

To Monsieur, with Love

Olympic dressage rider Charlotte Bredahl pays tribute to her equine partner, 1997 USDF Horse of the Year.

By Charlotte Bredahl

In April 1986, I went to Denmark with the idea of buying an investment horse in a partnership. My partner would pay for the horse, and I would train it and eventually sell it. I found Monsieur at a small farm out in the country. He was a 5-year-old barely broke Danish Warmblood gelding. His price was \$10,000.

I got him home and he proceeded to buck me off the first time I rode him. He did it so effortlessly that he immediately established who the boss was. Luckily, he never did it again (as of today). In the beginning of his training, I had to go very slowly due to his slow maturing, both physically and mentally. Many riders came to try him, but nobody liked him much. The first winter I had him, he let me know that he didn't like



One of the greatest moments of U.S. dressage rider Charlotte Bredahl's life: winning the 1992 Volvo World Cup Qualifier with Monsieur in Copenhagen while her entire family watched.

blankets. In three days he destroyed just as many blankets. After the third day, he lived with a bib on. It wasn't until he turned 14 that he didn't need the bib anymore. I still can't wrap his legs at night without the possibility that he might have the wrap around his neck in the morning.

As time went on, Monsieur turned out to be a very willing and focused horse, as long as he felt safe in his surroundings. When I started showing him, I discovered that I had a very insecure animal on my hands. The first two years of showing at the lower levels, I was a joke on the show grounds when I would arrive two days before the show to get Monsieur used to everything. I spent hours hand walking him around the arena to make him feel secure. It paid off. Monsieur got more and more confident, and eventually the dressage arena gave him a sense of security.

During these years, I worked with Hilda Gurney, who always encouraged me with Monsieur. I also worked with Robert Dover in clinics.

In 1990, Monsieur had his first year at Grand Prix, and it was a very good one. He won all the United States Equestrian Team (USET) Qualifiers he entered on the West Coast. At one of those shows, I noticed that a lot of people were gathered around his stall, and I ran over to see what was wrong. There he was with his grain bucket attached to one nostril. True to character, his only concern was to continue eating his grain. Somehow he had managed to get the double-sided snap moved from the screw eye in the wall to this nostril.

We qualified for the 1990 National Finals at Grand Prix at Gladstone, New Jersey. Hilda Gurney and Willy the Great also qualified, and Hilda asked me to fly cross-country with the two horses to Gladstone. The idea terrified me, but I said yes. Flying was bad enough, but to fly with Monsieur and somebody else's famous mount was something else. Anyway, I did it. We got the horses loaded, and all our equipment went right in front of the horses. Just before takeoff, I went into the cockpit for a briefing that lasted perhaps 15 minutes. When I got back, there was rubber foam everywhere. It seemed that Willy and Monsieur had had a contest to see who could eat the top of their rider's tack trunks the fastest. In addition, Monsieur had eaten part of my suitcase. I knew then that it was going to be a very long trip.

The Final at Gladstone was also the Final Selection for the World Games in Stockholm. Monsieur and I placed third, but didn't go to Stockholm due to the lack of international experience of both horse and rider. I agreed fully with that



At the 1997 Del Mar National, 16-year-old Monsieur demonstrates the skill that earned him a place on the USET top 12 list and won him the title of 1997 USDF Horse of the Year.

decision. No way did I feel ready to be on the U.S. Equestrian Team.

In 1991, we made it back to Gladstone and again placed third nationally. This time the USET rewarded me by giving me a grant to train and compete in Europe for five months. I chose the late Herbert Rehbein as my trainer, and it was an incredible opportunity to watch this master at work. The very first time Rehbein rode Monsieur, he got off after five minutes and said, "Don't ever fight with this horse." Only a remarkable horseman could understand Monsieur's character so quickly. He called Monsieur "The Danish King" ever after. Rehbein understood intuitively that Monsieur and I had a special relationship, and he rarely rode him.

Over the years, Monsieur has had some of the greatest riders in the world on him. However, whenever somebody new gets on him the first time, he pretends he has been trained by a different set of aids. As an example, if you ask him to canter, he will do one tempis for as

long as you canter. It has been rather embarrassing at times. However, if he was doing it to make sure he would never get sold, it worked, and I am grateful for that.

Monsieur and I had a very good year in 1992, starting out by qualifying for the final Olympic Selection Trial in Orlando, Florida. We all had to do two shows over two weekends and be in the top six to make it to Europe. My first class was a nightmare. Just as I was getting ready to go down the centerline, the school next door let out zillions of little kids. Well, Monsieur lost it, and I did most of the Grand Prix in half of the arena. I was devastated and thought it was all over. The next day was the Grand Prix Special, and I remember Robert Dover warming me up and trying to get me out of my defeated mode. It worked. I gave it my all, and Monsieur gave me the best test he had ever done. I cried when I came out of the arena because I had never felt so at one with my horse before. We placed third, which meant I was back in the running. The next week I placed third and fourth, and ended up sixth overall. I had just made it.

