

# Breeding British

## Rio – Dressage

By Sacha

The dressage competition of the Rio Olympics offers all sorts of interesting data and statistics for the breeder. Familiar names dominate the bloodlines of the 60 contestants, especially so when considering the top 18 who contested the final day's freestyle, and they can be summarised as the German D, R, F, W and S lines. Added to that are Dutch lines of Ferro and Jazz.

**Donnerhall** was again the most prolific stallion with over 31% of the horses starting in the dressage carrying his bloodline. Donnerhall was one of the first dressage stallions to have both a truly exceptional sport career and also a busy breeding career. He reliably passes on trainability and strength, even through his sons and grandsons.

# Breeding British



Donnerhall

**Rubinstein** was a son of Antine, the full sister of the Olympic stars Amon and Ahlerich, and this great motherline then found the perfect nick with the R line, producing Olympic champion Rembrandt, and the important stallion Romancier. Rubinstein himself, like the great Donnerhall, trained to Grand Prix and was in fact longlisted for the German Olympic team. He possessed and tended to pass on a great walk and trainability, and that is also true of his stallion sons. This trainability has made the R line popular for both amateur and professional riders, and 20% of the horses competing in Rio carried his blood.

# Breeding British



Rubinstein

**Florestan** spent his breeding career at the State Stud of Warendorf and although he won his performance test, did not have a career in sport. He became a great sire of broodmares but also became a great sire of sires. His sons and grandsons include Fidermark (Grand Prix), Florencio (Young Horse Champion), Furst Heinrich (Young Horse Champion), and the latest young stars such as Furstenball and For Romance.

**Weltmeyer** was another State Stud stallion who didn't compete past young horse classes, but became one of the most important sires in Hanover. Although his stallion sons didn't really create their own dynasty, he has become one of the most important broodmare sires in modern dressage breeding. Weltmeyer appears in the pedigree of 10% of the contestants.

# Breeding British

**Sandro Hit** is a bit of a marmite stallion and has been particularly successful as a sire of Young Horse Champions. But with a Team Gold Medallist in Showtime FRH and two other sons competing in Rio, and a grand daughter winning two medals, he has proven that with the right mare, he is as competitive at Grand Prix level as any other.

**Jazz** has been the most important and prolific sire in Dutch breeding for some years, but perhaps his domination is starting to wane. Although he appeared in the pedigrees of at least 4 horses in Rio, he has yet to appear as a broodmare sire or sire of sires at this level.



Jazz (picture courtesy of ridehesten.com)

Finally **Ferro**, who was responsible for 50% of the British Gold Medal winning team in London through his grandsons Valegro and Uthopia,

# Breeding British

continues to be an influence in Rio. 10% of the horses competing carried his blood, and appear to have inherited his own talent in the arena. Ferro was an Olympic, European and World Team Silver Medallist.



Ferro

## **Rio – Grand Prix Freestyle day**

### **The First Six**

The final 18 horses that qualified for the Freestyle on the last day of dressage are arguably the cream of the Olympic crop. How were the aforementioned stallions represented? Did they make the original list just due to volume (still

# Breeding British

an impressive feat given that we are discussing the Olympics) or was there also a star or two to represent them.

As the horses came into the dressage arena one by one on Monday afternoon, it was fascinating to not only watch their performances but to also consider the genetics that had contributed to getting them there.

First in was **Legolas**, ridden for the USA by Stephen Peters, a beautiful long legged son of the lesser known stallion Laomedon, himself a son of fabulous Thoroughbred sire **Lauries Crusador**. His dam however brings in the blood of the F line, through her sire Florestan II, the full brother to the far more successful **Florestan I**. What is interesting when the best descendants of Laomedon are examined, they often have the F line blood through the dam sire. Laomedon covered few mares before was exported to the US and gelded, and yet produced a number of Grand Prix performers from those small crops.

**Donnperignon**, has represented first Germany and latterly Denmark at Championship level for many years, and is probably the last direct son of **Donnerhall** competing at the highest level. His trainability and talent for collection and especially passage, highlight why Donnerhall still has the most significant influence on the pedigrees of the modern Olympic dressage horse.

