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Successful Swedish women push the breeding boundaries

BY KIM LUNDIN

PHOTOGRAPHY: KIM LUNDIN

Sweden is currently on top of the sporting world thanks to their recent World Championship glory, yet behind every horse is a modest breeder, who is sometimes female. This story profiles three Swedish ladies successfully representing each of the Olympic disciplines.

Eva Gudmundsson, from Flemminge Gård, south of Stockholm and close to the Baltic sea, is Sweden's largest and most successful breeder of jumping horses and has a number of approved jumping stallions under her belt. She is a multi-talented woman, a breeding judge, stallion keeper, and has her own breeding station with around 20-25 mares in foal every year. Eva also has a keen eye for international pedigrees, often the first one to sniff-out the new bloodlines, for example breeding with Kashmir van't Schuttershof long before the Swedish jumping team made 'wonder horses' of Kashmir-offspring in Rio 2016 Olympic Games. She is a pathfinder for other breeders in Sweden and in due time her offspring will prove her right.

Nina Sixtensson has been a dressage breeder for more than 20 years, living and working on her farm Dömsta Gård close to Köping, about 150 kms to the west of Stockholm. She is also a crop agronomist and breeds sheep. She produces around seven foals of her own every year, but delivers many more as her stable is a livery yard for mares in foal. Her own-bred Jetset will participate in Ermelo at the WBCYH representing the German Hannoverian association.

Therese Örup is a very successful small-scale eventing breeder who has her second horse in the Swedish team going to a world championship this year. In 2018 she had

Box Qutie with Anna Freskgård, and this year it is the son Box Leo who has qualified for the World Championships in Pratoni del Vivaro with Frida Andersen. To date there are 25 horses registered under the stud's name 'Box', as in the original farm in Boxholm. Therese is also a thoroughly modern breeder, she has her daily work in Switzerland, her horses in Sweden, and collaborates in her breeding endeavors with riders and others.

◆ What led you to become a sport horse breeder? Do you think that being a woman in what was – at least until fairly recently – almost exclusively a man's world was an important factor in your decision?

EG: I am the fourth generation in my family to work in breeding and producing riding horses. It was fairly easy for me when starting out to continue working with the contact network of my father and grandfather, probably my great-grandfather as well. Even with this background, I am basically bred into it, you need a large dose of mega-interest, even nerdiness in breeding to be able to work with it. It takes a lot of work; it is straining financially, and you need to be able to endure those very deep valleys and really enjoy the few highs. The only way to pull through is a burning, almost all-consuming interest for the whole business.

In Sweden, at least among the average breeder, it is not so overwhelmingly dominated by men, if you look to the bigger more professional breeders it is. But in Europe it is a different story. I remember being with my stallion Carême (2005/SWB Radiator - Chiara x Contender) down at the Westfalian association in Münster after he'd done his 70-day test in Schlieckau. All the men – and it was all men – talked about "the Swedish woman with a stallion" as it was a completely foreign concept to them in 2010. Oftentimes abroad we see a man's name as the breeder of a horse, in reality it is usually a family where the wife has had just as much influence in the decisions but is most times not given any credit.

NS: In agriculture there are a lot of men, but the woman is in the background. Before I started with horses, I ended up in a stable with horse breeding at a young age so I became



Eva Gudmundsson – and above with her stallion Chini Con Carême as a foals. Later exported to the United States

a pedigree geek early on. Then I got to participate in coverings, natural ones, taming foals, and all the other frequent tasks. I am a crop agronomist and was on a study trip when I bought my first foal. It was Martinette (1988: Martini x Pontus), covered as a three-year-old. When I got more into breeding I felt that the Germans were so far ahead, so since then I have bought my fillies in Germany. It is easier to find strong dam lines there. I have had good help from Dr. Frank Nordhausen in finding and choosing the right mares. He is the breeder of approved premium stallion So Perfect (2017/Oldbg Sezuan x Sir Donnerhall I).

Since I work in agriculture, which is totally male-dominated, I have never thought about gender, so I do my own thing. It hasn't even crossed my mind; I just keep going.

