

## Elisabeth Max-Theurer / Vorwerk Stud

# *Breeding history and philosophy*

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Anyone who knows Elisabeth Max-Theurer knows that breeding is her great passion, whether dogs or horses. She has dreamed of breeding horses since early childhood.



As a successful international rider, she began studying the bloodlines of successful horses at an early age. Unfortunately, her first attempt at breeding was unsuccessful; her Hungarian thoroughbred mare had a difficult birth and did not survive. Sadly, the filly suffered an electrical accident in the paddock and also died.

## Breeding history

Horses have been indispensable companions to humans for thousands of years. They were first used as food and, in the course of domestication, as working animals and as virtually the only means of transportation.

They carried their riders from one place to another, pulled stagecoaches and freight wagons, and were loyal comrades in the frequent wars. There was not much of the welfare that is so essential today. Stalls instead of boxes, exchanges at rest stops, etc.

Until World War I, warmbloods (in Germany) were bred for two purposes:

1. Carriers, heavier horses for pulling and carrying heavy loads. These horses had to be well-behaved, healthy, and enduring, as well as have efficient movements.
2. Lighter horses for the cavalry. These horses had to be agile, fast, obedient, and healthy, have a lot of stamina, and be comfortable to ride.

From World War I to World War II, cavalry horses were no longer needed, so almost exclusively work horses were bred.

After World War II, neither work horses nor cavalry horses were needed; instead, horses were bred for sport and/or leisure. The heavy workhorse mares were paired with noble stallions such as English thoroughbreds, Anglo-Arabians, Arabians, trotters, and Trakehners.



Example:

## Mon Cherie

(\*1970)

More Magic xx - Agram – Friedolin

- ◆ The dam was a Hanoverian mare by Agram, purchased at the Verden auction.
- ◆ The sire was the thoroughbred stallion More Magic xx, stationed at Vorwerk Stud.
- ◆ Georg Vorwerk was listed as the breeder in the pedigree, and the foal was branded as Hanoverian.
- ◆ The 3-year-old Mon Cherie was a gift, an addition to a show jumper belonging to a German business friend of Elisabeth Max-Theurer's father.
- ◆ Mon Cherie was not blessed with rideability in his younger years, but he was exceptionally intelligent.
- ◆ He was trained by Elisabeth Max-Theurer and her late husband Hans, with Georg Wahl assisting in his training.
- ◆ At the 1979 European Championships in Aarhus, Denmark, Mon Cherie was the first horse to beat long-time Swiss gold medal contender Christine Stückelberger and her unforgettable Granat.
- ◆ Elisabeth Max-Theurer and Mon Cherie also won the gold medal at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.





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The mares resulting from crossbreeding were often mated again with stallions of the refined breeds or half-breeds, so that most horses carried more than 50% refined blood.

Subsequently, breeding was consolidated and further refined with a continuous supply of noble blood, mainly from English thoroughbreds and Trakehner stallions.

Example:

## *Acapulco*

(\*1972)

**Absatz - Solarius xx – Jurawind**

- ◆ Hanoverian gelding by the half-Trakehner stallion Absatz out of a half-breed dam.
- ◆ Initially successful in jumping up to 130 cm
- ◆ Successful in dressage up to Grand Prix level and competed in the finals of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles/USA, among other events.



Until the 1980s/90s, horses were bred to be competitive in all disciplines. They were expected to have a good temperament, correct legs, beautiful gaits, and good jumping ability.

Example:

## *Furioso II*

(\*1965)

**Furioso xx - Talisman - Lord Orange**

- ◆ French half-breed, imported by Georg Vorwerk at the age of two and became a highly successful dual sire.
- ◆ Produced numerous highly successful show jumping and dressage horses and became a foundation sire and line founder in both disciplines.
- ◆ In dressage via Florestan and Jazz, in jumping via For Pleasure and Voltaire, he is an integral part of almost every modern riding horse pedigree.



Example:

## *Liechtenstein*

(\*1984)

**Lagano - Mangon – Fandango**

- ◆ Pure Holstein-bred DWB with Trakehner, Thoroughbred, and Shagya Arabian in his pedigree.
- ◆ Actually bred for jumping, he was successful up to Grand Prix level and competed successfully in the finals of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona/ESP.
- ◆ Vorwerk Stud continues to maintain the mare line in breeding to this day.



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About 30 years ago, breeders began to specialize in dressage or show jumping horses. The breeding of our modern dressage horses began.

In the 1990s, horse breeders recognized that progress in breeding could be accelerated through a specialized breeding program.

They began to mate mares with better movements and lighter necks and throats with equivalent stallions.

