

## Behind the Scenes at a Southern German Auction

By Kim Schisler

As a young dressage trainer in America, imagine receiving a call requesting that you fly to Germany to be an auction rider for the *Süddeutsche Reitpferdeauktion* (that's the Southern German States Elite Sport Horse Auction held in Marbach.) Now imagine a place where over 35 pre-selected, pre-vetted, impeccably bred, beautifully turned out young Warmbloods are offered for sale...a place where some of Europe's best jumper and dressage prospects can be seen and tried all under one roof! Does it sound too good to be true?

Fortunately, this is exactly what happened to me in the fall of 2009. Having studied dressage in Germany in 2005–2006 with Wolfram Wittig, my German was getting rusty and I thought, why not take advantage of this unique experience to ride a couple of nice horses at an auction? Having attended three other auctions in Northern Germany, I had a good idea of how these events worked. But I must admit, working behind the scenes was an unexpected, eye-opening experience completely altering my opinions of sport horse auctions. If you've ever considered buying at auction, I hope that sharing my experience from an "insider's point of view" will ease any potential buying anxiety.

Remember that in Europe, elite sport horse auctions are commonly held all over Germany, Holland, and a few other countries. These auctions make purchasing a talented young horse an efficient and effective process. What normally takes days, months or even years to find that special horse could potentially happen in a matter of hours at one of these auctions. It truly is the epitome of the horse shopping experience. When else would one have the opportunity to view so many carefully pre-selected and pre-vetted sales horses under one roof?



The mare Francesca ridden and presented by Kim at the auction.

Photo by Olav Krenz

### TREK TO MARBACH

After a nine hour flight, a quick walk through customs, and finding my baggage, I exited the Stuttgart airport to find Roland Metz, the head of Sales and Marketing for the Württemberg breed registry (the organizer of the big event) awaiting my arrival. The brisk morning air quickly awoke me and reminded me that I had arrived in Germany! Within an hour we were in Marbach touring the main Stud Farm. Later that day I was taken to a nearby farm to ride one of the horses that would be in the auction, and I was able to test a saddle that I would use for the remainder of my stay.

The following day, Wednesday, all the auction horses were scheduled to arrive at the main training stable. These young horses from age's three to six had already been pre-selected by Roland Metz and his auction committee. Out of 127 horses brought in by the breeders, only 37 were selected by the committee for the auction. They also had to pass an extensive vet check before being accepted into the auction. We spent the morning before the horses' arrival setting up a hospitality room and arranging flowers around

the arena. Once all the horses arrived, they were ridden in front of the vet for a final inspection.

#### PREPARING THE HORSES

The next couple of days as the horses became acquainted with their new setting, we had a chance to get to know each of them under saddle. There was 18 days to ride and prepare them for the auction. On Friday we teamed up in groups of three to five for our first training session with our coach, Jörg Schröder. His role was to polish the overall picture so that we presented the horses to the best of their ability. With only five dressage riders and nearly 18 dressage auction horses we ended up having a few group lessons that afternoon. Only three of the four jumper riders were available to ride in the weeks prior to the auction so we found ourselves riding the jumpers as well.

One of my favorite memories was an afternoon ride on Pondus, a five year old gelding by Power Pilot x Larome. Wolfgang Arnold, the head jumper rider, set up a grid for us to jump through. As he continued building the grid, he managed to squeeze in an oxer at the end that was nearing four feet in height! It was quite the entertainment for anyone watching us "dressage riders" riding over the fences. My background is in three-day eventing, and I still jump the young dressage horses at home on a weekly basis for fun, but it has been awhile since I remember cantering down to such a big oxer. Plus normally I wouldn't jump horses while wearing my tall stiff König dressage boots with such short stirrups. The blisters behind my knees were all the proof that we needed to show what fun we had that afternoon!

#### FIRST PRESENTATION

Our first presentation of the horses to the public was held on Sunday evening (13 days before the auction) at the indoor



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arena, which was located about a quarter of a mile from the training arena and stables. Believe it or not, we would hack these young horses on the sidewalk in the dark across railroad tracks with cars and buses passing us to get to the auction indoor! These young horses had great minds and had been exposed to so much already that they handled it superbly. I was amazed at how sensible they were! For the presentation, two or three horses would be in the main arena at the same time with the commentator giving us

instruction in German.

The warm-up arena was the place to be though! A 20 x 40 meter indoor arena adjacent to the big indoor arena was used for warming up the horses. At any given moment, there would be eight or more horses in the warm-up with a jump in the middle and multiple people to dodge. Each group of horses was presented in the main arena to the public for about five minutes, so there were owners and grooms constantly bringing new horses into



**Presentation of Belini, the top selling horse at the 2009 Marbach auction.**

*Photo by Olav Krenz*

the warm-up to swap with horses that had already been presented.

We were all dressed in our show attire and all the horses were braided. It was very exciting and very well-organized so things ran smoothly giving the potential buyers a first glance at these talented young horses.

### TRIALS

Once the horses had been presented to the public, clients began to arrive to try the sale horses under saddle. The following Tuesday and Wednesday there was an open training session where the public could watch our rides with our coach, Jörg Schröder. Then on the following Sunday there was another formal presentation to the public with live streaming on the internet so that even my family and friends in the United States could watch the presentation from the comfort of their living rooms. As the auction date drew closer, more and more clients showed up to try the horses. The more popular horses were tried more often than the less popular horses. I noticed that they began to show signs of fatigue after two weeks of consistent work.

