

Warmblood *Whoas*

By Michael Barisone

Kissing Frogs

After I wrote my column in the May/June issue about how Vera and I purchase foals in Holland every year (Vera is from Holland and her family is in the horse sales business, so this is a natural course of action for us), a reader responded with a letter to the editor asking how Americans might be more encouraged to purchase young horses domestically.

One of the simple facts of horse shopping in Europe is that you can see a lot of horses in a short amount of time, simply because of geography. Since there is a high concentration of horse breeders in a relatively limited area, you get a lot of bang for your buck. Young horses are available at a reasonable price, and at an auction you might see 60 or 80 foals you would consider bringing home. I wish I could shop like that here, but I can't. There are certainly exceptions to the generally lower prices there: I just paid a lot for a young horse at the auction in Holland, but I've never seen anything like him before so it was worth paying a premium.

But it's not where the horse is bred that matters. If the bloodlines are the same, who cares where they come from? Almost all Warmbloods here and in Europe are from the same or similar bloodlines. For me, it's about the convenience and the number of horses available. How many Warmblood foals are we producing here compared to Holland and Germany? I can't tell you the statistics but I'm sure it's vastly different. You can go to Europe for a few days and see 300 horses. Here you can spend three days and see five horses.

I know nothing about breeding; it's not my game. I'm a rider and a trainer. I want a horse I can ride and it doesn't matter where that horse comes from. I want to take a quality prospect and make him into a top horse. The reality is, where breeding is concerned, unfortunately it's probably going to take us as a country another 50 years to be able to be competitive with the Europeans. They've just been at it so much longer than we have.

As a result, there are ten times as many top-quality horses there. The Europeans have a culture of develop-

ing their horses within a system and a structure that we lack. We're trying, but generally in Europe the rider is under the tutelage of a really good rider, who's under the tutelage of an even better rider, who's under the tutelage of an Olympian. All the segments work together. That's the system that we have to create in this country.

To be successful, you need a good horse. Again, it doesn't matter where he came from. You need to look at his temperament, his conformation and his bloodlines in order to assess his quality and,

once you find him, you need to get him (or her) into a good program early.

To prove that a horse's origin is irrelevant, one of the best horses I've ever owned was found by my mother, who was driving through rural Ontario, Canada and happened to notice a horse trotting through a field. He was some oddball thing, I tell you: a Saddlebred/Cleveland Bay/Thoroughbred cross, with his mane down to here. She drove in and asked the farmer if he'd sell the horse. She paid \$2,500 for him, brought him home and he turned out to be a freak of nature. I rode him until he was five years old and he scored a 90 percent at First Level. (I sold him in order to finance a new indoor.) This horse out of a barbed wire-fenced field was quite a find. The "gems" are out there, but you have to be willing to search for them.

I don't comparison shop. If I like it, I'll buy it. Also, I don't buy trained horses. I study the type, the gait, the bloodlines and if I like what I see—and he's in my price range—I buy the horse. At the auction I attended, I knew Michigan B (the youngster I paid a lot for) was the best of the bunch. Now he may grow up to be a peg-legged donkey but at four months old, he was what I was looking for. You can drive yourself crazy comparing. When you're looking at horses, be decisive.

Having been through a whole lot of life with both horses and people, I've learned the absolute worst reason to choose a person for a relationship is chemistry. The worst. You have to have similar life goals. She can't



like the beach and you like the mountains. If she's family-oriented and you don't want to spend time with her mother, that's a problem.

With horses, however, chemistry is huge—I'd say 90 percent of a successful equine partnership is compatibility, chemistry, whatever you want to call it. I guarantee nobody could have made of Gifted, Verdades, Brentina and Ravel what Carol, Laura, Debbie and Steffen made of those horses. Alison Brock and Rosevelt, too. A good brain is important, and so is conformation, but you have to believe in your horse if you want him to be all he can be.

So go look at horses everywhere: consider gaits and temperament and conformation, then follow your heart. Ask yourself if this horse makes you happy. Because if you're bloody miserable, it won't work. It's like a marriage: if you do stick it out with the wrong one, you won't have a happy life. Look at every horse you can until you find the one you're looking for. There's a lid for every pot. As the saying goes, "you need to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince." So kiss a lot of frogs.

I've got a back field full of frogs. Some of them are

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pretty good kissers—but I don't know if they're princes yet. (Though the two-year-olds, you can't even put your lips on them!) Once we get them started under saddle, we'll see what we've got.

Whatever qualities you want in a horse, get out there and look. Whether you shop in the U.S. or in Europe, see everything you can see, give each horse

a try, then take home the one you fall in love with. Your next prince is out there. **WT**

An FEI dressage rider/trainer of Long Valley, New Jersey, and Loxahatchee, Florida, **Michael Barisone** has a thriving training business and several young horses in the works. Michael was reserve for the 2008 Olympic team riding Neruda. He and Vera Kessels-Barisone, a Dutch native and Grand Prix dressage rider, purchase foals in Holland each year and produce all of their own Grand Prix horses.



2001 Section D Welsh Cob Stallion,
14.3-1/2 hands
Sire: Canterbrook Llwynog Du
Dam: Hastening Mirage

Approved in North America:
Welsh Pony & Cob Society of America, RPSI,
Weser Ems, American Sport Pony Registry
2014 USDF Dressage Finals Grand Prix
Freestyle Champion



Traci Viers
Three Creeks Farm

traci.viers@gmail.com · 360-518-1933 · www.equestrian.com