

DRESSAGE TODAY

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EXTRA

ALICE TARJAN:
Training
Youngsters
to Grand Prix

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Training Youngsters to GRAND PRIX

Dressage rider Alice Tarjan is successfully training young horses up the levels with a focus on understanding each individual horse's needs.

BY NANCY JAFFER

W

ith top dressage horses often going for six figures, owning even a single Grand Prix mount is a challenge for most people. Yet amateur rider Alice Tarjan has come

up with an economic approach to horse selection coupled with no-pressure training that has produced a string of Grand Prix athletes with others coming up the levels.

"It is amazing how she can just bring up horse after horse to Grand Prix like that and have them do as well as they do. That is remarkable," said U.S. dressage development coach Charlotte Bredahl.

At press time, Tarjan, 42, had five horses in the top five of the 2022

Markel/USEF Dressage Young Horse National Championships, including:

- Ice Princess, fifth in the Four-Year-Old division
- Ierland's Eden, third in the Five-Year-Old
- Gjenganger, second in the Six-Year-Old
- Summersby II, second in the Seven-Year-Old
- Jane, second in the Developing Horse Grand Prix.

On top of that, Tarjan and Serenade MF were among 10

horse and rider combinations named to the U.S. Dressage Team short list for the ECCO 2022 FEI Dressage World Championships in Herning, Denmark, in August. She and Serenade were also chosen to compete on the Dutta Corp. U.S. Dressage Team at the 2022 FEI Dressage Nations Cup™ in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, an observation event for the world championships squad. And in 2021, she and Candescant, a 12-year-old Hanoverian mare (Christ 3 x Falkenstern II) finished sixth in the mandatory observation trial for the U.S. Olympic Dressage Team candidates.

"You want horses that naturally have an uphill way of going and articulate their joints." —Alice Tarjan

Tarjan's way of doing things takes time. She points out that choosing youngsters and bringing them through the levels has two major advantages over buying a made horse: "You save money, and you put your type of

training on them," she said.

"She certainly has an eye for a young horse," said former U.S. Dressage technical advisor Debbie McDonald.

That well-trained eye is another key to Tarjan's success. She picks out prospects at an age when they are a bargain compared to what they would cost after training.

Most of her horses are purchased off videos, although occasionally she will buy a U.S.-bred horse. The 9-year-old



Alice Tarjan and Serenade MF were named to the U.S. Dressage Team short list for the 2022 FEI Dressage World Championships, in Herning, Denmark, in August.

SUSAN J. STICKLE

Hanoverian mare Serenade MF (Sir Donnerhall x Don Principe) is one of those, and Tarjan has bred a few of her own, too.

Selecting Horses

As of June 1, 2022, Tarjan, ranked 77th in the world with the 11-year-old Oldenburg mare Donatella M (Furstenball x Jazz Time) and 85th with Serenade. She rarely sees the European imports in person until they arrive in the U.S. and are leaving quarantine. Instead, there are several key elements she considers when making her selection of new talent long

distance via video.

"You want horses that naturally have an uphill way of going and articulate their joints," Tarjan said. "You're looking for a certain mechanic of the gaits in the way the horses move their bodies and use their bodies."

In terms of how they move through their bodies, she looks for horses who are "elastic, like a panther," Tarjan said, "something that's slinky." While watching a horse's video, she wants to see if "the whole body can coil, not just the legs."

Scope is also important, but it has to be kept in perspective.

► Having her horses, such as Ierland's Eden, spend time turned out is important to Tarjan. When the horses play outside and let out their energy, they can focus when they are being ridden.



"You want an active hind end that is able to carry weight and has a good rhythm to it."

When assessing that aspect, she asks the question: "Are the hind legs underneath them or pushing out behind them?" And you don't want a horse that drags his toes.

McDonald, who worked with Tarjan in Florida, remarked, "Amazing how she does it time and time again."

Letting the Horses Acclimate

The real work begins after the horses arrive, and Tarjan starts training them.

But a first crucial step is giving the horses time to acclimate. "Some of them are bonkers the first day or two," Tarjan said. "When you get them fresh out of quarantine, they're a little shellshocked and they're typically hot because they've been sitting in a stall. Once you get them in the routine, you end up with the normal horse."

Tarjan doesn't get alarmed about a horse's behavior after he clears quarantine. "I'm not ever surprised. It's a lot of stress on the horses, everything changes for them—their diet, the language, the routine. You have to be fair to the horses and let them settle in and see what you have."

