

Federschwert, What the Hell is it?

A Quick Introduction to the Weird Sword we all Love

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So, you've started your journey into Historical European Martial Arts and have been able to find a club which is A. Close enough to get to regularly and B. Meets at times of the week when you aren't already busy (a rare combination). Let's assume that the first session you manage to get to concerns using the Longsword. Among the massed ranks of other club members, you can spot some synthetic practice swords, maybe a couple of steel longswords but you're probably also seeing a lot of these things;

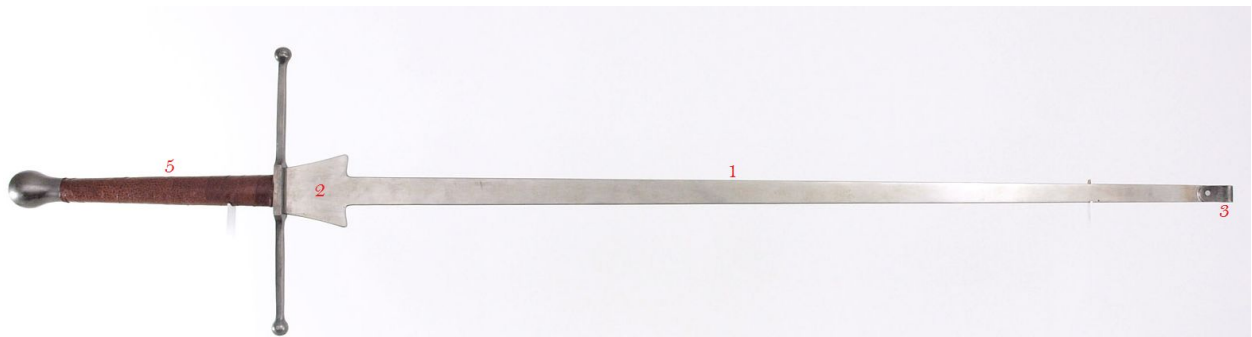


You're probably thinking "What is this bizarre spiky sword everyone keeps waving about?" This is a totally normal reaction as most people will have never seen one before stepping into a HEMA hall. What this is, gracious reader, is a Federschwert.

What is a Federschwert?

Put simply, a Federschwert (or "Feder" as they are commonly known), is a training tool for the longsword. Its design allows it to be used in high intensity combat with less concern for injury, providing appropriate protective equipment is worn. This is why you will see them used in most high profile longsword tournaments instead of more "traditional" longswords.

Let us take a look at the characteristics of a Feder



1. **Thin Blade.** The thin blade of the Feder result in less power being transmitted through strikes and allows the blade to flex more when delivering thrusts, making it less dangerous. Note the use of the term "less

dangerous” rather than “safe”. Feders are still dangerous and you absolutely do not want to get hit with one without wearing protective gear (Mask, jacket and decent gloves at an absolute minimum).

2. **The Shilt** (or “Ricasso”). The Shilt serves a number of purposes. The Feder has a thinner blade than a traditional longsword so the added mass of the Shilt stops the Feder from being absurdly light and actually brings the overall weight back up to full longsword levels. The Shilt also serves to move most of the mass of the Feder further towards the hands, which enables defter control of the blade. Finally, the Shilt serves as added protection for the hands (“Shilt” = “Shield”). These come in many different shapes/sizes, usually dependant on what historical examples the model is based on.
3. **Point/Tip**. The tips of Feder’s aren’t sharp or pointy. Depending on the model they could be either “Rolled” or “Spatulated”. Either way, they are designed to make thrusting safer.
4. **EXTREMELY FLEXIBLE (not pictured)!** Feders are designed to be flexi (exact amount of flex is dependant on manufacturer). Again, this is an additional safety feature to make hits less damaging.
5. **Handle**. This is a handle. You hold it with your Hands.

Fun Fact About Feders

As well as allowing us to train safely, the Federschwert is fully historically accurate! We see them depicted clearly in manuals as early as the *Gladiatoria* (MS Germ.Quart.16) Manual (dated from somewhere around 1435 and 1440). A suspected portrait of Johannes Liechtenauer from *Codex 44.A.8* (or MS 1449) from 1452 clearly shows him holding a Feder;



Other historical masters that feature the Feder prominently in their illustrations are Joachim Meyer and Paulus Hector Mair (among others).

Now you know all about Feders, it’s only natural to want to go out and acquire one of your own. Due to the growth of HEMA we have more choices in manufacturer than ever before! Some (but nowhere near all) manufacturers which you can investigate are Regenyei, Ensifer, Kvetun, Bloss.pl and Comfort Fencing.