On Thursday night before the Friday night Gala, we rode all the horses in the main auction arena so they could see the new additions, which included a grandstand, VIP tables, new lighting, plants, decorations, and a much smaller area to ride. Anticipation was rising as Friday

arrived. There was an excitement in the air as a huge group of potential buyers gathered in the middle of the training arena trying multiple horses, many for a second or third time, before the Gala festivities started.

### EVENING FESTIVITIES

The Gala night started in the main auction indoor under a light show. It had a party atmosphere, and there was an entire night of presentations and exhibitions that had been organized for the audiences viewing pleasure. My job was to ride the horses that I would be presenting the following day in the auction. There was an announcer; there was music; there was a crowd; there was clapping; there was energy in the air, and the horses could feel it! It was so much fun to be a part of a night like this.

Two of the black auction horses wore white bandages and performed a pas-de-deux under a black light. A few of the jumpers were brought out to jump a laser light. One of the most entertaining moments of the night came when a group of Icelandic horses raced around the small arena being steered by Jörg Schröder and the breeders who were honored for their achievements in 2009, all while trying not to spill their beer! After all, it is Germany, and riding at full tilt with a stein filled to the brim is almost a tradition. The grandstand was packed, and the VIP tables were overflowing with guests and champagne. And this was just the beginning.

After the festivities in the indoor arena, the horses were put away and the party moved over to the giant tent next to the outdoor stadium. Under the tent, there were food vendors, bars, tables, a band and a dance floor. We celebrated the birthday of Susanne Lauda, the Württemberg contact that lives in the U.S., and we danced the night away!

Just when I was ready for bed, I was informed that after the 'after-party,' the riders have a tradition of returning to the house, in walking distance, to continue celebrating. Needless to say, Saturday morning came too early!

### AUCTION SUCCESS

By 7:00 a.m., we were to be the barn because there was one last presentation of horses to the public at 11:00 a.m. with the auction finally starting at 2:00 p.m. After two and a half weeks of 12–14 hours a day in the stable, we were all a bit exhausted. The horses were tired too, but the excitement was still in the air.

The price highlight of the auction went to Belini, a three year old chestnut gelding by Brentano II x Walsrode. He sold for 106,000 Euros to a family from England. As a comparison, the year before, the most expensive horse sold for almost twice as much. Ludger Beerbaum had purchased that jumper stallion which was the 2008 licensing champion Con Chello (Chello x Come On).



Cell phone picture taken while Kim was hacking on horseback between the training barn and the auction arena.

The horses that I rode sold for more than the average price, and the owners seemed to be pleased with the way that I presented them which was really important to me. One was the lovely mare Francesca (Fornsbacher x Gardez), and the other one was Davenport, a four year old chestnut gelding by Dr. Jackson D x Lenys Lemon.

It was interesting to learn that Hilltop Farm in Maryland had purchased a Grand Prix Horse six months earlier by the same sire. In fact, the breeder of this horse, now called Douglas Hilltop, was among the ones honored at the Friday night event.

The average price of the horses sold was just over twenty thousand Euros (approximately US \$30,000), which is considerably lower than the prices paid for horses at most of the auctions in Northern Germany. Having had attended the Oldenburg auction in Vechta, the Hannoverian auction in Verden, and PSI auction in Ankum, I can honestly say that I feel that the Württemberg horses are of incredible quality and mind for the professional and amateur alike at an affordable price. What you see is what you get. I can attest that the horses were not prepped with any medication or other tricks. Unfortunately I learned that very few Americans and Canadians came to the auction, probably because the breed is not as well known as the popular ones from up North.

Just before the auction, the Württembergs also held a stallion licensing under saddle. Only four of the 16 young stallions were approved. The licensing champion was Manolo G (Metteur x Stan the Man xx), who had already won the state championship earlier in 2009. The owner decided not to sell him in the auction, however one other stallion that was just approved was added to the auction lot. Lord London (Londonderry x Brentano II) was sold for less than expected (about US \$40,000) to Switzerland. Coincidentally, a full brother of this impressive dressage stallion is already owned by a small dressage barn in the United States.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

The overall experience of being an auction rider was incredible. It's a bit difficult to convey in words how amazing the experience was for me. I met so many friendly people and made new friends that I plan to keep up with for a very long time! It was a networking opportunity like no other. In fact, I have already been offered a job here in the United States from one of the German horse owners that I rode for in the auction.

While there I stayed in a house on the main stud in Marbach with other riders and grooms. We ate three meals



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a day together in the team room and spent hours over dinner in conversation. Franz Lauster, who heads the breed registry, cooked dinner for us almost every night. My favorite dish was Käsespätzle, a traditional Southern “poor-mans-meal,” consisting of egg noodles, tasty cheese and onions.

I did fairly well remembering my German, but I must admit

that the local Swabian accent is close to impossible to understand. Even the German speaking natives from different areas of the country agreed with me!

Although we averaged 12–14 hours per day in the stable, it never felt like a huge work load because the camaraderie was fantastic. But most importantly, the sellers, buyers and even the horses all seemed to enjoy their auction experience! 

*Kim Schisler is based outside of Atlanta Georgia and runs Still Waters Dressage. She is a USDF bronze, silver, and gold medalist, and is currently competing Duvallier at Grand Prix. Her website is [www.stillwatersdressage.com](http://www.stillwatersdressage.com)*

*To learn more about the Southern German Auctions and Wuerttemberg horses, go to [www.pzv-bw.de/en](http://www.pzv-bw.de/en)*



**Kim and the Hanoverian Duvallier at Collecting Gaits Farm in Georgia.** Photo by Taylor Case