

Ina in **Osnabruecker Land;**

- First F.E.I. Freestyle Forum under the Patronage of
H.R.H. Princess Benedikte of Denmark

&

- A look at finest Olympic Breeding: **Brentina & Barclay,**
from the Osnabruecker Land into the world!

By Ina El Kobbia- Germany

"A long thought dream came true," said Mme. Mariette Withages Chairwoman of the F.E.I. Dressage Committee in her opening speech for the first ever held F.E.I. Freestyle Forum and thanked Mr. Ullrich Kasselmann, the international horseman, and his P.S.I. Team for hosting the forum and making this dream come true in February 2005 in Ankum in the Osnabruecker Land.

In a wonderful and enthusiastic opening speech, Belgian Mariette Withages enlightened the fascinated audience with the history of dressage and the development of freestyle. Modern dressage began during the Renaissance when the Neapolitan nobleman Federico Grisone founded a riding academy in Naples in 1532. France quickly became the leading nation in dressage but was replaced in the 20th century by Germany as the top nation in this event.

Dressage became an Olympic discipline for the first time in 1912 in Stockholm and it was only at the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952 that women were allowed to compete in the discipline. The unforgotten German Liselott Linsenhoff made history at the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968 as the first woman to win a gold medal in an equestrian event when she placed first as a member



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American rider Debby Mc Donald & her mare Brentina, from the Osnabruecker Land

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of the German dressage team. She added to her place in history by being the first woman to win the individual gold medal in dressage at the Olympics in Munich in 1972. Today her daughter, Ann Kathrin Linsenhoff, is one of Germany's best dressage riders, winning 3 times gold with the team: at the Olympics in Seoul, at the World Championships in Stockholm and at the World Championships in Jerez.

At first met with reservations and controversially discussed by traditional dressage experts, freestyle to music became part of Olympic dressage in 1996 and rapidly made its way to the hearts of the audience. It has become a highlight at any competition; performed correctly, it should look like you are dancing with your horse!

During the F.E.I. Freestyle Forum 155 participants from 23 nations discussed the regulations, dimensions and the developments of dressage freestyle, particularly in view of the coming Olympic Games in Beijing 2008. International judges, trainers, composers, choreographers, TV experts and world class riders -amongst them German Heike Kemmer, Monica Theodorescu and Spanish Raphael Soto- held a lively debate on Do's and Don'ts in freestyle to music. In order to provide illustration for the debate, several renowned world class riders like German Ann Kathrin Linsenhoff, Swedish Luise Nathorst and Spanish Ignacio Ramblas gave demonstrations and allowed for public criticism with regard to their presented riding techniques, choice of music and choreography.

At the end of the two-day international forum, one might say that much is possible in freestyle, but there has to be an overall harmony between horse & rider. Harmony, fluency and forward impulsion in the basic gaits as well as rhythm, energy and elasticity are essential. Furthermore, while performing difficult movements such as 'piaffe' and 'passage', regard should be had to the welfare of the horse. Excessive use of difficult movements will not be awarded. Making the right choice of music is a major challenge in freestyle; the style of music must be suitable to the appearance of the horse and the music must be appropriate to the particular horse movements, additionally the timings one chose for each gait of the horse must fit the beat of the music.



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Freestyle is surely one of the most beautiful sporting events one can see. Let me conclude by using the words of the wonderful F.E.I. Chairwoman Mariette Withages, "Freestyle is when discipline becomes art and art becomes discipline!"

Step by step, marching through the snow, I made my way on 5th March 2005 to meet with two of the finest horse breeders in one of Germany's oldest and most traditional regions for the Hanoverian Horse Breeding. In the beautiful landscape known as the 'Artland' around the parish of 'Badbergen' in the Osnabruecker Land, I met with Mr. Albrecht Middelkamp, his beautiful wife Anne and Mr. Wilhelm Rethorst. At the open fire place in a Nordic farm house, I learned about Hanoverian Horse breeding. Both Albrecht Middelkamp and Wilhelm Rethorst have been Hanoverian Horse breeders all their lives. "The Hanoverian Horse is our tradition and passion. We inherited it from our ancestors," they explained to me with pride. Both were long serving Presidents of the Horse Breeding Society of the 'Artland' which encompasses some notable 350 members. Over the years, many of their horses were presented at the elite auction in Verden and went from there around the world. Not long ago, in October last year, Albrecht Middelkamp successfully presented one of his Hanoverian fillies 'Diva' (Don Viro x A. Beauty) at the 111th elite auction in Verden; 'Diva' was directly sold to Spain.

Presenting your horse at the prestigious and internationally renowned auction in Verden is already a great achievement for any Hanoverian Horse breeder; however, Mr. Wilhelm Rethorst reached the stars: two of his bred horses, the wonderful mare 'Brentina' and her full brother 'Barclay' both by 'Brentano II' were at the recent Olympics in Athens. "It is the highlight of my career", Wilhelm Rethorst commented. 'Brentina' just became horse of the year in the USA. Together with her world class American dressage rider Debby McDonald, they took the bronze medal at the Olympics with the American team and were placed best American couple also in the individual dres-

sage ranking in Athens.

"Brenlina" daughter of "Brentano II" was very special from the start," her breeder, Wilhelm Rathorst, told me. "I presented her at the elite auction in Verden when she was three years old. She was sold at that time for around 105,000 DM and she went directly from Verden to the USA to Idaho. I sold her full brother "Barclay," he continued, "as a foal through a private contact. Barclay is ridden now by the international dressage rider Sven Rothenberger who rides for the Netherlands." Rothenberger was ranked 17th in the individual finals in the Olympics ahead of German dressage rider Heike Kemmer and American Lisa Wilcox. Moreover, "Barclay" became 5th in January this year together with Rothenberger at the F.E.I. Dressage World Cup in Amsterdam.

After this very impressive and nice afternoon, I left to stop by the only Horse Museum of the 'Artland' which Wilhelm Rathorst had so kindly told me about. If you visit the traditional and beautifully restored estate called 'Hof Brake' you are welcomed by the German/Belgian couple Van den Weghe, who bought the estate a couple of years ago. Guests can enjoy a holiday stay in one of the nicely furnished apartments and visit the Horse Museum where you can learn about the long tradition of Hanoverian Horse breeding in this region. It is there that I learned that even 'Salinero' ridden by the Dutch Olympic gold medal winner, Anky van Grunsven, has its roots in the Osnabruecker Land.

It is in fact true that the Hanoverian Horse is the most successful horse in the world: Already for the eighth time, the Hanoverian breed receives the "Best of All Trophy" awarded by the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH)! Five of the ten best dressage horses in the world in the year 2004 carry the Hanoverian brand and as far as the overall show jumping rankings are concerned, the Hanoverian Horse received third place for the fifth time! ■



Top: Horse museum at 'Hof Brake'

Middle: Olympic breeder Rathorst & the 3 week old foal 'Parak'

Bottom: Hanoverian breeder Middelpfaff with his mare 'Greenholz'

