

The German and his Horse

Martin Gueldner and Blackie's Rising Star

Martin Gueldner has been involved with American Saddlebreds in his home country of Germany since 2000. He and his family started out with Icelandic horses at his home-based Guggenberg Stable in Freudenburg, near Frankfurt. Over the past five years he has built his brood stock and show string to 17 horses. The crown jewel of those horses is Blackie's Rising Star, a seven year old stallion by Harlem's Spats Waller (Harlem Globetrotter x Raven Wing by Wing Commander) and out of Harlem's Star Gazer (Harlem Time x A Dancing Star by CH Starlike Sultan).

Gueldner started considering exporting Star to the US in 2005 when Fred Sarver judged the European Championships for American Saddlebred horses in Germany. The two became acquainted, as Gueldner is the President of the ASHA Charter Club of Europe. Gueldner recalls, "Fred told me that when I wanted to see and learn more about the Saddlebreds and how to show them, I should come to the United States." Later that same year at a Saddlebred Clinic in Germany, two trainers from the States offered more encouragement. While on a business trip to the US in October of 2006, Gueldner attended the fall Tattersalls sale. "I saw a lot of exceptional horses at the auction, in particular during the Callaway Hills sale. At the end, I was so excited that I decided to ship Blackie's Rising Star from Germany and to show him. Fred and Karen Sarver introduced me to Redd Crabtree and convinced him to train the horse and to coach me."

“Redd had to start from scratch, as showing Saddlebreds is completely different in Germany.” said Gueldner. Following four weeks of quarantine in Paris, Star arrived at Crabtree Farm in mid-February, 2007. In less than 3 months, Crabtree had Star in the show ring in the United States. “Redd has done a fantastic job, and I guess that the major tasks have been to teach Star how to use his hocks well, to give him a higher head set, and last but not least to improve his trot very much,” stated Gueldner.

German ASBs are based primarily on the import and breeding efforts of Walter Feldmann, Walter Schmitz and Lisa Heres-Rosenberger. Most German-bred Saddlebreds have an intensely gaited background, primarily because the ASB must compete at local shows in “gaited” classes against other breeds, such as Icelandic horses and Paso Finos. The only show that is held where Saddlebreds have their own classes is the European Championships, generally only held every other year.

Gueldner continues, “Regulations for training and showing of horses are different in Europe and Germany. For example, cutting tails is in principle (for any kind of animal) prohibited by law, as a surgery on an animal without the purpose of recovery does not comply with the European ethical understanding. Also the European understanding of showing the horses is quite different. The principle is that the performance of a horse should be 'mainly or only' influenced by riding aids and not by physical or mechanical aids. Therefore the regulations only allow standard fabricated light hoof shoes (plates) with a thin leather pad, no chains and no stretchers. In Europe there is a much stronger ‘Sport Horse’ tradition and a limited ‘Show Horse’ following. For this reason, the understanding of how horses are shown in the US is very limited, which can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, which sometimes in the past have lead to a negative image of

Saddlebred horses,” Gueldner explained. “There is a need of better explanation and education to German horsemen. Whenever they understand more about the way of showing as well as seeing the horses working, they like them very much.”

Gueldner had his first taste of showing in America at the Kentucky Spring Premiere, followed by Shelby County Fair. “I like showing in the US very much because it is more exciting as the spectators react more emotionally than in Europe,” he smiled. Another big difference is the judging system in Europe. “In Germany, the judges have to give their marks for each gait in an open way to all spectators when the horses are leaving the show ring. This leads to a better understanding for the riders, trainers and the spectators as to which horse had been strong in the different gaits and helps everybody to learn and improve,” he said.

Both horse and rider have come a long way in a short period of time. Gueldner will take what he’s learned here and apply it to his show horses at home. “I have learned from Redd how to build up a horse in a more systematic way. In his training plan, he jogs Star to build up his physical ability and strength at the trot. I will probably do this in Germany.” With his background of riding Icelandic horses, Gueldner’s greatest personal challenge has been to improve the use of his hands. “I’m learning to use my hands in a more flexible way and to avoid pulling too much on the reins, which tightens the horse too much. I enjoyed and appreciate the riding lessons with Renee Biggins. She taught me in an excellent and very patient way how to ride a Saddlebred with a better balanced and more effective seat.” Biggins says of Gueldner, “He is a great student, he tries very hard and wants to learn. Martin rides in one of my adult amateur group classes when he is in Kentucky. There are some really good riders in that class, so it has been a great experience for him.”

What is the future for American Saddlebreds in Germany? Gueldner hopes that the numbers will continue to grow and the quality of the horses improve. At the moment there are around 300 – 400 ASBs in Germany. “The roadblock is limited access to training.” There are currently no ‘American Saddlebred’ trainers in Germany; “therefore all riders and owners have to train their horses by themselves. They are only getting some help when once or twice a year a US trainer comes to Germany for a clinic. That makes it difficult to achieve a strong momentum for the breed.”

Recently a German veterinarian and Saddlebred owner/enthusiast, Dr. Kai Klingelhoef, got the first Saddlebred mare in Germany in foal using frozen semen to CH ShooBop ShooBop. The mare is owned by Gueldner but is leased to Klingelhoef. “This will open up a whole new world for us, if we can gain access to better stallions in the States,” commented Gueldner. Klingelhoef has a significant frozen shipment of Sir William Robert and is very enthusiastic about the 2008 breeding season.

In an effort to broaden his own stock, Gueldner has purchased three broodmares in foal to take back to Germany from Leatherwood Farm. Fred Sarver comments, “They are very well bred, including Leatherwood's Fine Wine, a bay 4 year old by Leatherwood's Starlight and out of Katharine Tierney by Callaway's Blue Norther. She is in foal to I'm A New Yorker. High Lining, a 9 year old chestnut mare by Periaptor and out of the World's Champion Manhattan Airs by Manhattan Supreme, and she is in foal to CH Callaway's Gold Rush. The final mare is HS Satori's Wish, a 2 year old chestnut mare by CH Callaway's Wish Me Will and out of Satori, by Attache. She is in foal to Leatherwood's Starlight.”

“Martin is a very positive and forward thinking man,” said Sarver, “and a man who is in love with American Saddlebreds. It will be his energy that will carry the Saddlebred into the future in his home country. We may some day be import these horses back to the US as we are doing now in South Africa.”