TO: For me, equestrian sport is a part of my family history, and growing up I was no exception, so horses were my life from early on. As life went on it became clear to me that I would not be able to compete and still fit everything else I wanted into my life. As horses were still important to me and I didn't want to lose the connection to the equestrian world I took the chance to combine my love for horses with my view of the sport, attempting to breed the type of eventing horse I would look for to ride myself. Thanks to the many individuals involved and working with the horses on an everyday basis I have been able to do this. I have never really reflected over this as a man's world, but more looked for what I wanted to do and how I could do that in the best way.

TO: I don't keep any stallions myself, but when I'm looking for stallions to use I try to find a good combination of proven stallions with some wildcards here and there. Breeding for eventing sport I often look for a lot of blood, which narrows down the selection somewhat. I have personally had some great looking horses combining my mares with Jaguar Mail (Hand in Glove xx x Laudanum xx).

◆ Which is the most influential stallion you have stood/are standing at stud or promoted as an agent (or used more than once as a breeder), and why do you think this is?

EG: My heart is with the foal; I make the combinations I truly believe will succeed and I put all my knowledge and experience into it. Sometimes that combination is achieved by using one of my own stallions, sometimes my vision needs something else. My aim is to create extremely good jumping horses, but a lot is riding on their upbringing and management later in life over which I have little to no control. I truly believe my stallions can create really good horses in combination with good mares.

As an example, I used Chacco-Blue really early and the

first result was Chaccon-Tess F (2008/SWB out of dam Contessa x Orlando) previously ridden by Sofia Farman, now in breeding. It was a sort of awakening too for me. I was in Mühlen with a friend, and we had a shopping spree on frozen semen at Schockemöhle's place. Chacco-Blue was not popular by then, he was considered too bulky and heavy. I had an Orlando mare that needed a bit of size, I felt they had the same type of jumping, I just felt that this is a great combination, and it was. From that point on I knew I had a knack for it, and I had the first Conthargos offspring in Sweden without anyone understanding my views. You must trust your gut feeling as a

breeder. A few years back I used Kashmir van't Schuttershof first and then I pointed out Emerald van't Ruytershof as the next up-and-coming superstar. I was not wrong.

In my opinion, my own stallion Silber Sky F (Corlensky G - Silber Cardentina F x Cardento) really produces good offspring if he gets a mare of normal talent. An injury cut his career short, but he is always a horse that makes you happy to look at. The Corlensky G x Cardento combination is very rare, but of five internationally competing, two have started in World Cup qualifiers and one reached the European Championships and a World Cup final.

I exported my stallion Carême to the United States, but his promising career faded, as can happen. He won his 70-day test in Germany and was very promising, and I still have frozen semen from him in store. My stallion Chini Con Omnes F (2016/SWB Kashmir van't Schuttershof - Diamant van't Dauwhof x Chin Chin) is licensed in AES and I really believe in him. I will put him in training and competition abroad this year and hope the right people see what I see. He has a close relative in my youngest approved stallion Chini Con Yanic F (2018/SWB Emerald van't Ruytershof - Chini con Lonia F x Nabab de Reve) as Diamant van't Dauwhof is his granddam. This is a horse I am so proud of; my father would have cried happy tears seeing him as the judges gave him a nine out of 10 for his leg conformation.

NS: I have changed stallions a lot over the years, and I have tried to have D-blood in all my mares, which has felt like it is a good base. I have rarely used a stallion more than once on the same mare. The one name that comes to me is Johnson, who I have used on several mares as he seems to fit. Previously it was Florencio who gave me good foals but perhaps with a tendency to be a bit slow. I'm not worried about using D-blood many times in the offspring; it will be such a small percentage that it doesn't matter. The D-blood in general; Donnerhall, Dancier or De Niro are welcome to join more than once. Sandro Hit may be considered controversial, but he gives good type, nice front, and a nice little head, he gives elegant horses. If you have a mare that



Nina Sixtensson

needs more type and elegance, I find Sandro Hit to bring that to the table. Sandro Hit and Donnerhall are a combination that has given several fine lines.

◆ **What mare lines have been most important in your breeding programme and which studbook do you mainly register your foals with and why?**

EG: The dam line that produced my two active stallions from my elite mare Diamant van't Dauwhof (2003/BWP Chin Cin x Wertschatz, dam line Dafata, Hannover Stutenstamm 1192105, Schridde 1204) is definitely one of my absolute best. She has a daughter competing internationally at 1m50 level. Her daughter Chini con Londia F is in foal to Nixon van't Meulenhof. Contessa (2004/SWB Orlando - Chiara x Contender) has also meant a lot to me as she has provided a strong foundation. One of her daughters competes internationally, Chloe F, and Conte di London F sold to Jeroen Dubbeldam. I have a fondness for Belgian horses, I really like having the tough ones like Darco, Nabab de Reve and Chin Chin in the pedigree.

