

# The Road Less Traveled

## Licensing Our Hanoverian Stallion Based on a Performance Career

By Jill Giese



**N**ow, perhaps more than ever, the decision to breed and bring another horse into the world must be made with great care. A horse is a unique domestic animal in that it typically has more than one owner in its lifetime, and in the case of Warmbloods, they are primarily purchased for sport. In times of economic hardship, leisure activities like horseback riding are hit hard. Producing an attractive riding horse should be a primary motivation for today's breeder, ensuring the progeny will have a future home. Achieving this goal is greatly increased by selecting a stallion that, in addition to having traits that will improve on the physical characteristics of the breeder's mare, has proven that he passes on exceptional temperament and rideability. As Sharon Garner states in her article "Responsible Breeding Selection Tips" in *The American Hanoverian* magazine, Summer 2010, "If a breeder is not doing their utmost to breed a quality riding horse, there is ultimately 'nothing to sell for sport.'"

Fortunately, much of the guesswork in the stallion selection process is removed by the breed societies; they ultimately decide if the candidate meets their criteria to have offspring awarded the breed name. This includes standards that must be met under saddle. The Hanoverian breed is renowned for having one of the most rigorous stallion licensing systems. These highly selective standards were established in the Hannover breeding area of Germany in 1735 and have been adhered to by the governing society, the Hannoveraner Verband, and followed by their daughter organizations, including the American Hanoverian Society (AHS).

### Overview of the Licensing Process

A stallion under consideration for Hanoverian licensing goes through a physical inspection before a commission comprised of judges from both the United States and Germany. The stallions that pass then undergo a post-licensing veterinary examination. To obtain lifetime Hanoverian breeding approval the horse must either pass an AHS- and German Verband-approved Stallion Performance Test or qualify with scores in competition. The first step, the Stallion Inspection, is conducted at a minimum of three years

of age and includes: a veterinary inspection following a strict protocol; conformation assessment; and evaluation of gaits, presence and masculinity. Stallions aged three to six are free jumped and must also be presented under saddle for an evaluation of their basic gaits and rideability. Older horses that have met the requirements in sport may be asked to free jump, or be presented over a course of fences, or, in the case of dressage performers, presented under saddle. To pass the inspection, a Hanoverian-registered stallion must receive an overall score of seven with no subscore lower than five.

As part of the approval process, all stallions are required to satisfactorily complete a comprehensive x-ray protocol jointly agreed by the AHS and Hanoverian Verband. In the United States and Canada, the radiographs are read by an AHS selected panel of three veterinarians from the world renowned Rood and Riddle Equine Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. This procedure helps safeguard that undesirable inherited traits, such as OCD, are not passed on to Hanoverian progeny.

The next step is where stallion owners can choose the path to final approval. The most common route to complete the licensing procedure is the Performance Test. Within two years of successfully passing the Stallion Inspection, the stallion must attend an approved test facility where he is evaluated in dressage, show jumping and cross-country jumping. The Performance Test is known as the 70-Day Stallion Test during which the stallion is trained and evaluated by a selected and approved team, culminating in a three-day final that includes evaluation and scoring by guest judges and riders. Since 2010, the AHS and German Verband have recognized the stallion testing conducted by Silver Creek Farm in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Manager Barbara Sikkink advises that in 2012 the fee for the testing will be \$8,500, with additional costs for transportation from the stallion's home base to Oklahoma.

The alternate choice for stallion owners is licensing based on Competition Performance. The licensing prospect must attain required scores or placings at specified levels in the disciplines of dressage, jumping or eventing. At first review, this may seem a less expensive route. However, as Barbara

notes, when one factors in a cost of \$3,000–\$6,000 per month for professional board, training and showing over a period typically spanning five or six years to get to this level of competition, it is not the inexpensive option!

A stallion licensed on this basis should be of particular appeal to the sport horse breeder. Arguably, he should be given greater consideration than his younger counterpart; the typical Performance Test candidate, by virtue of age and experience, can only be evaluated on its promise of future ridden excellence. The appeal of a stallion that has been licensed based on competition results is that he has proven consistently, and at a high level of difficulty, that he is an exceptional performer under saddle. Sharon Garner also advises in her responsible breeding article that mare owners should research a stallion's performance career, because "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, and that is certainly true of breeding horses."

