



# The Sport of Kings and the two women who rule

words Michelle Gerlach images provided by Irene Hoeflich-Wiederhold

The equestrian world has often been called the Sport of Kings, so leave it to a couple of Dressage Queens to strike gold.

Irene Wiederhold and Michelle Gerlach were destined to meet because both women have horses, and the horse world is a very small place. They became friends because they both hold fast to the same ideals in life and each have tenacity to spare.

The two went into selling horses as a team because they realized there was a market for high quality horses at affordable prices.

Irene is a native German now living and working here in Florida. She and her husband Roger own 1st Realty in Cape Coral. While real estate takes up the bulk of her time, Irene enjoys her evening rides on one of the current sale horses in her barn. From the dressage arena she can also oversee her broodmare and young stock grazing in the field.

Michelle is a professional dressage trainer and instructor who recently

relocated to Florida from Ohio where she owned and operated a successful training facility for 11 years. Here in Florida, she shifted her business slightly by no longer boarding horses. This shift allows her to maintain her own horses and the sale horses at home while freelance instructing at various other locations. Traveling in this manner is how she met Irene. As their friendship developed, Irene and Michelle realized that their interests were similar yet not exactly the same.



Irene loves the study of bloodlines and began her own breeding program to produce youngsters with the mental and physical capabilities to rise to the top levels. Michelle is passionate about riding and controls the training programs of the young horses beginning their careers under saddle. It seems that this balance helps prospective buyers as well. Irene can speak with great authority about the lineage of each horse, and Michelle can discuss training techniques for the present and future.

The sale horses are of German descent bearing the brands of Oldenburg,

Hanover, and Westfalen and carrying the Olympic bloodlines of Donnerhall, Florestan, Rubinstein, Sandro Hit, and

Each horse that arrives presents a mystery to be solved.

Weltmeyer. These horses are either imported through Canada on spec or sold directly from Germany. While both methods are successful, it's having the horses here in Florida that keeps the two excited about their work.

Each new horse that arrives presents a mystery to be solved. They are all faced with many of the same challenges, yet their individual personalities dictate how they will handle these new things. A good mind is paramount when selecting young horses to be sold. Each horse must get on a van, leave their place of birth, get loaded onto an airplane, fly across the ocean, trucked to quarantine, and ultimately find themselves in surroundings which contain nothing familiar.

The way these horses behave upon arrival tells Michelle and Irene much about their ultimate behavior when faced with the rigors of training and showing.

**Florida's climate presents one of the most challenging adaptations for all horses not just the recently imported.**

The heat and humidity of summer can cause stress related disorders such as anhydrous which is when the adrenal glands shut down and the horse discontinues sweating to regulate their internal temperature. The wet ground of summer with such a high salt content can be damaging to their hooves without proper management. The dry ground and slow grass growth of winter create the problem of sand ingestion while grazing. Both Irene and Michelle spend many hours learning proper techniques to minimize the effects of these difficulties and to keep the horses as protected from harm as possible.

After the horses have acclimated and entered into their training regimens, the advertising begins. Hours are spent on the phone and answering e-mail. Video



tape and photographs are also utilized. Prospective buyers usually visit the horses to learn things, such as how the horse feels under saddle, that video footage and still photographs cannot convey. Once a horse is sold and shipped to his new home, Irene and Michelle continue to keep in contact with the new owners. They answer any questions which might arise regarding everything from good nutrition to proper saddle fit.

Each sale and subsequent arrival of a new charge reminds the two how lucky they are to be so successful at something that they love so much.



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