Ever since the day that Monsieur had a very bad experience in an awards ceremony at Gladstone, he has been terrified of them, and when he is terrified, I am too. Orlando was no exception, but lucky for me my friend Anne Gribbons knew about the problem. She brought me Karin Schluter's horse, Goldfever, and told me to get off Monsieur. I gladly did, and watched Monsieur lead Anne back to the barn, her feet barely touching the ground. Thanks to Anne, Karin, Hilda and Michael Poulin, who all have let me borrow their horses, I have survived many awards ceremonies.

After the Selection Trials, Carol Lavell, Michael Poulin, Hilda Gurney and I went on to Europe. There, we had to do two more shows to determine the team of four. Robert Dover and Jane Savoie joined us at the shows. Monsieur was wonderful, and we ended up third overall. After the team was picked, I went back to Rehbein's along with Robert to get ready for Barcelona. Carol and Michael stayed at Gabriella Grillo's.

Two weeks before leaving for Barcelona, I went to a CDI-W in Copenhagen. Since I am from Denmark, this show had special meaning, and for the first time ever, my family got to see me compete. The show was held in front of the castle in the center of town, and riders came from all over Europe. I had one of my best shows and won the Volvo World Cup Qualifier. It was one of the greatest moments of my life when they played the American national anthem and the American flag went up, with my entire family watching. Somehow Monsieur seems to know when it really matters.

The 1992 Olympics was an incredible experience that I will never forget. Monsieur had been working great in the days up to the Grand Prix, and I was feeling relatively confident until I started going around the Olympic arena. People started clapping, and Monsieur did a Western sliding stop and spin and headed for the out gate. I turned him around and tried again, with the same result. The bell rang, and I knew that one thing I can always get Monsieur to do is to back up, so I backed him down the long side and



With help from her fiancé, Joel Baker, Charlotte now owns Monsieur, who will never be sold.

Sherry Scott

waved at the judges as I went by (great first impression). Then I headed him down the centerline and he was wonderful. Carol Lavell had the highest score on the team, and Robert and I tied for the second highest. We won the team bronze medal and were ecstatic.

In 1993, Monsieur and I got another grant to train and compete in Europe. We were based out of Conrad Schumacher's facility—he was very helpful—and we went to lots of shows. The greatest of them all was Aachen.

I concentrated on my business of training and teaching and getting Lugano (my younger horse) going in 1994. I showed Monsieur relatively little, but he still qualified for the Volvo World Cup League Final in Washington, DC. He also won the United States Dressage Federation (USDF) Grand Prix Horse of the Year. The show in Washington was one of the most difficult shows I had ever done. The spectators were practically on top of us, and since it was a jumper crowd, they were used to clapping and cheering during the rides. The first night was the Grand Prix, and I made it through without problems, even though I could feel that Monsieur was doing his very best to keep his nerves under control. The next night was the Freestyle, and even in the warm-up arena I could feel that Monsieur wasn't going to contain himself any longer. As I went around the arena, my music started and I was supposed to passage down the centerline. Instead, Monsieur passaged out the gate of the arena. My music was still going and by the time

I got back into the arena, the music had stopped. So there I was doing my salute at D instead of X. I now had to improvise the entire program. Somehow it all came out okay. By the way, this was on national television. I borrowed a jumper for the awards ceremony.

Monsieur and I got off to a good start in 1996, but unfortunately he had a mishap in his turnout and went lame just before the selection for Atlanta. I put him out to pasture for five months, and in the spring of 1997, he came back better than ever. In two of the USET Selection Trials he got his highest scores ever. He ended up second on the USET top 12 list, and he won USDF Horse of the Year—all at 16 years old. One of the reasons for our improved scores is Guenter Seidel, whom I have been working with for about one and a half years. Guenter has been a great help and inspiration.

During the past 11 years, Monsieur has been for sale, not because I wanted to sell him, but because I had an obligation to my partner. I tried everything, including finding another partner, however Monsieur was determined to stay with me. Finally, after all this time, with help from my fiancé, Joel Baker, I own Monsieur, and he will never be sold.

At 16 years old, Monsieur leads a very comfortable life. He spends at least three to four months out in pasture every year and only goes to the most important shows. When he is in work, he lives at a barn where he has a very large stall with a very large paddock.

Dear Monsieur, thank you for giving me some of the greatest memories and experiences of my life, and also for teaching me some very valuable life lessons, such as patience and persistence, pay off. You have also taught me to stay cool under all circumstances in the show arena. Because of you, I had the opportunity to spend three summers in Europe, training with the best trainers in the world, competing at the greatest shows and riding in the Olympics. I am forever grateful. 🐾