Example:

## *Rubinstein I*

(\*1986)

**Rosenkavalier - Angelo xx – Donar**

- ◆ Bred from a full sister of the international dressage horses Ahlerich and Amon, Rubinstein was mainly paired with dressage-oriented mares from the outset.
- ◆ Produced an impressive number of horses that were successful in advanced dressage competitions.
- ◆ Also stationed at Vorwerk Stud, he himself was successful up to Grand Prix level at a young age.
- ◆ Even though many Rubinstein offspring were quite capable of jumping, this was often not further encouraged in view of their exceptional rideability.



The breeding of multi-talented horses with versatile aptitudes declined, as did the use of refining stallions and mares.

For about 20 years, dressage horses have been bred to be lighter, with longer legs, smaller hooves,

shorter backs, high neck sets, smaller mouths, and light, flexible necks.

In addition, dressage horses have become more elastic, light-footed, and spectacular, especially in trot.

## *Importance of the dam line*

Modern dressage horse breeding places great importance on stallions, as they can cover several hundred mares annually thanks to artificial insemination.

With enough offspring, it is possible to determine whether a stallion is a good sire in a relatively short period of time.

Mares can only give birth to a limited number of offspring, even if this number is increased by modern

reproduction techniques such as embryo transfer and ICSI. This technique allows us to use good mares for both sport and breeding at the same time.

A proven dam line in the sense of many good sport horses descended from close female relatives minimizes the risk of breeding a horse that has no potential for dressage.





Example:

## Weihegold

(\*2005)

Don Schufro - Sandro Hit – Figaro

- ◆ Highly successful herself up to Grand Prix level, she was used for breeding via ET in parallel with her sporting career.
- ◆ She has over 25 successful horses in her direct descendants and relatives, e.g. Total Hope, Special Gold, and Viva Gold.
- ◆ Maternal lines that are also established in show jumping often produce very good dressage horses. The jumping genes give the often very sensitively bred dressage horses a certain balance in character, as well as a strong back.

Example:

## Contana

(\*1999)

Don Schufro - Continue - Colorado x

- ◆ comes from a jumping line cultivated in Lewitz,
- ◆ has produced a large number of international dressage horses in a short period of time, mainly through two of her daughters, e.g. Glock's Total US and Zantana RS2 (photo right).



## *Fundamental thoughts on modern dressage horse breeding*

Breeding a good dressage horse is not easy, because:

You have to define the goal: An expensive foal is not the same as a top young horse, nor is it the same as a Grand Prix horse.

Dressage is not measurable. Scores are always subjective to a certain extent. Even if judges strive for the greatest possible objectivity, a completely different type of movement receives the same score (lessons can be good or bad in different ways).

Many factors are required for a good dressage horse, e.g., character, trainability, rideability, health, movement (all three basic gaits).

Most of these factors have very low heritability. This is because they are difficult or impossible to measure and compare and/or because there is a lack of data (e.g., regarding health).

## *Breeding a Grand Prix horse*

Breeding a Grand Prix horse cannot be planned. The low heritability of the factors necessary for a dressage horse can also be found in the characteristics that make a good Grand Prix horse.

Compared to a young dressage horse, we do not need particularly spectacular movements, but rather three good basic gaits, a strong back and strong hindquarters that can ensure collection, as well as even more rideability and trainability.

In addition, very good health parameters are required, as Grand Prix exercises are extremely demanding on all body structures and require years of training to complete them in a test without great effort and with little risk of injury.

Even if all physical and mental requirements are met, a good Grand Prix (or dressage) horse depends on good training and a suitable rider.



## Problems with modern dressage horse breeding

Many “modern” dressage horse breeders focus primarily on breeding spectacularly moving horses that can be sold for a lot of money as foals or young horses.

The focus is mainly on elasticity and agility in the trot.

However, for all types of dressage tests, and especially for higher classes, we need three basic gaits, with a good walk and canter being particularly important, as these two gaits are difficult for the rider to improve.

As described above, horses are being bred to be lighter and in a square or even highly rectangular format. This leads to a decline in the horse’s natural balance.

Combined with a finer foundation and longer, softer fetlocks, this results in the physical characteristics of a late-maturing horse.

The start of training has not changed at the same time. As a result, many good horses are unable to show their potential under saddle, either for health reasons or due to rideability problems, which are often attributable to starting training too early.

The rideability and willingness to perform have increased significantly in horses bred in recent decades, while their resilience has decreased.

As a result, we have many horses that are very easy to train, even if their bodies and all their structures are not yet ready to perform lessons in a way that preserves their health. Many of these horses retire from sport early because they cannot meet the physical and/or mental demands.

The widespread use of artificial insemination reduces genetic diversity in the population. Stallion lines that increasingly pass on good movements and rideability are used more frequently and appear many times in modern pedigrees. For example, the stallion Donnerhall appears several times in the first generations.

