



Rabbit jumping, a big hobby in Sweden

by Malin Thyni



All photos by the author

IT WILL SOON BE TIME for the big season of rabbit jumping here in Sweden, when rabbits and their owners get together and compete in the open air.

But this is also an all-the-year round hobby as during the winter riding halls all over the country are occupied by rabbit jumping clubs taking part in winter competitions.

Rabbit jumping has existed in Sweden since the late 1970's. For many years rabbit jumping was a matter of copying horse jumping, regarding both the rules and the jumps.

Later on new rules evolved and so did the style of the jump courses. Rabbit jumping competitions use both a straight course – called straight – and one that is similar to horse jumping, called crooked.

There are also competitions in high jump and long jump. A specially designed jump is used.

The world rabbit jumping record is 99.5 centimeters, by the Danish rabbit Tösen in 1997. The long jump record is 300 centimeters, by another Danish rabbit Yaboo in 1999.

Both record holders are Dutch rabbits, which is a popular breed to train, although the lops are the most successful ones in the long term.

You can train all kinds of rabbits to get them jump, but not all of them are interested! Rabbits are clever and some of them think that crawling under or between the bars is the most efficient way to do it. Others like to give the fence a little push so the bars will fall to the ground.

If a rabbit is going to have success in the show jumping business, they need to think that actually jumping over it is the way to go.

Almost one thousand people are involved in rabbit jumping in Sweden. Most are girls in their teens but we do have a couple of boys and men and a large group of women in their 20- and 30's who have stayed in the hobby even after having children and a family to take care of.



In the summer there is a special show that has a midnight jumping competition. It is held in northern Sweden where it is sunlight all night.

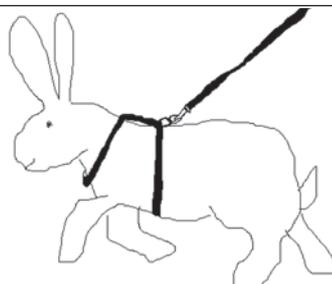
Other large competitions are of course the Swedish national championships, held twice a year but in different classes.

How to make a harness

This is a shoulder harness. The strap around the belly is placed closer to the front legs. This type of harness is popular but most use an H-harness when the rabbit is young and then change harness when harness is broken.



This is an H-shaped harness. Be sure the strap that runs along the rabbit's back is not too long since it will only irritate the rabbit and affects its ability to move.



More Information

Visit the Swedish rabbit jumping society: www.skhrf.com. They have an English version .

There is also a Swedish rabbit breeders society that has its own branch of jumping: <http://www.skaf.info>
Contact siv.bromster@skaf.info

Malin's website: <http://web.telia.com/~u71002543/>

Tips how to train a rabbit:



First, be gentle with your rabbit. You will never get it to jump if it is afraid or even unsure, because when in danger, rabbits tend to press themselves down to the ground.

You will need to train the rabbit to go in a harness. Again, some nervous rabbits do take a long time to adjust to the harness.

When harness broken, the rabbit will need to be trained over jumps. You can make them yourself, although in Sweden there are professional jump makers.

Remember – training makes perfect! But to succeed you will need to have a large portion of patience and a good sense of humour and a bond with your rabbit.

How to make the jumps:

The rabbit will need to understand how to jump different jumps, like simple fences with bars, fences with planks, walls, waterjumps, etcetera.

To get some ideas for your own jumps look at the horse show jumping; for example the Olympia show in December or the World Cup series, or you could search the Internet for pictures.

Be sure the jumps are not putting your rabbit in any danger. To make a base to place the bars and planks on, do not use nails. Instead use a piece of wood or buy professional bar holders.

The jump must be able to fall from both sides, so that the rabbit won't hurt itself if trying to jump the fence in the opposite direction. The bars need to be at least 55 centimeters, but the jump can be wider, up to 80 centimeters.

Important rules:

The rabbit must be at least four months old to enter.

You need to handle the rabbit gently; you cannot for example use your foot to make it jump and you need to be gentle with the lead.

You need to wait until the judge tells you that you are welcome to start.

There is always a limited time to finish the course.

At your first competition you will try one of the lowest courses where the jumps are a maximum height of 20 or 30 centimeters.

Jump Start for Britain!

As we go to press we learn that the first UK Rabbit Jumping Exhibition will take place at the Honley Agricultural Show on June 13.

Organiser Maureen Hoyle (01484 450310) tells *Fur & Feather*: "But it won't happen unless I can get some helpers! So if anyone is interested, please contact me as soon as possible."

