

"Up until 1889, the Haflinger did not exist as a breed." - these are the words of Baron Gobert Sternbach, provincial manager of stables, taken from an article on the history of the breed written in 1984

Sternbach was right: the pretty horses with the golden manes, today intrinsically linked to South Tyrolean tradition and culture, were in fact a late creation of the Habsburg Empire. The entire Tyrol area had never achieved self-sufficiency in terms of horse breeding, among other things because the pastures of the Alpine valleys did not produce the required amounts of fodder. In the second half of the 19th century, the Habsburg Ministry of agriculture and the Military Inspectorate in charge of the horse breeding sector decided to systematically promote breeding in the area of Tyrol in a concerted effort. On the one side, the troops would thus be able to procure their mounts directly on location, and on the other the relatively poor mountain farmers would be helped out with an additional and remunerative source of income.

To this end, a colt stud farm was set up in Lasa/Laas, Val Venosta/Vinschgau. In this manner, the farmers dedicated to horse breeding were sure that their colts would be purchased. At the age of four, the horses were handed over to the army. They were then trained by the army for four years, after which time they were returned as reserve horses to the farmer or to a trader who were expected to return them – in perfect condition – to the troops in case of manoeuvres or war. After another four years, the horses became the property of the breeders.

In this way, the farmers and breeders were motivated to breed strong pack horses with the right requisites for war use in the Alps. At the same time, the foundation stone of today's Haflinger breeding was laid.

In 1874, the cross-breeding of the oriental stallion "133 El Bedavi XXII" with a local mare of Galician origins at the farm of one of these breeders, Josef Folie, in Sluderno/Schluderns gave rise to a golden sorrel with dorsal stripe that was named "249 Folie. No one imagined then that this was the beginning of a new breed which would later become known as the "Haflinger. The name, literally meaning "from Hafling" (a village in the South Tyrolean mountains), at that time was a popular term for "pack horse".

249 Folie had the ideal features for military use and was soon bought as a studhorse by the army. 249 Folie served as studhorse for 19 years and successfully passed on its features to its offspring. In 1897, an inspection of mares on Monzocolo/Tschöggelberg and in Val Venosta/ Vinschgau was organised to verify the results of the breeding efforts. One year later, the Habsburg Ministry of Agriculture recognised the denomination "Haflinger" for these horses. This way it gave clear indications for further breeding to breeders in Val Venosta/Vinschgau, on Monzocolo/Tschöggelberg, in S. Genesio/Jenesien and Renon/ Ritten.

The stables administration still had to use thoroughbred and crossbred Arab studs for the breeding of their pack horses, but the golden sorrel Folie and its offspring asserted themselves as the most important line for the future Haflinger breed.

The seven stallions which are considered the founders of the line in today's breeding are all offspring of Folie and, except for one, were all born in South Tyrol.

In 1904, on Monzoccolo/Tschöggberg the "1st Association of Haflinger breeders, Meltina/Mölten" was founded, comprising the villages of Avelengo/Hafling, Verano/Vöran, S. Genesio/Jenesien and Merano/Meran. The annexed Haflinger stud farm was intended to free farmers from the expenses of keeping valuable mares for breeding.

In 1908 the Val Sarentina/Sarntal Horse Breeding Association was established. It is thanks to the people of this valley and their traditional preference for blond-maned sorrels that this specific characteristic of the Haflinger has become dominant and typical of the breed. Indeed, at the turn of the century, the colour did not play any relevant role in Haflinger breeding. There were dark horses, brown horses, sorrels and bay horses. It was because of the increased use in breeding of the "white maned horses from Val Sarentina/ Sarntal" that the blond golden sorrel gradually asserted itself as the "symbolic" horse for the Haflinger breed.

After the First World War, South Tyrol became part of Italy. In the province of Bolzano/Bozen, an extraordinary commission for horse breeding was established in order to systematically continue the breeding efforts. The studhorses belonging to the national authorities were first collected at the stud depot in Ferrara and subsequently taken to the different covering stations in the South Tyrol breeding area.

After the Second World War, a significant upturn marked the breeding of Haflinger horses. Time had, however, changed considerably. Especially in agriculture and forestry, where up to then the Haflinger had played a crucial role, it was increasingly being replaced by advancing mechanisation.

These changes set the course for a new orientation of Haflinger breeding towards creating a reliable horse for the whole family and for pleasure riding.

The Haflinger has therefore gone through many stages in its development from a pack and draft horse to its deployment for military use and finally its new destination as a sports and leisure horse. The characteristics developed during all these different uses have notably marked the nature of the Haflinger and can today be conveniently benefitted from in its various new activities.