

Breeding Totilas

How two small Dutch breeders produced a wonder horse.

By Kyle Karnosh



Breeders Anna and Jan Schuil at their farm in the Netherlands with Lominka (Totilas' dam) and their canine family

To many, it may seem that Totilas burst onto the competition scene out of nowhere in 2009 when he set record-high scores at Aachen and the European championships and then won all three gold medals at the 2010 World Equestrian Games. But breeders Jan and Anna Schuil knew they had something “very, very good” in 2000 as they watched their 2-day-old foal in the pasture. Still,

they could never have imagined how this foal, Totilas, would eventually change their lives and have a major impact on the sport of dressage.

The Schuils live in the village of Broeksterwoude in the Friesland province of the Netherlands. They breed only two mares a year and keep the offspring until they are 6 years old. Jan Schuil says that limiting the number of foals allows them to keep the quality of the raising experience high and do it right. “Handling the foals every day when they are young develops their relationship with people, and that is very important,” he says. By keeping the offspring so long, they can see how they develop and then try to match them to the best type of rider—exactly what they accomplished by pairing Totilas with top Dutch rider Edward Gal.

The Quest To Create a Champion

The Schuils’ odyssey to produce Totilas began 19 years ago, when Jan, a veterinarian, had the opportunity to buy the Dutch Warmblood mare Elsa (she eventually produced Lominka, Totilas’ dam). By Akteur, Elsa was out of Wominka by Pericles xx (xx = Thoroughbred). The

Schuils were interested in Elsa because she was descended through her dam line from Freiminka, a mare from an old Oldenburg line who was imported to Holland around 1950. They knew that horses of the Freiminka line were known for their good temperament, durability and power. Elsa had been for sale for quite some time. Many breeders were not interested in her because she did not have any “predicates,” which are awards given for excellence at a keuring, for performance results or for performance of offspring. Examples are Ster, Prestatie, Keur and Preferent. (Learn more at kwpn-na.org/resources/predicates.php.)

Since they were from the show world, the Schuils approached breeding a bit differently. They liked Elsa’s power, her wonderful friendly temperament and her bloodlines. Her sire, Akteur, combined two foundation stallions of the modern Dutch Warmblood—Amor and Sineada.

The Schuils are dressage enthusiasts, having trained horses themselves. So even though Elsa was bred to jump, Anna trained her to the equivalent of Fourth Level. Elsa received her Ster predicate as a 9-year-old. Later, she earned just about every predicate pos-



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PEDIGREE OF TOTILAS

Totilas KWPN	Gribaldi Trakehner	Kostolany Trakehner	Enrico Caruso, Trakehner Kapstadt, Trakehner
		Gondolla II Trakehner	Ibikus, Trakehner Gloria VI, Trakehner
	Lominka KWPN	Glendale KWPN	Nimmerdor, KWPN Silja, KWPN
		Elsa KWPN	Akteur, Gronigen Wominka, KWPN (Three generations further back on the dam line is Freiminka.)

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Elsa (left) and her 2009 foal (by Hirtentanz) trot past Elsa's portrait. Elsa is the dam of Lominka (right), who produced Totilas in 2000.

sible, including Prestatie, awarded for production of stallions and upper-level competition horses.

When the time came to select a stallion for Elsa, the Schuils chose Glendale based on his bloodlines, even though he was not popular in Holland at the time. Glendale's sire was Nimmerdor, with the Trakehner Marco Polo and the Trakehner/Holsteiner stallion Polaris on

his dam's side. All of these bloodlines had been proven to cross well with the Freiminka line. (One example is John Whitaker's great jumping horse Milton, whose Dutch Warmblood sire, Marius, was by Marco Polo out of a Freiminka granddaughter.)

The Schuils believe Glendale did not live up to expectations in Holland because he was bred to mares whose

bloodlines were not a good match. Although Glendale had mostly jumping blood, he competed in dressage and won the annual stallion dressage competition in Holland. In 1994, he was imported to the United States by Mary Alice Malone's Iron Spring Farm, where he stood until his death in 2002.

The result of crossing Elsa with Glendale

was the mare Lominka, who would become Totilas' dam. Lominka is, according to Jan, "a bit old-fashioned. We wanted something to modernize her, so we looked to Trakehner stallions." The Trakehner breed is somewhat unique in Germany. It is one of the smallest studbooks, yet it is the studbook with the highest percentage of S-level (advanced) approved stallions

WILL BRENTINA HAVE A TOTILAS BABY?

As America's top dressage mare, Brentina (aka Momma), successfully segued from a career as an international dressage horse to that of mother, rumors have been flying regarding the stallions she has been bred to. Her longtime rider, Debbie McDonald, reports that there is no Totilas/Brentina foal on the way, at least not yet. But it's not for lack of trying. She confirms that Brentina was bred to Totilas twice with frozen semen, but both embryo transfers (ET) failed to take.