**Roosevelt** was the first of the final day's competitors to come forward representing the R line of **Rubinstein**. I have to confess to a fondness for this

# Breeding British

compact willing little Hanoverian stallion. I have followed his career over the last year or so with interest after I had decided to use his sire **Rotspon** on my own mare. Roosevelt was the performance test champion in both Denmark and Sweden, scoring a 10 for walk and a 10 for ridability and finished 5th in the Young Horse World Championships in Verden representing Germany, before he moved to the USA. Roosevelt's dam sire is **Lauries Crusador**, the Thoroughbred stallion who made such an impact on the Hanoverian breed.



Roosevelt

Great Britain's Fiona Bigwood and **Orthilia** again represent **Donnerhall**, through Orthilia's damsire **Donnerschlag**. Orthilia's Trakehner sire **Gribaldi** has been in the top ten of the world's leading dressage sires for many years now, but Orthilia was the only competitor carrying his blood in

# Breeding British

Rio. Their difficult freestyle may have had a few mistakes, and there is clearly more to come from this mare as she gains experience and strength, but it was clear to see she has inherited her great nature and honesty from Donnerhall and flamboyant extended trot and shoulder freedom from Gribaldi. Her great relationship with Fiona will mean they will hopefully be back to represent Team GB at many championships to come.



Gribaldi sire of Orthilia

Next into the arena was a horse that combined both Rubinstein and Donnerhall blood. Patrick Kittel's **Deja** is a Swedish Warmblood by the Rubinstein son **Silvano** out of a **Don Schufro** mare. Don Schufro is bred on the famous Donnerhall x Pik Bube nick and appears in the first 2 generation pedigrees of no less than 5 horses competing in Rio. He was the damsire of Deja and another Swedish team horse Jimmie Choo SEQ, and through his son



# Breeding British

Diamond Hit, was the grandsire of Dublet (USA) and Della Cavalleria (Austria). His best representative however is undoubtedly his daughter Weihegold, more of whom later. Deja's sire Silvano is a Dutch bred son of **Rubinstein** and is also a Grand Prix winner himself, and another graduate of the Young Horse World Championships. Like so many Rubinstein sons, Silvano is known for his great attitude and ridability.

Patrick and Deja were definitely the best to date, dramatic music and a technical program but yet the mare was soft and relaxed throughout and again what a lovely walk! The mistakes in the tempi changes undoubtedly brought their marks down but it was an enjoyable test.

Ireland's only representative in the dressage was Judy Reynolds and **Vancouver K**, a Dutch Warmblood. The pair had gone so well to get through to the final day. Vancouver was one of 4 **Jazz** offspring competing in Rio. Jazz is a stallion with a reputation for producing hot yet talented horses, definitely more professional rides, and Jazz himself was known as a sensitive ride. Like many of the influential sires we have mentioned already Jazz competed to Grand Prix level as did his sire before him. Jazz has been one of the most used sires in Dutch breeding so it is no surprise to see so many get competing at Grand Prix with especial talent in the trot work.

Vancouver's damsire is non other than **Ferro**, or Olympic Ferro as the multi medal winning stallion was also known. Ferro's influence at the highest level is

# Breeding British

well known, through grandsons such as Valegro and Uthopia and sons such as Prestige, Rhodium and Kennedy.



Vancouver K (picture courtesy rte.ie)

## **Middle Six**

After the break came the first of the Dutch riders, Hans Peter Minderhoud and the breeding stallion **Johnson**, another son of Jazz. In this instance the heat of **Jazz** is tempered by the sensible **Flemmingh** on the dam side, a Holstein bred horse who has been such an influence in Dutch breeding. Johnson's long legs, uphill frame and flamboyant foreleg generally typify the modern Dutch horse and his offspring often follow this pattern (Bretton Woods, Jack Sparrow).

# Breeding British

Another horse by a Trakehner stallion followed Johnson, this time the Danish representative Cassidy. **Cassidy** is a son of the Elite stallion **Caprimond**, one of the most influential sires in the modern Trakehner breed, and once again a sire who competed to Grand Prix level himself. Like the British team horse Orthilia, Cassidy is by a Trakehner stallion and out of a **Donnerhall** line mare. This time his dam Doreen is directly by Donnerhall himself and her dam Parodie is by **Pik Bube**, so we see the Donnerhall and Pik Bube cross again.

