

TRAINING WITH THE TEAM: The Thirteenth Year in Germany

By Catherine Haddad
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*Three exciting years have passed since my last contribution to this website. Much has happened, many goals have been met and I am happy to report that the opinions I expressed in the last piece have not changed all that much. In a nutshell, you still need **the right horse, the best trainer and unwavering financial backing** to succeed. The politics are still difficult to overcome, but good riding does persevere in the end. And the learning curve remains steep; so enjoy the climb!*

1. The Horse



Catherine Haddad and Maximus JSS, Hagen CDI*** May 2006. Photo by Ruechel

I have a great horse in the moment—Maximus JSS, a 1994 Danish warmblood by the famous producer of Grand Prix horses, May Sherif. Maximus is bigger than most people think, over 17.3hh and hotter than he looks. We have tried very hard in the last year to give an impression of relaxation, accuracy and smoothness in our tests. That plan has paid off well with steady improvement in our scores and good enough international results to earn the spot as Alternate for the US Dressage Team at the Aachen WEG last August.

I have to smile when I write that: "...Alternate for the US Dressage Team at the Aachen WEG last August." Wow!?! Maximus and I started in our first Grand Prix early in 2004. Then an injury kept us out of competition for over 18 months. We started seriously competing again in October of 2005. So there we were less than one year later..."Alternate for..." Looking back, I am surprised we achieved so much in so short of a time. Have a look at some of our placings from 2006:

- 5th in Grand Prix Freestyle, Hagen CDI***, April 2006.
- 3rd in Grand Prix Special, Hansbeke CDI***, May 2006.
- 3rd in Grand Prix, Munich CDI ***, May 2006.
- 3rd in Grand Prix Freestyle, Munich CDI***, May 2006.
- 7th in Grand Prix Special, **Wiesbaden** CDI***, June 2006.
- 4th in Grand Prix Freestyle, Rotterdam CDI***, June 2006.
- 5th in Grand Prix, Verden CDI***, August 2006.
- 2nd in Grand Prix Special, Verden CDI***, August 2006.
- 8th in Grand Prix, **Stuttgart** CDI***, November 2006.

Being named 1st Alternate was icing on the cake, however. The following are highpoints from 2006 that motivate me to plan for the future: We got to start in **Wiesbaden** and **Stuttgart!** We were second to **ISABELL WERTH** in the Grand Prix Special at Verden. We got a **9** on one tempis from an international judge. We earned our gold medal for more than 10 placings between 1-3 in the Grand Prix **IN GERMANY**. And we moved into **the top 50** ranked horse and rider combinations in the world. Pinch me.

“WIESBADEN: Pirouette at the Castle” How often do you get to do THIS??



Maximus and Catherine in the Grand Prix at Wiesbaden CDI* June 2006. Photo by Girke.**

The next part of my plan is to improve as much as possible over the next few years with my “lead horse” Maximus JSS. I also have two younger horses moving into Grand Prix competition in 2007. Cadillac and Sir Sherlock JSS are very talented and Maximus’ successes paved the road for a good introductory season with them.



Sir Sherlock JSS at Stadl Paura CDI *in the small tour.
Photo by Rzepa**



Cadillac at Bremen CDI* in the small tour. Photo by Strickland**

As for Maximus himself, I’ve turned up the heat on his gaits and throughness since the summer. Our accuracy is confirmed. Now we are adding brilliance to the test. We have every intention of moving permanently into the 70th percentile over the next months in the Western European World Cup tour.

Of course, as I mentioned in my last article for this website, we didn’t achieve any of this by dreaming about it! There was a lot of hard work, good training, intricate planning, and many, many dollars spent. Maximus and I traveled over 10,000km in one year to horse shows and started over 35 times at the Grand Prix level both nationally and internationally. We have gained invaluable experience and learned a lot.

Here is one of my most important lessons from year thirteen in Germany: If you have a great horse like Maximus JSS, learn to manage him well. International competitors have to travel a grueling number of miles over land and by air to qualify for anything of significance. Hone the fitness, control the stress and pay attention to every detail of care at home and on the road. PLAN for a peak in preparedness when you have big goals. This applies to both horse and rider! Prepare and compete as a pair.