### Licensing Our Own Stallion

In 2011, we presented and successfully achieved licensing based on Competition Performance from the German Verband and AHS with our homebred stallion, Dreammaster DMV (Dimaggio/ EM Daisy Dee/Dream of Glory). It's been a long ride, pardon the pun, but one we are proud of. How did we decide he was worthy of the time and expense of pursuing this elite status? The answer is partially one of circumstances but primarily one of being true to our breeding philosophy: to strive to produce horses that not only have the physical attributes requisite for reaching the top in competition, but have the temperament that will allow an amateur rider to make that journey with them. We believed that our own Dreammaster was exceptional from birth and over the years proved he was the "whole package." Putting him forward for licensing was an eight-year journey, evaluated carefully at every stage.

Our goal to further the excellence of Hanoverian breeding originated and developed during more than a decade of living in England, which included regular commuting to Verden, Germany, the breed's "Mecca." It was a privilege to have easy access to the many equestrian mentors in both countries who generously shared their breeding knowledge and skills. In 1999, I made the leap to purchase my first elite quality Hanoverian. Successfully winning a nail-biting auction battle for the event's star and top selling horse, a dark liver chestnut three-year-old mare sporting four matching "dressage socks" named Daisy Dee (Dream of Glory/Western Star), proved to be a pivotal moment in my life. I renamed her Dreamcatcher and she returned with me to England, earning much media fanfare. The hype was well founded: she not only carried me, then a novice rider, to many open dressage titles, but also I partnered her with friend and coach Carl Hester to secure both National and International Young Horse titles.

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of embryo transfer featured in several horse magazines, including *Horse and Hound*. The Dimaggio/Dreamcatcher union yielded three embryos, producing two colts and a filly in 2003. (See the full story, "Build a Breeding Business on Embryo Transfer" in the May/June 2009 issue of *Warmbloods Today*.) The triplets were showcased at an event at Addington Manor with Carl astride Dreamcatcher and the triplets cavorting around the arena with their surrogate mothers. The favorite was clear; the dark liver chestnut colt Dreammaster was in a league of his own as he independently took central stage demonstrating his star presence and gymnastic "airs above the ground."

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In 2004 my partner John Dingle and I took the first major step to realize our dream of creating our own Hanoverian stud and training center. Returning to my native Canada we began the immense task of transforming a cattle ranch located in the pristine mountain valley of Pemberton Meadows in British Columbia. Transporting Dreamcatcher and the three yearling triplets was just one in a series of monumental physical and mental challenges ahead of us.

In our opinion, we believed that this colt demonstrated all the characteristics we wanted to produce in our future offspring. We agreed to breed him to a couple of local mares as well as perform our own embryo transfers with select mares. John, experienced in embryo transfer from his previous work with bovines, worked with a keen local vet and put our new lab into production. The resulting foals clearly demonstrated Dreammaster not only improved the physical attributes of the mares, he passed on his genetic gifts of paces, performance and temperament (confirmed a few short years later with his offspring's accomplishments in both dressage and jumping competitions). We also decided to attach the suffix "DMV" (for Dreamcatcher Meadows Ventures) behind the foals' names that met our breeding standards.



In 2007, we selected and imported a 300-day Performance Tested licensed stallion from the Hanoverian state stud in Adelheidsdorf, with a view to expanding our breeding operation. John trained the young stallion and made his competitive dressage debut; they were undefeated in the FEI young horse competitions in both 2008 and 2009. During this time we focused on ensuring that Dreammaster DMV firmly established the basic skills following the classical scale of training in dressage. During that time we limited our breedings to the licensed stallion.

At the age of seven, in 2010 Dreammaster DMV debuted in U.S. dressage competition at Devonwood, giving John one of his most memorable competition experiences. He prevailed over almost 30 Hanoverians, including those at Grand Prix level, to secure breed champion in addition to First Level victories. This was closely followed with his U.S. breed show debut in Spokane. Celebrating his victory as the show's grand champion, the judge, fellow competitors and audience left no doubt in our minds that this stallion was where we should focus our resources. Judge Mike Osinski asked where we had been hiding this superstar, the likes of which he would choose to breed his own mares to. Several more breed and dressage championships followed, including the title of Inspection Stallion of the Year for the American Warmblood Society, scoring over 88%.