I had hoped Cassidy would qualify for the freestyle as his pedigree is wonderful and so interesting to discuss. We have the aforementioned Caprimond, who was sound, long lived, generous and with a real talent for passage and piaffe. I will never forgetting watching him, his son Hohenstein, grandson Munchhausen and great grandson Meraldik, passaging in unison under the spotlight at the Trakehner Hengstmarkt some years back. What great genetics! Then we have the legendary Donnerhall and Pik Bube blood and then a motherline that has produced super stallions such as **Davignon** (Grand Prix sire) and **Fassbinder** (sire of sensational dual Young Horse champion Fiontini).

# Breeding British



Caprimond – sire of Cassidy

And then the excitement of the lynchpin of the British team – Carl Hester and **Nip Tuck**. The horse was so much more relaxed on this third day of competition and what a wonderful test to watch. I doubt many riders could have produced this horse to be so competitive at the highest level of the sport. And can you believe it, Nip Tuck is yet another horse descending from **Donnerhall**. Although his sire **Don Ruto** has not really produced any other offspring to this standard, he has produced Grand Prix horses and competed to small tour himself. Don Ruto is by **Don Gregory** out of a **Rubinstein** mare, so combining those influential D and R bloodlines. Don Gregory was yet another Grand Prix competitor by Donnerhall.

# Breeding British

Nip Tuck's damsire is Animo, a top jumping sire who may have contributed to his slightly spooky character and the damline has not really produced any other high level sport horses.

With Carl having taken the lead, next it was the Spanish combination of **Delgado** and Beatriz Ferrer-Salat, who already have a European medal under their belt. Delgado is the first horse in the arena today by **De Niro**, the current number 1 dressage sire in the world and of course a son of **Donnerhall**. Delgado's damsire **Weltmeyer** has been a waning influence in recent years as a sire, but is also the damsire of British team horse Super Nova II (by De Niro), and the New Zealand representative Vom Feinstein. Weltmeyer's son Wolkenstein we will discuss later as he is the damsire of Desperados FRH (again by De Niro). This underlines the important contribution **Weltmeyer** still makes as a sire of broodmares in modern breeding.



# Breeding British

De Niro, sire of Delgado

Dramatic music and a really good piaffe pirouette to finish, still was not enough for the Spanish rider to take to the lead and Beatriz moved into 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Carl and Hans Peter. So it was another Dutch man – Diederik Van Silfhout and **Arlando**. This combination is the most successful Dutch combination of the Games. Arlando is an 11 year old stallion by the small tour horse **Paddox**, making him yet another grandson of **Ferro**. His damsire is the very useful Thoroughbred sire **Mytens** more commonly seen in eventing and jumping pedigrees (eg: Mighty Magic). Probably due to the Ferro influence, Arlando is more shortlegged than some of the Dutch horses, but really equal in front and behind and a very pleasing picture.

The final horse of the middle session was **Don Auriello** representing Sweden. No prizes for guessing that he represents the **Donnerhall** sire line (his great grandsire) but he also carries **Rubinstein** blood through his sire **Don Davidoff** and **Weltmeyer** blood through the dam line.

## **Final Six**

The final 6 combinations are truly the best in the world. Opening up proceedings after the break is Kristina Broring-Sprehe and the Hanoverian stallion **Desperados FRH**. The London Games Team Silver Medallists and Rio Team Gold Medallists are also the current World Number 1 pair. By the

# Breeding British

sadly now retired top dressage sire **De Niro** and out of a Wolkenstein II (**Weltmeyer**) dam, and from a prolific dam line that has produced numerous licensed stallions and other good sport horses. His dam's full sister produced the Grand Prix horse Don Diego. And Kristina throws down the gauntlet with a massive score of over 87%



Desperados FRH

And then on to Charlotte and **Valegro**, the most famous combination in dressage. Could she make history and win a third dressage gold medal for Britain. With his compact and short legged frame, an attribute his fabulous grand sire Ferro was criticised for passing on, Valegro is a joy to watch. There

# Breeding British

is no leg flinging, no knife edge riding, no over bending, just harmony and power and precision. Valegro's sire **Negro** is now one of the most sought after stallions in breeding, thus ensuring the **Ferro** sireline stays in the headlines. Negro was known for his strong piaffe and passage and competed to small tour level after much success as a young horse.