**Our first breakthrough on the international scene: Frankfurt CDI-W, December 2005
Over 70% in the Freestyle. Photo by Altenhofer.**

Five tips gleaned from experiences on the international circuit:

1) ***Enhance hydration!*** Use electrolytes when you travel and when you show—every 6-8 hours on the road, 1-2 times a day at the show. Use a liquid form that you can squirt directly from a syringe in to the mouth. Get your horse used to eating something wet—either wet hay or soaked beet pulp or mash. These things you can feed on a long trip without increasing the risk of colic.

2) ***Don't compromise on shoeing or footing,*** ever.

3) ***Stay in your routine.*** Ride at home like you ride at a show, and ride at a show like you ride at home.

4) ***If you have to treat, don't compete.*** If your horse has an injury, rest him until it is healed. The best veterinary support in the world cannot replace rest. Many treatments are most effective during periods of rest anyway.

5) ***Listen to your own instincts*** even when the outside influences are strong—like in a Team situation. Do not compromise your own integrity and keep the welfare of your horse at the forefront of your priorities at all times.

These tips may seem obvious to many people. I only mention them because you would be amazed at the common sense that gets thrown out the window when riders, coaches and vets are under pressure at a team competition. Be prepared.

Catherine and Maximus at home in Vechta. Fitness is the key to success for both horse and rider. Photo by Heinen.



2. The Trainer



Rudolf Zeilinger with Festival at the German Championships in Muenster, July 2006.

Photo by Fey.

If I have a great horse, I have an even greater trainer. Both my trainer, Rudolf Zeilinger, and I come from the Schultheis School of dressage: **Correctness and Accuracy Come First. Brilliance Comes with Confidence.** It was Rudolf who insisted that I temper my riding and concentrate on accuracy in the tests this year because my horse needed time to develop confidence. Zeilinger wanted to see perfect tests not brilliant tests, and this approach helped me develop the appearance of ease and grace for which Maximus and I have become known over the last year. I am eternally grateful for his experienced eye and his commitment to our system of riding.

My friends and colleagues on both sides of the ocean continue to be astounded by the fact that I get up at 5:00am six days a week to drive to Emsbueren where the Zeilinger stable is located. I keep two of my best horses there year round. It's an hour drive and I'm usually on the road by 5:30am, in the saddle by 7:00am, finished with two horses by 9:30 am, and back in Vechta at my own stable by 11:00am. I'm often asked why I do this. The answer is clear: Because the training at Zeilinger's brings success.

I'm well beyond the point in my riding where I need lessons every day. So if you were to sit in the corner over a period of days during my training (a hypothetical situation since people are not allowed casual visits to Zeilinger's) you might be surprised at how little he says to me. The most common question from Americans is, "How do you learn anything?" And my most honest response is, "By concentrating on what I am doing."

Let me be a bit clearer about this. I know how to ride. (Once you've made the Shortlist you don't have to be humble anymore.☺ See previous article.) My initial years of education with Bodo Hangen and Willi Schultheis gave me a good basic seat and knowledge of the system for training a Grand Prix horse. Rudolf helps me improve the weaknesses in my horses, my seat and my approach to showing. He doesn't do this with a lot of words because he doesn't have to. I THINK about what I am doing. I'm not listening to the radio on the way to his stable, I'm thinking about my riding and how to improve it...every day. When I'm struggling with something in the saddle, he says one or two words that help me out.