"When I bring my horses up, I am very open to them making mistakes. As long as they try to give me an answer, they can give me the wrong answer, and that's OK."—Alice Tarjan

Training All Personalities

Tarjan's next job is "to figure out how to train all personalities," she said. She keeps an open mind as her horses progress. A case in point is Tarjan's 8-year-old Dutch Warmblood Jane (Desperado NOP x Metall), who won the qualifier for the Lovsta Future Challenge Grand Prix Series Championship Intermediate II at the Adequan Global Equestrian Festival in 2022. The duo also finished third in the Developing Grand Prix finals.

"She's turned into a really solid horse. When I started with her, I was not as excited about her as I had been

with some of the others," Tarjan acknowledged.

And here's where the patience comes in. "Jane has certainly proven you can do a lot with training, and that horse has really come along. Compared to some of the other horses in the barn, she's not the scopeiest

mover, but she's super rideable and very uphill and very dependable. The training has helped with the scope, too. She has a very good rhythm and mechanic for the work, so that stands out."

On the next step in Alice's pipeline, her 7-year-old mare Summersby II (Sezuan x Sandro Hit), was marked at



NANCY JAFFER

▲ Jane surprised Tarjan with how much progress she made. They won the qualifier for the Lovsta Future Challenge Grand Prix Series Championship Intermediate II at the Adequan Global Equestrian Festival in 2022.

71.617 percent to win the Summit Farm Future Challenge at Prix St. Georges level during Global.

Mistakes Are Part of the Process

Although Tarjan has a reputation for selecting young horses with talent, that wouldn't take her very far without her training philosophy that develops them the way they should go, without stress. "The horses perform better when they have a good understanding of what they're doing," she explained.

"For me, the goal is to have the horses be confident in the work and be happy and understand what they're being asked to do. I start young horses in the Young Horse test. The advantage is you can make mistakes and they don't penalize you for it as much as in the regular test."

Describing her training methods, Tarjan said, "When I bring my horses up, I am very open to them making mistakes. As long as they try to give me an answer, they can give me the wrong answer, and that's OK."

"It's my job to explain to the horses better what I'm asking them for. We get some brilliant work, and then you get a lot of stuff that doesn't look like anything. You start doing a [flying] change and it's late, I just ignore it. I don't worry about it. They all come along, and they all figure it out, and you can put ones [one tempis] on them."

"As a result, horses are much less worried in the training." That philosophy carries up through the levels. "Alice has

Grit and Determination

Alice Tarjan has a penchant for black horses with white stockings—they dominate her stable. A preference for that color combo is rooted in her years with Licorice, her "evil" childhood pony that she took care of herself.



COURTESY, ALICE TARJAN

Licorice is the black pony with white markings who started Tarjan on her riding career.

At age 11, she would haul water from the house to the barn, muck the stall and not hold it against Licorice when he ran off with her.

Riding at the grassroots level and participating in the Somerset Hills Pony Club (eventer Doug Payne and show jumper Devin Ryan are also alums) gave Tarjan the base that has helped make her into the horsewoman she is today.

In the 1990s, Tarjan was a long-listed eventer but then turned to dressage. She worked with Christina Gray and Silke Rembacz as well as Olympian Robert Dover to develop her skills in the discipline. Grit and determination are trademarks of Tarjan, who is a cancer survivor.

She trains her own young horses to Grand Prix at farms in Oldwick, New Jersey, and Loxahatchee, Florida. A lawyer who works with her husband, Dennis Sargenti, Tarjan is involved in their trucking and rigging business as well as real estate. The couple still enjoy foxhunting, which is how they met.

such a talent for putting piaffe/passage on all her horses," Bredahl said. "She does it really well You don't see any resistance in the piaffe/passage tour like you often see with others. Her horses are always ready to perform in that."

Tarjan believes most horses want to take the path of least resistance. "People say the horse is being naughty. I don't believe that. I think the horses are confused and don't understand what to do. If they understood what to do, it would be much easier for them to choose the right path."



STEPHANIE J. RUFF

▲ Tarjan and the 12-year-old Hanoverian mare Candescant

NANCY JAFFER

▲ Part of Tarjan's success is her focus on each individual horse. She tries to understand each horse and bring him along in a way the horse accepts.

him a unique perspective.

