

A dream come true

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'VE FOUND THE HORSE OF YOUR DREAMS BUT HE'S NOT FOR SALE? WELL, IF YOU'RE ANDREA BANK, YOU JUST DON'T TAKE NO FOR ANSWER, AS HELEN FIRTH REPORTS

While training at Leonie Brammal's German stables last winter, Dairy Flat dressage rider Andrea Bank has given the green light by her parents to look for a horse or two to bring home. And 21-year-old Andrea quickly found just

the horse she wanted: the beautiful black Hanoverian stallion, Doringcourt. There was just one snag: he was Leonie's favourite horse and he definitely wasn't on the market.

Doringcourt is a five-year-old 16.2hh

Premium licensed stallion, by Dressage Royal out of a Gluckspilz-Diadem mare. He won young horse classes with Leonie in Germany, scoring more than 80% in his first Level 1 tests. Doringcourt's sire, Dressage Royal, is descended from the 'royal combination' of Donnerhall and Rubinstein, and made the German FN rankings for the top 15 dressage sires for breeding value and reliability.

"It was Doringcourt's owner's dream for Leonie to ride him in the World Championships for young horses," explains Andrea. "And when I asked Volker (Leonie's partner) if I could buy him, he said the answer was almost definitely no.

"I rode Doringcourt the whole time I was at Leonie's, and I decided if I couldn't have him, I didn't want any other horse. So I kept saying that he was going to be mine and I was going to take him home!"

Finally, two weeks before Andrea was due to leave, she discovered the answer had suddenly switched to 'yes'. "Leonie had a meeting with his owner and told him it would be such a nice lifestyle for Doringcourt in New Zealand. Because over there, they are stabled the whole time – it's not a life for a horse, really. And he could have the best of both worlds over here. I was the happiest person in the world."

Andrea says the stallion, who she affectionately calls 'Roy', is the best horse she's ever ridden. "He is so loose through his body and finds everything easy. I don't usually like boasting about my horses, but Roy is really special."

Leonie, who is the trainer of Olympic gold and bronze medallist Heike Kemmer, started teaching Andrea when she first came to New Zealand to hold clinics five years ago. Since then, the Bank family and Leonie have struck up a firm friendship, with Andrea going over to Germany regularly to train with Leonie in her yard, Gestut Muhlenort, for several months at a time.

"Leonie was Johann Hinneman's head rider for 21 years. He calls her a genius – and she is!" enthuses Andrea. "She is an amazing rider and I was so lucky to go to her yard, because she's incredibly generous – you get to ride her top horses that she's competing and I have learned so much."

Andrea also became very familiar with handling and riding stallions while at Leonie's, saying she loves working with them. "Stallions are special to ride, I think. If you can use the energy they give you and put it to good use, they can be really wonderful. You can definitely tell when you're



Andrea and Doringcourt competing in Australia



Andrea and Doringcourt: really special

on a stallion – they’ve got that little bit of extra spark and presence.

“We rode some naughty stallions over there and we did have to stay on top of them. But I think people make too much of a fuss about stallions here – if they’re handled right, they are not a problem.”

Roy is one stallion she describes as a ‘doddle’. “When you ride him, he’s just 100% on you and I feel very safe on him.” However, his cheeky side has definitely emerged since leaving Germany. “My room backs on to his stable, and at 6.30am he’s got his feed bucket in his mouth, swinging it and banging it against my wall!”

Unfortunately for the Banks, Roy was caught up in the equine influenza outbreak during his journey back to New Zealand, and ended up stuck in Sydney for nine months, where he was well looked after by Aussie-based Kiwi Grand Prix rider Wayne Williamson. Frustratingly for Andrea, when she finally got the stallion home, he suffered a broken tooth, requiring surgery, so she has only now brought him back into proper work.

Andrea has recently set up her own business, North Park Equestrian and Doringcourt Stud Ltd, teaching, training, breeding and ultimately selling services to Roy. Andrea says besides being her future dressage superstar the stallion is also a fabulous jumper, and she thinks he will be well suited to lots of different mares, for both dressage and show jumping. However, he will have a strictly limited book each season.

“I don’t want to thrash him, because he’s my riding horse and he’s only five years old. They don’t perform well if they have to serve all the time, so we won’t breed him flat out; for his sake, we have to create a balance,” she explains.

“I love teaching and that is what I want to concentrate on. I teach all sorts of riders – pony clubbers, older ladies and competitive dressage riders. I just like helping people, seeing them progress and work through problems.”

Although she’s young to be teaching and a stallion owner, Andrea has a lot of experience under her belt already and knew from a young age she wanted to make horses her career. At just 14, she was riding Grand Prix on Bill Noble’s stallion Icarus Allsorts, and also had a Prix St Georges horse, Mystic Magic. Since then, she’s been concentrating on producing young horses and currently has a great team, including her own six-year-old young dressage horse champion, Northern Fortuous, and Chris and Annie



Wills’ exciting stallion Limonit, both of whom she will be competing at Level 5 in the coming season. Roy and Susannah Martin’s young Aussie import DC Domino complete the line-up.

“I haven’t ridden (the higher levels) for what seems like forever! But I love riding young horses. It’s really rewarding, because now Fortuous is doing changes and it’s such a nice feeling that I’ve trained him myself.

“When you go to Germany, all you do is basics, like a million transitions. And then you come back here and everyone wants to get their horses to Grand Prix really quickly, but it just doesn’t work like that. I’ve really tried to concentrate on the basics with Fortuous and now when it comes to teaching him all the tricks, he finds it so easy. You actually end up getting there more quickly, because you don’t have to backtrack.” **H&P**