Riding is best learned by doing, not talking. More often than not, watching Rudolf train one of his horses gives me solutions to my own problems. How do you explain throughness to someone? Anyone can do it with words but SEEING it happen and DOING it yourself on the same day are worth twenty conversations on the same subject. Here is a list of some things that I've learned or improved upon in the last four years of riding at Zeilinger's without being verbally told how to do it:

- 1) My seat at the canter
- 2) My seat to hand connection in general.
- 3) Maximus' self carriage in canter.
- 4) Straightness in changes on all of my horses.
- 5) Throughness in trot.
- 6) Speed of the hind legs in the piaffe.
- 7) Tempo adjustments in the passage.
- 8) Relaxation/focus for Cadillac's brain.
- 9) Bending for his body.
- 10) Balance in piaffe/passage transitions on Sherlock and Maximus.
- 11) Suppleness/elasticity in trot.
- 12) Lower/raise the croup in piaffe.
- 13) Frame adjustments for transitions.
- 14) Use of corners.
- 15) Riding the dreaded zig zag.



CDI*** Lingen, July 2006.
Photo by Fey.

This list could go on for two or three pages but my main point here is that **the teacher can only provide knowledge; the student is responsible for learning.** So Zeilinger simply offers a few suggestions that lead me to make many breakthroughs in my own riding. He is also systematic about giving me a general direction and plan.

Training at this level has very little to do with lengthy explanations. What is important is that your trainer knows how get a horse from 4 years old to Grand Prix and how to get a young Grand Prix horse to develop into an international star over months and years. Zeilinger is one of the few people in the world with this kind of comprehensive knowledge.

3. The Sponsors



JSS: The Janet S. Schneider Trust
Catherine with sponsors Susan and Rob Schneider at the WEG 2006.
Photo by Strickland

If I have a great horse and an even greater trainer, then I have the greatest sponsors of all time. Everyone wants to know why I have a Superman patch on my jacket and my saddle pads. Look more closely and you will see that the big “S” has a small “J” and another small “S” on either side of it: JSS. This is the sponsoring logo for the Janet S. Schneider Trust.

Janet Schneider became my private sponsor in 2003 when she decided to take an active role in the promotion of dressage as a sport in America. An avid rider and generous contributor to the organizations supporting dressage, Janet wanted to back an American rider capable of making the US Team. I cannot express in words how honored I am that she chose to sponsor me. She not only agreed to purchase Sir Sherlock JSS and Maximus JSS for my use in international sport, but also to cover my expenses in doing so until both horses retired from competition.

There are many forms of sponsorship, but I can’t be happier with what I have. Even though Janet passed away in the spring of 2005, her three children, Rick, Rob and Susan Schneider continue to sponsor my efforts to make a Team. They stand behind me and my riding 100% and they are also enthusiastic supporters of the sport of dressage.

One of the great advantages in being sponsored by the JSS team is that Janet’s daughter, Susan Schneider, brings technical knowledge to our partnership. She is a DVM specializing in equine medicine as well as a competitive dressage rider. Susan has been a student of mine for over 10 years and believes as strongly as I do in the Schultheis School of riding. She has built a practical and beautiful stable in Montrose, Colorado with the San Juan Mountains as a backdrop. I travel there as often as I can to teach her and she comes to Germany whenever possible to further her experience.

Susan's brother, Robert Schneider, is our numbers man. A dedicated fan of golf and a competitive golfer himself, Rob understands the importance of concentrated training, financial support, press appearances and staying cool under pressure. Both Rob and Susan spent the entire week at the WEG with me in Aachen last August. Generally speaking, I make a miserable spectator and this show was no exception. I am grateful for their words of wisdom, their political savvy and the unwavering support during that long week! We had a lot of fun together.

Richard Schneider, the third sibling in this close knit family, is our team photographer. Unfortunately he could not travel to Aachen for the WEG in August, but during a trip to Germany last year he photographed and videotaped my stable and horses until we had to ask him to put the cameras down!



**Catherine on Sir Sherlock and Susan on Wagner De Bonce in Vechta, July 2005.
Photo by Richard Schneider**

The coming year looks very busy for all of us. I am trying to qualify in Europe for the World Cup with Maximus JSS and Susan will be competing in the United States on Wagner De Bonce and Danilo at the Prix St. George/Intermediare I level. A skillful and elegant rider, her eyes are set on qualifying for Gladstone this summer. I hope to join Susan there as her coach and possibly bring Sir Sherlock JSS or Cadillac along for the Grand Prix competition.