It is known from other domestic animal populations that increased levels of inbreeding can influence the performance and health of offspring.

Breeding dressage horses is always a bit of a gamble. We breed for genetic traits with low heritability, and it takes a long time to prove whether a mating is successful or not. Even the best horses from the best dam lines can have full siblings that are unable to successfully compete at L-level dressage.



## Breeding philosophy

Elisabeth Max-Theurer acquired many high-quality young horses, which she and her husband trained for dressage. These horses often had a good dose of jumping blood and noble blood in their pedigrees.



Example:

### August der Starke

(\*1995)

Argentinus - Landadel - Eldorado

- ◆ Acquired in 1999 as a 4-year-old stallion for Victoria Max-Theurer, who was 14 at the time.
- ◆ Raised with a focus on jumping, he was later trained up to Grand Prix level and presented internationally by Victoria.

Example:

### Augustin OLD

(\*2000)

August der Starke - Rohdiamant – Traumdeuter/T.

- ◆ The purchase of August reawakened enthusiasm for breeding, so a suitable broodmare was sought for the stallion.
- ◆ The mare Weinrubina was purchased, descended from the Vorwerk sire Rohdiamant out of a dam by the Trakehner Traumdeuter x Figaro.
- ◆ Born from a natural mating on Mother's Day in the riding hall in Achleiten: Augustin OLD
- ◆ 2007 Winner of the Burg-Pokal
- ◆ 2009 5th at the European Championships in Windsor/GBR
- ◆ 2012 12th in the individual classification at the Olympic Games in London/GBR
- ◆ 2013 6th at the World Championships in Caen
- ◆ An exceptional specimen with exceptional rideability.





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## Vorwerk Stud



The stables and pastures in Achleiten were not large enough for extensive breeding and rearing, so the search for a stud farm in northern Germany began.

In 2009, Elisabeth Max-Theurer was able to acquire the traditional stud farm in the Oldenburg Münsterland region.

Since then, the breeding, rearing, and training of dressage horses for the highest classes has been the goal of the Vorwerk Stud.

An average of 20 broodmares are recruited from successful dam lines and selected for health and rideability.

Young mares are used for breeding via embryo transfer in parallel with their athletic training.

Young mares are paired with proven sires who have already produced many good sport horses, and proven mares are paired with the stud's own young stallions who show great promise.



Example:

## *Alvarinho GV*

(\*2017)

**August der Starke - Jazz - Rubin Royal**

- ◆ As already mentioned, the sire is himself successful in Grand Prix competitions and was bred for jumping.
- ◆ His dam is closely related to the mare Blind Date, who was internationally successful in Grand Prix competitions with Victoria Max-Theurer.
- ◆ Alvarinho is her second foal, successful up to the Small Tour at the age of eight and successful with Laura Strobel in the final of the Nuremberg Burg-Pokal.



Example:

## *Zulu GV*

(\*2018)

**Zarathustra - Sorento - Diamond Hit**

- ◆ The sire of Glock's Zonik, who is out of a Florestan dam (full sister to the Grand Prix stallion Florentinus), was purchased at the age of 2.5 years.
- ◆ The dam is a half-sister to the successful Grand Prix stallion Fürstenglanz.
- ◆ Zulu won various young horse competitions and competed in the 2025 World Championships for Young Dressage Horses in Verden.

In addition, interesting foals and young stallions continue to be purchased. Of particular interest are horses that carry thoroughbred and/or jumping genetics in their first generations in order to maintain the genetic diversity of the horses and promote strength and durability in breeding.

This is not always easy, as the breeding of racehorses and show jumpers has also evolved over the last few decades.

Most modern English thoroughbreds are now bred for shorter distance races, which means they are

becoming smaller with a lower neck. Racehorses are also being used in fewer and fewer races, which means that less emphasis is placed on selecting for toughness and health and less importance is attached to correct conformation.

In show jumping, too, there is an increasing trend toward breeding horses with shorter, low-set necks, which are additionally overbuilt and have fairly straight hind legs.

Nevertheless, there are still interesting horses that can enrich dressage horse breeding.



Example:

## *Villazon Royal MT*

(\*2021)

**Vivino - Lauries Crusador xx – Weltmeyer**

- ◆ Acquired at the DSP licensing in Munich/GER.
- ◆ Has a thoroughbred percentage of over 50% and is very noble with strong and correct conformation.
- ◆ We expect his first foals to be born in 2026 and will also use him for sport.