In Germany, riders often work with young horses and aim at the world championships for that group. In America, many riders hope "for a big-money sponsor that can buy them a made Grand Prix horse. I think it's really sad that, in general, the U.S. doesn't focus on young horses," he said.

One problem, he believes, is the lack of young horse trainers in the U.S. Another hitch is that in this country, a young horse may not be ridden like a sporthorse. "It's sad to see riders who are afraid to ride the young horse forward; it might spook, it might take off," he said. Tarjan isn't in that category.

"She's on them if they're wild or not wild; she's not a wimp," said Lars Petersen, a Danish Olympian who also has had a hand in training Tarjan.

Understanding Each Horse

Her program goes beyond riding to proper consideration of her horses' needs. Orlob notes some people are reluctant to utilize proper turnout, which is vital for young horses.

At his farm, "whenever they want to come in, they come in, and Alice does the same. You let them play outside. When they let energy out, you have a much better ride on them because they can focus and are relaxed."

Training Young Horses

Marcus Orlob, Tarjan's main trainer who also rides her stallions Glory Day and Maximus, is a native of Germany now based in New Jersey. That gives

Bloodlines

Bloodlines don't play a major role in Tarjan's decisions about which horse to buy. "I have bloodlines that I think are interesting, but at the end of the day, I buy the individual horse," she said. She notes the bloodlines simply offer an idea of potential.

"Maybe with foals you're likely to lean a little bit more on bloodlines," she added. "Once there's a horse on the ground to look at, then you're looking at the horse on the ground."

She acknowledged that a Dutch cross on the German line "is probably a good mix," but cautioned, "it depends on the horse in front of you."

As Tarjan emphasized, "Once they're under saddle, it doesn't matter what their bloodlines are. It could be a donkey crossed with a zebra, but if it does the Grand Prix for a 75 percent because of the way it goes, people don't care."

Asked to analyze what Tarjan does, he said, "Her talent or gift, she's focused on each individual horse and tries to understand him and brings him along in the way the horse accepts it.

"We work the horses three to four times a week for a half-hour. It's quality, not quantity. I think Tarjan really understands each horse. You see the end results. She has another top 6-year-old, another top 5-year-old. The quality is right there for the big ring. **PT**"

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2023 FEI World Cup Finals

Omaha Equestrian Foundation's Lisa Roskens shares what will be new for the 2023 finals.

INTERVIEW BY STEPHANIE J. RUFF



AMY K. DRAGOO

Lisa Roskens at the 2017 FEI World Cup™ Finals

Omaha Equestrian Foundation founder and amateur jumper rider Lisa Roskens brought the 2017 FEI World Cup™ Finals to Omaha, Nebraska, in 2017.

The finals will return to the CHI Health Center Omaha April 4–8, 2023. In addition to the jumping and dressage finals, the event will include the vaulting finals. Here Roskens shares more about herself, what to expect at the 2023 finals edition and what she thinks Omaha has to offer the world of horse sports and vice versa.

PRACTICAL HORSEMAN: Could you tell us about your professional and personal background?

LISA ROSKENS: I was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska and had prodigal years in graduate and undergraduate school in California. Through a series of “flight of the bumble bees,” I found myself in our family business, Burlington Capital, LLC.

I did a bunch of different business jobs before I came to work for my father because I really felt that I needed to deserve that job, not just get it because I’m related. I wanted to go out and get a lot of good experience so when I came

to run the company, I had the relevant chops to do so.

On the personal front, my name is Lisa Roskens. I’m addicted to horses, and we can talk about that as much as you’d like.

PH How did you get involved with horses?

LR When I was a little kid, our backyard faced a fenced pasture. My parents moved there just because they liked the pastoral scene, not because they had anything to do with horses. Both of them were very much afraid of horses, but I kept crawl-

ing under the fence to go pet them.

They finally just gave in and started letting me take riding lessons, and I rode Western. I’ve worked cattle on a ranch. I still go out to my friend’s ranch in western Nebraska once a year and help them move cows around for a week. I ended up switching over to jumpers when I was about 10 years old and never looked back.

PH Your major nonprofit here is the Omaha Equestrian Foundation. Could you tell us a little about its mission and vision?

LR The mission of the Omaha Equestrian Foundation is two-fold. One has been to bring Omaha into the center of the horse world. Horses are such a part of our DNA here. We’re a farming and ranching culture. We have incredible Native American history here, and I really want to bring energy back to our community.