I register my foals in Swedish Warmblood if it is possible, but don't stay away from a stallion I believe in if he is not approved by SWB – then I go to another studbook. My goal is the foal I envision in my mind's eye, and I'm not hindered by an obstacle such as registration. I approve of the regulations SWB has in place, don't take it the wrong way, and I even wish they'd sometimes would enforce them even more.

I really believe in using younger stallions because we need to further the breeding and be bold about it. Nowadays it's not taking such a risk, as most horses are thoroughly and for generations bred as specialist jumping horses. The pedigrees are solid jumping today in most cases. It is not the same risk as it used to be using a young stallion. At the last Olympics the average age of the sires was seven, closing in on eight-years-old, chosen when they've shown their talent in sport. As breeders we must declare to riders, 'in seven years' time you will ride what I breed today'.

NS: My mare lines are Feldgold (Oldenburger Stamm 77) and Rulli Rudilore, (Rudilore, Oldenburger Stamm 177). They have given me the most, and when a foal is born I register it according to the client's preference. Nowadays it's mainly Oldenburg as they make the trip all the way up here to Dömsta Gärd, west of Stockholm, to do the registration. Oldenburg also has a very open policy. A few are SWB registered, but not all of them. When a customer has bought a foal, they have the option to choose a name and a breeding association in which to register. If the client is aiming for German foal shows and stallion licensing it is not an option to register in SWB. I don't work with the SWB one-mare-license system at all. [Author's note: It enables mare owners to cover with a foreign stallion where the stallion owner has not licensed his stallion with SWB, but the fee is upwards of €130 and a lot of paperwork.]

TO: I register all my horses as Swedish Warmblood as

they have a great system for the young horses, both in terms of evaluations as well as competitions. But best of all, Swedish Warmblood has the rule that any mare who had a foal as a four-year-old gets to compete herself in the age group of horses one year younger. This gives the opportunity for my mares to produce an offspring early in their life and still be able to participate in the young horse competitions. It's an excellent system that allows mares that are bred for competition to get to contribute to the gene pool, and in that way we encourage the turnover of generations, also of the horses that are aimed for top sport.

◆ **What is the best/most successful horse you have ever bred and what qualities made it so?**

EG: My best offspring are my fantastic mares; they are my best work. Good mothers, excellent fertility, and really easy in all their handling. I also have Malin Baryard-Johnson's former competition mare Actrice W (1999/Westf Ars Vivendi - Nikita x Nobelpreis, bred by Reinhard Wessels) in breeding. She's a horse that is not my breeding at all, but she fascinates me, she was a superb showjumper and now she's an excellent mother. She has a lot of length in her back, but that is a good trait for me, to reach over the biggest oxers.

NS: My breeding St. Emilion (2019/Oldbg Suarez - Tia Romina II bxy Dante Weltino OLD) is approved as a stallion, appointed as a premium stallion, and has given me loads of publicity. [Now standing at stud at Klosterhof Medingen.] He is the product of two really strong dam lines, my own Rulli Rudilore and Suarez dam Damandala from the BADDA, Hannover Stutenstamm 2190001, Schridde 23, that are in essence his strengths.

I really liked my own-bred Florenstern (2005/Hann Florencio I - Die Diva x Dacaprio), who gave me much joy. She is related to Jetset 6 (2015/Hann Johnson - Belair DS x Beltoni) who is part of the German cadre from Hannover participating in the WBCYH in Ermelo in September. As a five-year-old he finished third in the German Bundeschampionat with Kira Laura Soddemann.

TO: Eventing horses need a quality jump and gallop, but the key part is the mindset and willingness to perform. Box Quatie (2006-2018/SWB Quite Easy - Lady Like KLT x Little Boy), who participated in both European Championships and WEG, and her son Box Leo (2010/SWB Jaguar Mail), who among other things finished fifth in the World Breeding Championship for Young Horses are probably my two horses that have been seen at most competitions. Box Quatie was a good mix of quality and grace and had an iron will to perform in competition. Box Leo brings great qualities as a jumper and with an enormous gallop he always looks for a way to find the right jump, and absolutely loves showing off at competitions.

