



**Worthy Opponent is ridden by
Training Director Helmut Schrant.**

Bob-Tarr ©

THE 100-DAY STALLION PERFORMANCE TEST

An owner describes her first experience at this important event for young warmblood stallions.

By Kyle Karnosh • Photos by Bob Tarr

Dana Estes decided that she really liked riding stallions. "It's that extra presence, the attention you get when you ride into the ring," she says. "I just loved it." An experienced event rider who finished third in the Advanced division at Kentucky Rolex and was long listed for the 1992 Olympics, Estes became enamored of stallions when a student had a Hanoverian stallion in training at her barn in California. She didn't have the money to buy a mature approved stallion, so she put that idea on the back burner until friend and breeder Jeanne Schamblin told her that she had a colt that really should be a stallion. Estes had started some of Schamblin's youngsters under saddle and the two had developed a friendship over time. Schamblin imported a premium mare by Hohenstein out of an Archipel dam carrying a foal by the Weltmeyer son Waikiki. "When I went to take a look at him, he was 5 months old," recalls Estes. "He was really awkward looking and I thought, *Oh my gosh, no.*" She politely declined, but Schamblin persisted, and when Estes came back to look at the colt as a yearling, she bought him. "He was still pretty

homely, but I just kept looking at his dam. That mare is so incredible and has such presence that I just had to believe he would turn out well."

Buying Worthy Opponent, or "Archie" as he is known around the barn, ended up taking Estes on a three-year journey that brought her to the 2007 100-Day Stallion Performance Test at Paxton Farm in Ohio. Estes wanted to have her stallion approved, so she researched the 100-day test. "I bought DVDs of the 2002 and 2004 testings," she says. "After watching the DVDs, I said to myself, this is basically an event, and I know how to do this."

Getting Ready for the Test

Archie's preparation began with some light work under saddle as a 3-year-old. Estes had promised herself that she would wait until he was 4 before starting to jump him under saddle. "He was actually started over fences on a cross-country course," she recalls. "I was at an event schooling some students, with



AHS President Doug Leatherdale, Hugh Bellis-Jones, Dana Estes and Rene Menke with Reserve Champion Worthy Opponent.



This page, both photos: Wamberto ridden by Alexa Bendfeld. Page 43, both photos: Rapture R ridden by Rene Menke.

Archie just along for the ride. He turned 4 that very day, so we took him out to the cross country course and popped him over a few small fences." Much to Dana's delight, she discovered that not only could Archie really jump, he loved it. He competed in his first event in May of 2007 after about 90 days of consistent work under saddle.

At the California stallion inspection sites, the ISR/Oldenburg North America approved Archie in June, and the American Hanoverian Society did the same in July. At the beginning of August, the time came to send him away to Ohio for the stallion test. "It was hard to let go of him for three months clear across the country to a place I'd never been," says Estes, who traveled to Paxton Farms to be there when Archie's van arrived. Meeting director Helmut Schrant and the testing crew put her mind at ease. She was also delighted to learn that one of the test riders, Alexa Bendfeld, was also an event rider and would work with Archie. Since home was 2,000 miles from the testing, frequent trips were out of the question. So Estes went home until the "midterm" stallion presentation 50 days into the testing.

Having seen many of the stallions when they first came to the testing, Estes says she was "blown away by how

far they had come in such a short period of time." But she was also in for a shock. "Normally Archie is quite laid back. You can canter him on the buckle and my 12-year-old niece can ride him. When I came to the midterm, I almost had heart failure because Archie was so hot, he was coming out of his skin." The transition from being out in pasture 24/7 and fed only hay to being stalled with a fair amount of grain had worked a dramatic change.

Estes was worried, but the testing crew responded to her concerns. At a sit-down meeting with training director Schrant, rider Bendfeld and testing nutritionist Don Kappler, everyone put their heads together and came up with a modified feeding program and some training adjustments. "They were responsive and helpful, but I didn't get to stay to see the results."

On top of that, right after the midterm, Archie banged his leg in the stall overnight. "The staff and the vet were right on top of it," says Estes, "I was impressed with the quality of the care. Luckily it wasn't anything serious. But to be on the safe side, he was rested for two weeks. With that plus the feeding changes, I really didn't know what to expect coming into the finals."

The Jumping & Rideability Tests

Estes arrived for the final testing held Nov. 8–11. She was apprehensive, but her concerns proved to be unfounded when she saw her stallion come into the ring. "I saw him, and the change was amazing," she says. "He was his normal, mellow self, and I thought, *Oh, thank God*. It really set the tone for me for the remainder of the test." One of her main regrets in the final test, in which outside experts score the stallions, was that they didn't push him to jump higher in the free jumping. "Archie was jumping 5 feet 3 inches in training, but they didn't take him nearly that high in the final test. Whether it was because of his dressage pedigree, and they assumed that he couldn't jump well, or whether they were being careful because of his previous injury, I don't know."

Although the scores were not announced until the end of the final test, Archie scored higher than average—a 7 for free jumping—while he scored 9 in general jumping aptitude from the training director. In the free jumping phase, Versache, (who was part of the 30-day short-test stallions) achieved the top score of 9. Bravo, Confetti and Wamberto each scored 8.