Example:

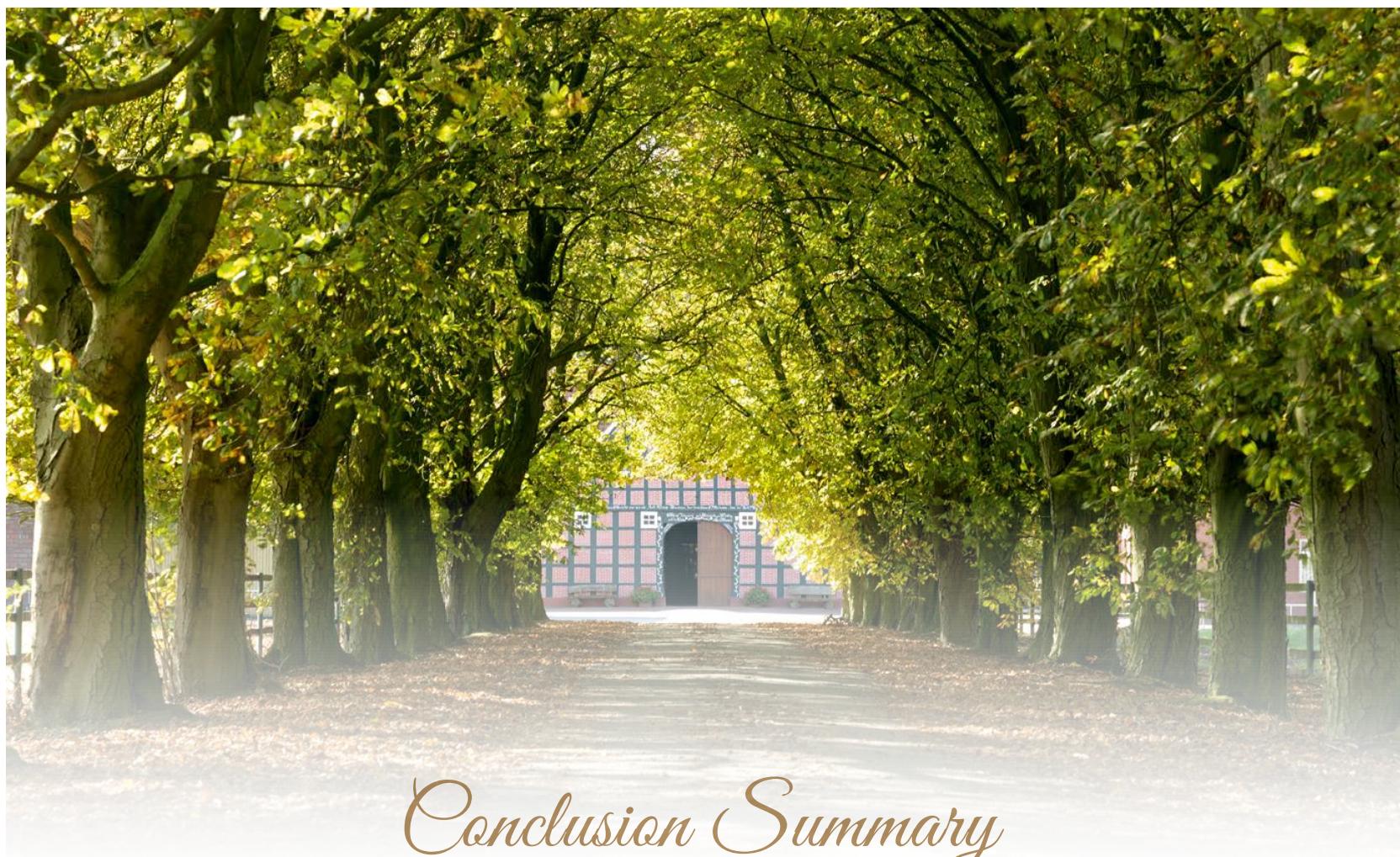
## *Caracciola MT*

(\*2013)

**Chin Champ - Calido – Literat**

- ◆ Reserve champion of his licensing with an emphasis on jumping and later successful in dressage. Among other things, he placed in the 2021 Nuremberg Burg-Pokal final.





## Conclusion Summary

At Vorwerk Stud, we want to breed dressage horses for international sport. This requires good genetics on one hand, but also good conditions on the other.

Our horses grow up with full-day turnout in the herd and are not worked until they are at least 3.5 years old. Even when competing, the horses get as much free exercise and social contact as possible. Training is based on classic guidelines and is tailored to each individual horse.

Even though our horses have spectacular, exceptional movement, we do not push them at a young age. In particular, we only ask for expressive trot when the horses are physically capable of it in order to minimize health risks.

This concept costs a lot of time and money, but it pays off in the long term with horses that can be successful in high-level sport for a long time and, above all, in good health. Of course, such a concept always requires talented and sensitive riders. However, breeding them is not in our hands :)