Valegro's damsire Gershwin actually brings in jumping blood through the great Voltaire and there is more jumping blood further back, which accounts for Valegro's outstanding canter.



# Breeding British



Negro- sire of Valegro (photo courtesy of foto Hoefslag)

With over 93% surely Valegro and Charlotte had earned the gold medal winning score. But to my mind the best of the Germans in Rio so far was coming into the arena – London medallist Dorothee Schneider and the young horse **Showtime FRH**. This combination just could threaten the British pair. Showtime is the only horse with **Sandro Hit** as his sire to make the top 18, and I have to confess I am surprised how much I like this horse. His sire has never appealed to me for a number of reasons, and it is a line I am so familiar

# Breeding British

with after my time in Germany. But Showtime has a good walk, has the ability to carry weight in his hindquarter and looks so trainable. I also really like the Danish horse Selten HW (by Sandro Hit), who didn't make the final cut in Rio, but has a lot of promise for the future. Both Selten and Showtime carry classic Olympic blood on their damside. Selten is out of a Hohenstein mare (by **Caprimond**) with **Donnerhall** in the next generation. Showtime is out of a **Rotspon** mare with again **Donnerhall**.

But Showtime and Dorothee were not error free, the piaffe struggled with rhythm at times and the transitions out could have just had a fraction better balance. Although it was still a good test, it was clear this was not going to top Charlotte's huge score. A horse to watch for the future who will no doubt improve even more.

Three to go and all of the big German breeding stallions will be represented – Florestan, Rubinstein, Weltmeyer, Sandro Hit and of course Donnerhall.

For Spain, the powerful chestnut **Lorenzo** and Severo Jesus Jurado Lopez. Lorenzo is not from the L line of Lauries Crusador but from the L of the mighty jumping producer Landgraf, through the stallions Lanciano, Lord Sinclair and Lord Loxley who became dressage specialists. Lorenzo's sire **Lord Loxley** is out of a **Weltmeyer** dam. Lorenzo's dam sire is a stallion I

# Breeding British

think we are going to see feature prominently at the next Olympics – Rubin Royal – another Grand Prix campaigner who is a grandson of Rubinstein.

Lorenzo's test is a joy, the final centre line a one handed passage with the audience clapping in time to Bon Jovi, but still not good enough to overtake Charlotte. The crowd show their displeasure at the score of 83.553%



Lorenzo

The penultimate rider is Laura Graves from the USA and **Verdades**. Verdades is by **Florett As** by **Florestan**. Florett As has competed to World Cup level and is yet another example of stallions who compete to the highest level, passing on that talent to their offspring. Laura is the first rider to show

# Breeding British

tempi changes on a circle, but their score was only good enough to go into bronze medal position.



Florett As – sire of Verdades

So the only person who could dislodge Charlotte was Isabell Werth, who had lead the Grand Prix Special two days beforehand. She is riding the striking mare **Weihegold**, a daughter of **Don Schufro** (Donnerhall x Pik Bube) out of a Sandro Hit mare. Don Schufro is rightly called a living legend by his owners at Blue Hors Stud and was a team Bronze Medal winner at the 2008 Olympics. Weihegold could well be his best offspring to date and he already has 30 licensed sons and a large number of Grand Prix offspring.

# Breeding British

But the young mare just wasn't as polished as Charlotte and Valegro and the Gold Medal went to Great Britain with Isabell taking Silver.

I hope this article has highlighted the sire lines that not only produce Olympic horses, but produce the very best Olympic horses. These are lines to use for success at the highest levels of the sport. Time and time again the same names re-occur, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, but all proven to bring performance to the table. Mare owners have so much choice these days, but sometimes it is worth going back to basics.

Source: <http://www.breedingbritish.co.uk/rio-dressage/>