WHAT THEY SAID
“Even though we Holsteiner breeders have been trailblazers or trendsetters on many topics, we will not jump [on] any bandwagon. For some of you, progress might seem a bit sluggish sometimes. But let’s face it, bustling activity just for its own sake has never achieved anything –” Thies Beuck, Holsteiner Verband chairman.

“You have to be critical of your own mares” – Prof. Dr. Hartwig Schmidt.

“Nowadays buyers don’t ask about mare reports, but if she was in the top quarter she’d be sold.” – Gérard Muffels.

“It’s easier to sell the super horse, and it must be the super horse for €10 million than one for €5,000. You need 20 times the coffee and schnapps to sell the £5,000 horse! A big price is no deal [problem], they want the super horse” – Harm Thormählen.

GEORGES MUFFELS
It was the calm after the Neumünster flurry at Elms- unhorn, as all the Elite auction entries, plus their own group of five colts are prepared in the hall. The auction was completed on the previous day for the Schmidt family as they were up at 6.30am to prepare for the Teagasc group’s arrival.

Like all the stallions we visited, the yard, featuring a 250-year-old traditional horse barn, was immaculate. German owners evidently take great pride in presentation, with important details like multi-generation pedigree cards on each stable door and finishing touches, such as equine statues and rose beds.

A modest man – some research afterwards revealed Prof. Schmidt had received the Holsteiner Verband’s 2009 breeder of the year award for the European medal winning mare Coradinna – the retired scientist had built up an enviable group of Holsteiner mares.

That mission began after his move from southern Germany in 1974 to be closer to the main breeding heartland.

After an early lunch at a restaurant, where the river Elbe backdrop provided a view of a gigantic cargo ship making its way to Europe’s second-largest port in Hamburg, it was off to Hof Thormählen.

EYE-CATCHING
An eye-catching sight there is a life-size statue of Capitol I, the work of artist Heike Landherr; it was unveiled at a ceremony in 2008.

The studfarm’s owner Harm Thormählen is an even larger-life character with a series of paintings including the Hamburg Derby winner Retina and Cor de la Bryère on display in the indoor school.

Harm, who also co-judged this year’s The Irish Field Breeders Championship, put several horses through their paces in the school including Sandro Junior, the champion colt at this year’s inspections, sold the previous evening for €280,000.

Star of the show was the retired Fein Cera, bred by him. Courtesy of YouTube, several of the group later watched her faultless record on the final day at the 2002 World Equestrian Games in Jerez, where Derrmot Mullen won a gold medal, with her regular American rider Peter Wylie.

Another statue greeted us on arrival at Elmshorn, where the foundation sire Landgraf, by the imported thoroughbred Ladykiller, stands in front of this training and stallion station.

Gérard Muffels, his Dutch-born manager, was another to give us a Sunday off after the busy Neumünster sessions and obligingly took Casall out of his stable for self sessions with his Irish fans.

It was all light years ahead of the stud’s original purpose.

Another realisation, on an equine scale, in the run up to Armistice Day was the fact that many continental bloodlines, as well as the Irish Draught, were affected by war. Studbook rank- ings, battles and selfies are a better path now.

Next week: Final part of Teagasc Tour