century equine world. Most of the analysed examples have shown how the two became increasingly separated. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the residual influences of the equestrian academies and the relative importance of the cavalry ensured that the two remained inseparable, and control of the state studs also ensured that they remained intertwined. However, as the century unfolded, and the demands of the military shifted, scepticism grew about the relationship between horsemen and their horses. By the end of the century, the relationship had been severely undermined, as reflected in the pressures for the steeplechase to reform and in the emergence of new experts, interested in the horse as an economic product. The military reaction to these developments was mainly to uphold the inseparability of horse and rider, criticising moves to drive a wedge between the two, and advocating its validity from the perspective of patriotism and national security. However, the provision of the mounted warrior and warhorse could not be a narrowly military preoccupation; it could not be detached from the broader workings of society and the economy, whose appetite for ‘horsepower’ had, by the time of the *Distanzritt*, reached a level that could no longer be ignored.