On the flip side, I really wanted to professionalize how we presented our sport. I took information and ideas from every sporting event I could possibly go to, to say, “Let’s make this produced event so that it has the same feel of a major sporting event.”

And then the third piece of what we’re doing is really to try to educate people about horses, horse sport, animal husbandry and agriculture in general so that we have a huge educational component to the event.

Originally our goal was to host the World Cup Finals in 2017. We caught that bus, and now we’re doing it again.

PH That educational element is very important to you. Why is that? What are you hoping to accomplish with it?

LR We’d like to grow the sport in this region, not just because we love the sport, but to me it’s an engine of economic development. If you get 10

GET READY FOR OMAHA

The 2023 FEI World Cup™ Finals for jumping, dressage and vaulting will be April 4–8, 2023, in Omaha, Nebraska. Tickets are on sale now for “all sessions” for each discipline as well as VIP seats, hospitality lounge passes and fully-catered tables. Tickets for those groups plus single-session tickets are available now as well. For more information and to buy tickets, go to omaha2023.fei.org and ticketmaster.com.



Lisa Roskens with 2017 Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping Final winner McLain Ward.

more people riding and owning horses, then you probably need another horse-shoer and the vet clinic needs to expand.

You start building a business, and we have multiple new A-shows in our area. That then means we need braid-ers, course designers and jump crew. To me, it's a really great employment vehicle, especially for people who have a non-traditional desire and don't want to spend the next 10 years in school, and they want to work with their hands.

I really wanted to bring all the facets of this sport to our community so people could start participating in a new, more robust way.

PH What plans are underway for the return of the FEI World Cup™ Finals next year?

LR One idea I'm really excited about is from Julie Boilesen, the foundation's CEO. She was looking at [the dates of the 2017 and 2023 Omaha finals] 20-17, 20-23, 17-23.

What was going on here in 1723 on the Great Plains? Interestingly, that era was when horses really started making a change in how the tribal nations in our region started living, started fighting, started moving and started taking care of their families.

Horses became an integral part of their culture in that century. We're really excited to be partnering with the Blue-bird Cultural Initiative, among others. We want to give our Native American tribes a platform to showcase their history and their connection with the horse. We also want to demonstrate the great culture that has been built around the horse in this part of the world before we Westerners even started swinging our leg over one. I love that bringing forward of our history and creating that connection to our sports.

The promotional materials really are building on that theme of Native American crossed with the sport. I'm really excited about the partnership with the FEI. They've been open to some of our new ideas and very collaborative. We're excited about that.

Another thing that we have added is the vaulting championship. We'll have three championships next year—jumping, dressage and vaulting—which will be very exciting, and there will never be a dull moment in the arena.

PH What are you most looking forward to with the World Cup™ coming?

LR During the 2017 finals, I loved the energy it brought. I loved all the languages, and I really loved all the local people coming up and saying, "This is amazing." The mission of the 2017 World Cup was to introduce the world to Omaha and introduce Omaha to the world of equestrian sport. And it was so fun to see both sets of eyes get opened. People were like, "Wait there are stoplights and good restaurants?"

On the flip side, people that had been coming to the International Omaha saw the next level, and they'd never seen high-level dressage.

That blending of community, culture, the world and the horses is what I really enjoy the most. And then, I must admit, I really enjoy when it's all over, and it went well.

PH You brought up introducing Omaha to the world. It's an unusual place to hold an event of this caliber. What can you say about Omaha?

LR I love it. To me, Omaha is very unexpected, and it's nice. There's a little bit of what you expect in that good Midwestern hospitality. Everybody's friendly and helpful and welcoming, and they really do want everyone to come and enjoy our community.

We're very proud of our little city. Since 2017, we have four new hotels that have opened within a couple miles of the venue. There's lots of local shops and restaurants. We have very good museums and cultural experiences. We have a Western heritage museum that gives you a great regional experience, and our zoo goes head-to-head with San Diego Zoo every year for the top zoo in the country. What I would say is come for the horse show, but make sure you make time to enjoy what else is going on.

Because it's Easter weekend, we've shifted the schedule so it will end on Saturday. Hopefully that gives people Sunday to do some things before they have to fly home. 🐣



CHECK OUT LISA ROSKENS' full Dressage Today Podcast (Season 3, Episode 22) wherever you get your podcasts.

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