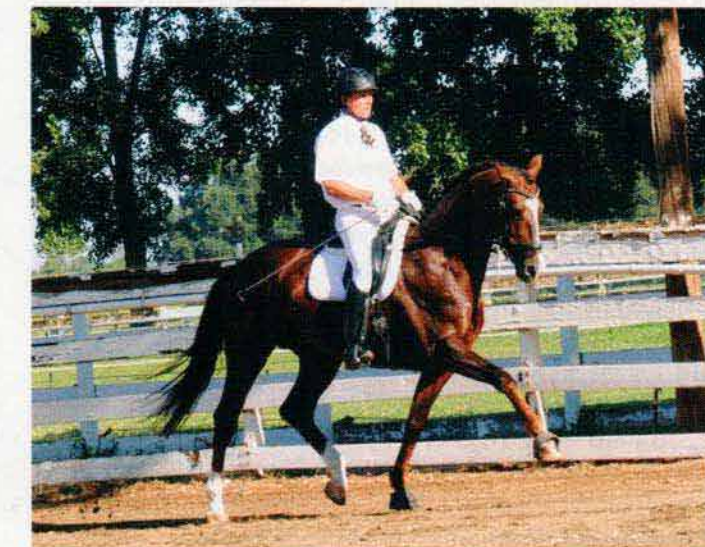
Dr. Ludwig Christmann, international development director of the Hannoveraner Verband, annually travels the world to increase awareness of the breed and also to evaluate Hanoverians of all ages. He identified Dreammaster DMV as exceptional when he evaluated him as a foal in England. In addition to our personal friendship, he has been a mentor and advisor to establish Dreamcatcher Meadows as a breeding "Deckstation." His summertime visits to conduct a formal Hanoverian inspection allowed him to monitor Dreammaster DMV's training and development. A fellow judge, Spruce Meadows legend Albert Kley, joined him on the 2010 Pemberton tour and echoed the opinion he was a candidate for licensing. The evidence was complete and we were confident that he was worthy of the time and expense of attempting to attain status as a licensed Hanoverian breeding stallion based on performance. It was time to put him to the ultimate test.

### Put to the Test

Before planning Dreammaster's 2011 competition schedule to achieve the licensing criteria, we needed to make sure he passed all the stringent x-ray and veterinary standards. (These are the same requirements set for the three-year-olds following the conventional Performance Test route, which we did not take with Dreammaster.) With an eight-year-old, it was a daunting task considering the physical wear and tear of several years of training and competing. There is also more likelihood that inherited problems such as Osteochondritis Desecans (OCD) would be evident at this later age. We were delighted and relieved to learn he passed the reviews of five Kentucky-based veterinarians retained by the AHS.

We next turned to our friend and mentor, U.S. Olympic medalist and international judge Charlotte Bredahl-Baker, to train and compete Dreammaster DMV to fulfill the competition criteria. Up until this point, Dreammaster had only competed up to First Level, just six months prior. Charlotte built on his advanced classical education that we had focused on for years and continued his training on our stallion that she says she "absolutely loves." The combination well exceeded the competition requirements, which are five scores exceeding 64% awarded by international judges at FEI Prix St. Georges (PSG) level at recognized USDF shows. The pair regularly achieved scores in the mid-70s at PSG and Intermediate 1 level, with a constant "9" for gaits, winning USDF Horse of the Year awards in the process. This speaks volumes regarding Dreammaster DMV's trainability and Charlotte's partnership with him. Thus, the check box for performance scores were ticked—one more very important requirement was met!

We now had the final task at hand to complete our licensing journey. In August 2011 Dreammaster DMV, John and I received a warm welcome from Edgar Schutte at his Rainbow Equus Meadows in Sacramento, California, where



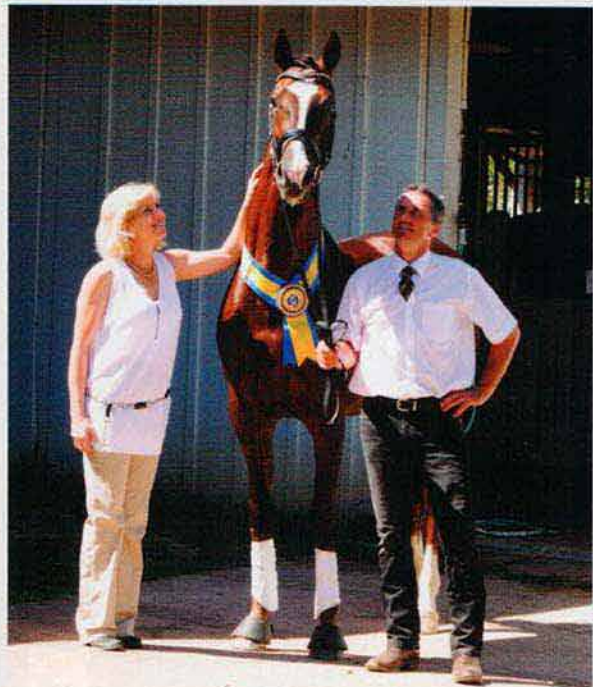
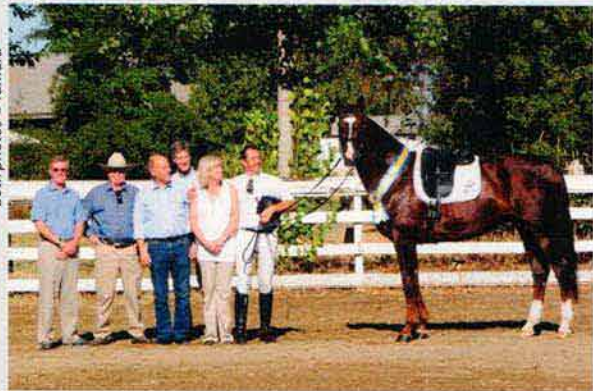
Both photos © Tamara