That afternoon, Estes watched her stallion ridden by guest riders Jessica Jo



Tate, Fred Webber and Verena Stock. Each stallion was ridden by each rider for five minutes and then scored on rideability. Archie was given solid scores—two 7s and an 8. Rapture R and a 30-day stallion, Rashka, had the best rideability scores, each earning an 8 and two 9s, followed by Wamberto with two 8s and a 9.

Basic Gaits and the Unexpected

The next day turned out to be one of the more exciting days in the testing but for totally unexpected reasons. The day dawned cool and breezy, with many of the extremely fit stallions bursting with energy, tails up over their backs and snorting. At the big outdoor ring where the basic gaits and dressage portion of the testing was held, one of the 30-day test stallions had to be led by another horse to get into the ring.

Then, Archie came bounding into the ring with a huge trot. He saw the videographer and stopped dead. After a short stare down, he did a 180-degree turn and ran back the way he had come. Estes watched in horror as her stallion slipped and went down. His rider, Alexa, slammed her head into the ground and didn't move. The EMT rushed to the scene and an ambulance was called while Archie was caught and put away. Alexa regained consciousness but was taken in the

ambulance to the hospital for a thorough checkup. After seeing to her horse, Estes and her student, Sandy, raced to the hospital to check on Alexa. Amazingly, the rider walked away with no concussion and a clear MRI. She returned to the testing in time to ride the last horse.

Dana and Sandy got back just in time to see Helmut Schrant ride Archie for his basic gaits and dressage test. Archie scored 7s and 8s for gaits, lower than his training scores of 8s and 9. Rashka was again a scorer with two 8s and a perfect 10 for his canter, followed by Richmond HL with two 8s and a 9 and Wamberto with 7, 8 and 9.

Rudy Leone and European jumper rider Mike Patrick Leiche jumped each of the stallions and graded their jumping under saddle. This portion of the testing provided more excitement. While waiting his turn to jump, one of the stallions suddenly whirled and unceremoniously deposited his rider in the dust. Unharmed, the rider remounted and continued with the testing.

"I was most concerned about the under-saddle jumping," says Estes, "because at the midterm, that was where he got really excited and hot. So I was relieved to see him go well." Archie scored a solid 7, while Rashka scored 9, followed by Rapture R with 8.5.

Cross-Country Day

That night, Archie developed some heat and swelling in the opposite leg from his previous injury. It was poulticed and checked by the vet, and the swelling went down. When Archie trotted out sound the morning of the cross-country phase, Dana had an agonizing decision to make. "It was really difficult, because I know how much he loves the cross-country, and it really would have been his time to shine. But there was still some heat and sensitivity in the leg, and I just knew that if I ran him, he was going to come out of it with a bow, so I pulled him." As with any other injured stallion that completes a sufficient percentage of the test, Archie received the average of all the scores for the other stallions on the portion he did not perform. All the stallion owners then had to wait until the following morning while the final scores were calculated. Regarding her expectations, Estes says, "I think we all go into the testing with the delusion that our stallion will finish in the top five. After I got here and saw all of the other stallions, my expectations were quickly adjusted downward. I was just hoping that he would finish in the middle of the pack with a score of 100. I thought he did OK, but I didn't know."

As Ekkehard Brysch announced the

The Test and Its Officials

In most warmblood registries, after passing an initial in-hand inspection, a stallion is required to prove his performance potential before being approved for breeding. The 100-day Stallion Test was developed as an efficient way to obtain information on a stallion's performance potential early in his career when he can still have a significant impact on the breeding program.

In the stallion performance test, the horses are placed in training with the testing director for 100 days of training and evaluation. At the end of that period, during the final test, a group of outside experts score the stallions. These included **Gerd Zuther**, an American Hanoverian Society (AHS) Mare and Stallion Committee judge and training director at the November Hill Farm Stallion Performance Test from 1987 to 1995; **Cord Wassmann**, president of the German Hanoverian stallion licensing commission; and **Dietrich Felgendreher**, Kentucky trainer, ISR/Oldenburg Inspection committee member and training director for the 1994 Stallion Performance Test at the Kentucky Horse Park.

Ekkehard Brysch, CEO for the ISR/Oldenburg N.A., and **Hugh Bellis-Jones**, executive director of the AHS, managed the 2007 test. Training director was **Helmut Schrant**, a stallion manager who has been active in stallion testing since 1990.

scores in alphabetic order, Dana says the tension was almost unbearable, and she swore never again to buy a stallion whose name begins with W! "I had to wait through all 16 stallions. I thought I was going to pass out." While she waited, Hugh Bellis-Jones came up to her and apologized that they only had one cooler, so they'd have to mail her Archie's cooler. "While I'm looking at him with a blank expression, he says, 'You do know your horse is the highest scoring Hanoverian, right?' And everything from then on was just surreal." Archie was also reserve champion of the testing, the strength of his high scores during the training period overcoming his withdrawal from the cross-country.

The overall test champion was the Dutch Warmblood stallion Wamberto (Rousseau/Voltaire). Rapture R



Rashka ridden by Ken Borden; judges Dietrich Felgendreher, Cord Wassman and Gerd Zuther

(Rotspon/Donnerhall) finished third. Rashka (Raymeister/Opus) won the short test with the highest score of all (only two scores below 8 in the whole test).

Looking back on her experience,

Estes says, “I had always heard how political breeding was, but I’m a nobody in breeding and look how things turned out for me. It’s all about the horse. It was a very positive experience.” 📷

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