

TALES OF HEUSCHMANN

by Holly Mason

After many e-mails and a phone call, I set up a trip to Warendorf, Germany in early February to spend some time with Dr. Gerd Heuschmann. Dr. Heuschmann is a vet who specializes in biomechanics and I met him when he lectured at the NEDA Klaus Balkenhol Symposium last November.

He graciously agreed to pick me up at the airport. Unfortunately, he was walking with a single hand crutch as he had had reconstructive knee surgery the week before. If he had been on his normal schedule, however, there would have been very limited time to discuss horses and biomechanics in such detail.

On my first night there, Gerd and I had dinner with Linda Christie, an American FEI rider that has been in Warendorf for 7 years. She and Gerd are involved in the new organization, Xenophon, an association that is dedicated to “the preservation and promotion of riding culture in accordance with traditional, classical principles” (www.xenophon-classical-riding.org). Linda runs International Equestrian Connections, an educational planning company for riders from North America to study in Germany.

The next day, we toured all of the facilities in Warendorf – Die Deutsche Reitschule (The German Riding School), Die Landgestuet (The Westphalian Stud), and The Olympic Training Centers for Dressage, Jumping and Eventing. And, last but not least, Gerd’s veterinary clinic.

Eckart Meyners was fortuitously in the area during my stay. Gerd described him as “The Guru of The Seat for all of Germany”. I was able to audit a very small session of 9 riders for several hours. Much lively discussion ensued with Eckart as we found the common ground between us.

I discovered two very interesting biomechanical concepts that differ between the US and Europe. The Europeans routinely admonish us not to put saddles too far back - I almost never run into this here (or in Canada) and frequently have people dismount in clinics to move the saddles back from the withers and off the scapulas. I think the Europeans feel the power they have for control by putting the saddles further back (and using a tight foregirth to keep it there...) while most of us in the states come from the Hunter Jumper tradition of saddles more on the shoulder blades. Neither extreme is good!

In another difference in riders, Europeans ride with very close legs, so Eckart and others encourage opening the knee slightly so the leg doesn’t grip so much. I routinely see



The old city of Warendorf is wonderfully charming with killer cobblestones, but great tack shops!



The enormous outdoor arena in the middle of Die Deutsche Reitschule



Gerd with his dogs: Oscar, the Jack Russell and Caruso, the Rhodesian Ridgeback who does indeed sing all the time..

the opposite here with knees quite rolled out and the bottom of the pelvis pushed back. Again this originates from all the equitation work so many of us did as children.

Gerd, for all intensive purposes, is "The Vet to The Stars", but he was very outspoken about the kinds of horses being bred in Germany that have such enormous motion and in actuality, can only be ridden by top riders. We compared notes on the "normal" population of horse owners who work incredibly hard just to have one or two horses. I asked him what percentage of his practice was this group - I guessed two-thirds and he just said, "More than that". So even in Warendorf, the basic percentages apply for the kinds of folks owning horses. Apparently the Germans have become very interested in breeding Quarterhorses (!) I have quite a few students with these dependable, super-ridable horses and we spoke about the breed at length. Like many subjects Gerd brought up, he was very attentive to what I had to say and what I thought.

It was an amazing trip filled with intense discussion, lots of laughter and the knowledge that Gerd, Linda, and I share such passion and dedication for educating riders so our wondrous equine friends have better lives.



Only at Die Reitschule in Warendorf would you see such a window in a courtyard - a horse skeleton, posed in Grand Prix collection...



Eckart Meyners loosens up this young rider's neck - he later remarked that he thought Americans were more open minded about a variety of therapies (massage, chiropractic, acupuncture, etc.). I mentioned I have a close massage therapist friend who works with adults and children in an occupational therapy practice establishing "Sensory Integration". He thought this type of work was, "Fantastic!"



One last snapshot at the airport. It was time to go home but it had been such a grand adventure - great company and all things equine.

Gerd and the 6 year old Trakehner he has taken on as a personal project. I rode this horse for quite a while and we discussed at length the suppling lateral work and how such work related anatomically and biomechanically to his tricky horse.