◆ **What great plans do you have for the future?**

EG: Bigger, better, brighter in all aspects. I have tried with a bit of volume and in the coming year's I will try to focus on

even more prominent mares from the very best dam lines in Europe. I have a wish list and I will work on it further. I need to find a working partner to help develop our offspring and keep them a bit longer in order to move up the food chain.

NS: Of course, producing another approved stallion comes to mind, but as always I am more into the dam lines. I really would like to find good mares from Escolar and Lord Leatherdale. Even more, a mare out of the same dam line as Weihegold, WEISSENA, Oldenburger Stamm 213, fokfamilie 845. There are so many good dam lines I would like to bring back home. I feel like the Covid-19 pandemic has made me slightly off from the breeding world, having not been to stallion shows or anything, and you need that kind of energy boost from time to time. I really would like to visit the German Bundeschampionat, but it always collides with harvest time in Sweden. I have quite a few dream mares such as Lady Devinja (Oldbg: De Niro x Rubinstein I), Gesina (Oldbg: Sir Donnerhall I x Blue Hors Don Schufro), Poetin (DSP: Sandro Hit x Brentano II).

TO: We have recently expanded our yard, starting a cooperation with eventing rider Frida Andersen and look forward to seeing what this will bring us in the long term. Our yard holds some nice youngsters, and it will be really interesting to see their development and long-term future.



Bred by Therese Örup, Box Leo has qualified for the eventing World Championships with Frida Andersen

◆ How do you envision the sport horse breeding industry developing in the future and what issues do you think it will have to address to progress more in the future?

EG: It always comes down to dollars and dimes. We have a lot of players and stakeholders in Sweden and in other countries with more funding than knowledge. They are influenced by people who care more about taking a salary than actually working to bring horse breeding forward. It is difficult to get a grip on this problem because it all comes down to trust. I really wish that some of the people investing in the sport would see the value of also investing in the breeding business, one cannot live without the other – the days for breeders' funding riders are over.

I will never give up on quality of the horses I produce, I will persevere because I think that someday it must pay off. I will keep on striving to produce the best possible jump horse there is.

NS: If you look a few years ahead – fewer people will have a connection to how animals work. For me that means that the horses we breed in the future will have to be easier

to handle, have a really good temperament, and be much easier to handle overall. People have less and less time for their interests and will not want to spend it on annoying behavior from their horse. They will also in general have less experience so overly sensitive horses will demand too much work. I used to have a lot of German-bred horses that were all quite steady, then I brought in more Dutch blood and that brought a lot more nerves – I call them popcorn horses – now I am back to more German lines again.

The average horse owner is now facing skyrocketing prices and, historically, the breeders have subsidized the riders, but that will not stay the norm. Will middle income persons with a genuine horse interest be able to have their own horse in the future? There will always be people that are well off and not price sensitive, but we need both kinds. I have a genuine worry

that the horses I breed will grow up to a life spent less outdoors. This will give us a longevity issue as we cannot make them last if they are not allowed to move daily.

The previous trend with very short backs has thankfully turned, it feels as though a bit longer back is now more in fashion, but where to put the saddle was a real worry for a while. I'm trying to breed what the riders will want in 10 years' time, and it is a challenge.

Another big task for me as a dressage breeder is to find new blood that will work as a mix. Is there a new bloodline

to use in the future? We need more noble blood as our dressage horses nowadays just keep adding muscle upon muscle and growing too heavy. We had Lauries Crusador and we need a good replacement, a Thoroughbred or an Anglo stallion. Someone needs to dare to do the cross. I don't want it straight-up, but further back in the pedigree. I really liked Glock's Trafalgar (2012/DSP Totilas - Paola x Lord Loxley), but he's not available for breeding.

TO: Eventing is a sport that has gone through many changes in the last 10 to 15 years, and I think there are additional changes to come as a natural evolution of the sport where we as a community continue to modernize. With this I think we will see even stronger requirements on jumping ability and dressage from the horses, but also from the riders. For us breeders planning for a horse that should be at the top of the sport some 12 to 14 years from when we cover the mares, we need to take some chances on this development. Producing a good horse is partly based on information, partly on gut-feel, but also a large cup of luck and circumstances going the right way – that's what makes it so exciting. ■