

Maikaefer - The life and influence of our oldest known Trakehner

A venerable gentleman who resides in retirement very near to an Olympic, World and European Champion, 'Mikey' is possibly the oldest registered Trakehner. He may also lay claim to having some influence on his owner's involvement in that Champion, the world's number one dressage horse, Valegro.

Maikaefer, to give Mikey his proper name, was bred by Hans Joachim Gross at Erdmannshausen Stud thirty-five years ago. By Amadeus out of Mazurka V11, Maikaefer was one of three full brothers - the others being Midas and Marrakesch – who all went on to be successful dressage horses. In his early years his claim to fame was managing to break two toes of his breeder's wife's foot. It was not his fault, just one of those things that happen around horses, but it did mean Maikaefer was forever etched in her memory.

He was sold at Neumunster sales as a four-year-old in 1984 reaching the highest price. His new owner Birgitta Hartmann was training with Bent Jensen, who represented Denmark at the 1992 Olympics, and the incomparable Lis Hartel. Having reached medium/advanced medium level in Denmark, Maikaefer relocated to the UK with Birgitta where they were regularly in the money at Prix St Georges level.

The number four seems to be recurrent in Maikaefer's life as at fourteen he was sold as a schoolmaster to Rowena Luard. Tommy Iversen, who also knew not only Birgitta but also Lis Hartel, having trained with her, then trained Rowena on Mikey and looked after him for many of the 26 years he has known the horse.

"Mikey had been known to be quite hot" recalls Rowena, "but by that time he was just a lovely horse – in fact the nicest horse I have ever ridden." And so it was Mikey who reinforced an interest in dressage for Rowena, an enduring one as she would later become the co-owner, together with Carl Hester, of Valegro.

The qualities that made Maikaefer such a lovely horse to ride were those, not surprisingly, that made him a very good dressage horse; his suppleness and his sharpness. Whilst the latter may have been the cause of a couple of broken toes, in his later years it settled to be a nice sharpness (although he was always quite naughty on the roads) that made such an impression on his owner for the past 21 years. Quite nervous in the stable, Mikey has always liked to know his handlers and he remains loyal to his 'friends'. That he survived two major traumas was purely down to his strength of character, of that Rowena is certain: "He is lucky to be alive after a couple of bouts of serious illness, but his sheer will and tenacity pulled him through."

In the late autumn of his life Mikey, Maikaefer, lives with his constant companion, retired intermediate eventer Arabian Vanya, known as Larry, who is a few years younger. Whether or not he is the oldest registered Trakehner, what a lovely life he has had and what a legacy he will leave having inspired his owner's love of dressage which has led to her ownership of two Olympic horses – Valegro and Carl Hester's Athens Olympic ride Escapado who incidentally also lives in happy retirement just down the road from Maikaefer.