



Bulat Pestivien Horse Fair

As you travel around Brittany, you can often come across particularly strong-looking horses grazing in the fields. These muscular beasts are highly-prized, and are indeed shown off at the fairs throughout the region. Rob went to Bulat-Pestivien in September to see them at their best, and spoke to one of the organisers who explained how the horse fair works there...

Anthony My name is Anthony Pinson, I am the President of the Bulat committee. My English is not very good but I try to speak English a little. We are in Bulat for the traditional Foire au Poulains at Bulat Pestivien, it's the 267th fair, the oldest horse fair in the Côtes d'Armor.

Rob What are you doing here today?

Anthony It's a fair with a competition for the young horses born this year. There are about 120 foals which are entered this year. There's also a market, with all sorts of things on sale, clothes, kitchenware and so on. There's also a fairground, and meals served at lunchtime; all this attracts 3 to 4000 people to Bulat-Pestivien.
I mustn't forget to mention that there is also a "pardon" this week end, a religious celebration with a mass on Saturday evening, a procession, and a traditional bonfire, a "tantad". There's a firework display to end all that. On Sunday, there was also a mass and a procession which, all together brings about 2000 pilgrims during the weekend. It's the oldest horse fair in the Côtes d'Armor, but it's also a religious festival. It's highly regarded by worshippers and horse fans alike, particularly among the older generation. Bulat is in the heart of rural Brittany, with a lot of older people, many of them Breton-speakers. Breton is spoken a lot among the horse breeders.

Rob Do you think the fair will continue?

Anthony It will certainly continue. The number of foals being entered hasn't diminished; there are still as many entrants as ever. There may be problems with servicing at some studs, but the foals keep coming. There may be a change as far as the day itself is concerned, as Monday isn't an ideal day; we have to do without many of the younger people who have a job to go to. We may be forced to make some adjustments in the future; the fair may be held on a Saturday, rather than a Monday, but we'll have to think about that.

It's also a fact that, for a fair lasting three days, we need to recruit a lot of volunteers, and that can be difficult.

So much for the organisers; what do the horse breeders have to say about the day? First I spoke to Jean-Marc ...

Jean-Marc The breeders come here to show off their yearlings, the horses born this year, and to enter a competition for the best. The judges are looking at their breeding, the way they move, their coats, a whole load of different criteria. They have a grid, and they mark off the points of each foal, ending up with a winner in each class.

Rob Now I'm speaking Deborah, who looks after the horses here. What age are they?

Deborah The horses are all born during the last year, some are only six months old, others were born last year. So they're up to 18-months old. They're wonderful horses. You can do everything with them, they have a superior personality. They respond well, they're very docile, and they're willing.

Rob They look very strong.

Deborah Yes, they have great strength, and they know how to use it when they're asked. The Breton horse can be used for all sorts of things, for pleasure, in a harness or with a saddle. Unfortunately, the most profitable use for the Breton horse is for its meat. The majority of the horses that have been bred end up going off in the wrong lorry, especially the males.

Rob So most of the horses here are going to end up on the butchers' slab.

Deborah The problem is that, at my grandparent's stud, we find it really difficult to let them go; they stay with us, for the most part. We try to find people who will take them on, to use them for riding or putting them out to stud. The others just stay at home! The average age for a Breton horse, well, we have some of retirement age now, they are 20-25 years old. They live quite a long time, you see. When you buy a Breton horse, it's not for a year or two; it's for 10-20 years minimum.

Jean-François is one of the older breeders and very experienced, and when he talks about his animals, he's quite philosophical. I asked him why his horses were making so much noise.

Jean-François Le Pavec I don't know, I'm not a guru, but I think it's the stress, and them wanting to get back to their mothers. They're lost, completely lost, like when you send kids to school for the first time, they want to go home and see their mothers! And the mares in the fields, they're stressed too, and they neigh to call their foals to

them. Because there's plenty of activity in the fields, you know, and in the horsebox too! And when they get to the field, the foals go straight to the mares to suckle; just like sheep. They recognise their mothers straight away, they don't make any mistake!

Rob How many horses have you got at your place?

Jean-François Altogether, I have about 80.

Rob And what kind of work do they do for you?

Jean François None at all. We don't make them work; we raise them just for our pleasure.

Rob But it costs a lot to raise a horse, doesn't it?

Jean-François Yes, but it's better to die poor! Rich or poor, the result's the same! We can't keep all of them, it's impossible, but...wars kill people, so I don't see why we shouldn't kill horses too. If we killed as many horses as we have killed people, that would be a lot of horses! And the horse meat is very good, y'know. It's the best meat you can get, full of energy. It's also more expensive, despite being so cheap to produce. I think I'm winding you up, aren't I?

So, sadly, those fine beasts we see throughout Brittany may well end up on a plate. Apparently, Italy is the main market for this region's horse-meat. But if you want to see the horses at their best, go along to Bulat-Pestivien on the second weekend in September for a lively display of horses and their owners.