Top & bottom: John Dingle and Dreammaster DMV during the in-hand and ridden portions of the final stallion inspections.

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a panel of judges from the American Hanoverian Society and the German Verband would conduct the final inspection. (Up until this point he had not been presented at any stallion inspections.) We were prepared for the worst when we discovered minutes before the first in-hand presentation that he had cast a shoe. Furthermore, the outdoor arena that he was to perform in was adjacent to stalls with other stallions and paddocks where mares and foals were cavorting about. It speaks volumes about this horse's athleticism and temperament that he was approved by all judges despite these challenges!

Fortunately, Edgar's concern and resourcefulness produced a blacksmith before the ridden evaluation. Now with four shoes to support him, our performance star was finally able to show he had a lot more to deliver than just the "correct paces" noted in his in-hand presentation! Dreammaster DMV floated through



**Top and Bottom: Dreammaster DMV is licensed and approved. He is also approved by the CWHBA along with their other stallion Windfall.**

the movements, clearly demonstrating his trademark suppleness and gymnastic ability, while maintaining perfect balance and rhythm. John, who had not ridden his favorite mount for eight months, was delighted by how Dreammaster DMV responded to the lightest of aids, staying focused while being taunted by the neighboring stallions and mares in the audience. This explains the comment by judge George Walker that this "16.3 hand dark liver chestnut particularly impressed us with his good interior, demonstrating a high level of rideability that helped to enhance his gaits under saddle."

### **Final Award and Comments**

After the mandatory full veterinary examination, Judge Konrad Boeth from the German Verband announced, "He is the epitome of the modern sport horse—it is a unanimous decision to license Dreammaster DMV." To hear such an accolade was truly the crowning moment of our eight year mission. As the rosette bearing "Licensed Stallion" with the Hanoverian brand was placed around our boy's neck, I noted John had something in his eye too. It's a good thing the official group photos weren't close-ups! That blue satin sash joins the rarely awarded certificate that had been presented to my beloved Dreamcatcher (Dreammaster DMV's genetic mother). It's entitled the "Leistungsstute Dressur" for exceptional lifetime achievement in dressage, one of the most meaningful accolades of our life devoted to our Hanoverian horses.

AHS Executive Director Hugh Bellis-Jones stated, "Having seen this horse at his licensing, he is a welcome addition to the ranks of AHS approved stallions. Dreammaster DMV is in good hands and it will be interesting to follow his performance career. Dreammaster DMV epitomizes the international nature of Hanoverian breeding which emphasizes one global population with a common breeding goal. Dreammaster DMV was bred and foaled in the United Kingdom, his breeders and owners are now resident Canadians, and the horse himself is fully licensed for American breeders. Because of the full reciprocity that exists between the AHS and Hanoverian Verband breeding programs, Dreammaster DMV has fulfilled all his requirements for all other countries where Hanoverians are registered, including Germany. Dreammaster DMV is the only son of 2002 Dressage World Breeding Champion, Dimaggio, standing at stud in North America and his 3 x 3 breeding to Donnerhall is particularly intriguing."

With that comment, we come full circle to our message for breeders. Take careful note of stallions that have proven themselves in high level competition. For example, the legendary sire Donnerhall won over 65 FEI

notes, when one factors in a cost of \$3,000–\$6,000 per month for professional board, training and showing over a period typically spanning five or six years to get to this level of competition, it is not the inexpensive option!

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