McDonald and owners Peggy and Parry Thomas decided early on that any foals from Brentina would be by ET. "Her mother died giving birth to one of her foals," says McDonald. That fact combined with Brentina's post-retirement colic surgery made the decision clear. "We just didn't want to risk her for selfish reasons, just to get a foal."

Fortunately, two other ET breedings did produce foals—one by the Hanoverian stallion Damsey and the other by Leslie Morse's late Grand Prix stallion Kingston. Damsey (Dressage Royal/Ritual/Grande) is owned by American Hanoverian breeders Doug and Louise Leatherdale. "The Leatherdales were great," says McDonald. "They offered us any of their stallions. We wanted more leg, refinement and a free foreleg, so we

Tass Jones



Tass Jones



Elma Garcia



From left: Brighton (by Kingston), Dillinger (by Damsey), and Olympians Debbie McDonald and Brentina, a 1991 Hanoverian mare (by Brentano II).

of all breeds in Germany.

Lominka's first foal was a gelding by Balzflug (Habicht/Insterfeuer) named Platini, who competed to Fourth Level dressage and was sold to Finland. Jan felt the cross was a little hot, so the next year Lominka was bred to Anky van

Grunsven's TCN Partout (Arogno/Donauwind). This cross produced Ramon, who was a small-tour horse and was eventually imported to the United States. Still searching for the right combination, Jan and Anna next bred Lominka to the Trakehner stallion Gribaldi (Kostolany/Ibikus), and Totilas was the result. After Totilas was born in 2000, Lominka was bred



Arnd Bronkhorst



Arnd Bronkhorst

Totilas (left) and his sire Gribaldi (right), a Trakehner stallion. Bred by Marika Werner in Germany, Gribaldi also had a successful Grand Prix dressage career under the guidance of Edward Gal.

only to Gribaldi.

American breeders will recognize the pedigree of Gribaldi's sire Kostolany because it crosses two stallions that stood for many years in the United States: Enrico Caruso at Tylord Farms in Vermont and Falke at Yancey Farms in Texas. Kostolany competed at Grand Prix but was even more successful as a sire. In addition to Gribaldi, his many approved

sons include Silvermoon, the sire of Blue Hors Matine, and the popular Dutch Warmblood Polansky. Gribaldi's dam is by Ibikus, and he is, in fact, line-bred to that stallion. Ibikus was German Riding Horse Champion four times and was successful in dressage competitions up to the FEI level. In 1976, Ibikus was sold to Denmark as an improvement stallion and became one of the foundation sires

picked Damsey. She had seen Damsey in Germany years ago and was impressed, especially with his attitude. This breeding produced a handsome dark bay colt named Dillinger.

Pollyrich Farms, a facility that specializes in breeding and ET in Solvang, California, handled the breeding and foaling. After breeding with frozen semen, Brentina had some difficulties with fluid in her uterus, and the breeding manager recommended trying again, this time with fresh semen. Needing a close-by source, McDonald thought of her friend Morse and Kingston based in Southern California. They had toured together when Brentina was competing and frequently did trail rides with Kingston and Brentina. "So I called Leslie, and we said, 'Why not?'" recalls McDonald. Morse

trailed Kingston to Solvang and had him collected for Brentina. "Now, considering [the death of Kingston in 2010], we feel really lucky," says McDonald.

In the spring of 2010, Brighton, a chestnut Oldenburg colt, was the result of this cross, but things did not go smoothly. The colt was so large that he became stuck in the birth canal and had to be delivered by caesarian section. They were unable to save the mare, so Brighton has been raised as an orphan. "We really have to thank the staff at Pollyrich for their handling of everything. They did a great job in a difficult situation," says McDonald.

Brighton and Dillinger are very different foals. "Dillinger is a beautiful colt with textbook conformation. Brighton, well, he's special," says McDonald.

"He's a bit more awkward with a bit of a potbelly from being an orphan, but he's an amazing mover and he has Momma's ears," she says, laughing. She really wanted a colt and is thrilled to have two. They plan to keep both for at least another year to see how they turn out. "It would be great to take them all the way [to Grand Prix], coming full circle," she says. "They're sort of part of the family."

There are no Brentina foals coming in 2011. McDonald admits that it pains her to be separated from Brentina for too long. "She still likes me to ride her every day." But she and the Thomases will try again in 2012 and, hopefully, they will get another Brentina foal (and maybe even one by Totilas). "If it's meant to be, it will happen," says McDonald.—*Kyle Karnosh*

WHAT DOES THE PHENOMENON OF TOTILAS MEAN TO SMALL BREEDERS?

By Mary Daniels

Totilas is the world's hottest dressage stallion. Judges and pundits say he has raised the bar for dressage breeding. Mare owners are lining up to pay his stud fee, said to set a new record, just like his performances. I have been a small breeder with the ISR/Oldenburg registry for more than 20 years and have two mares that I have carefully chosen. I've attended many inspections as participant or observer, regarding them as classrooms, and I've seen how sport-horse breeding in this country has evolved. But I wonder how I can possibly compete. So I queried two top ISR/Oldenburg registry officials: CEO **Ekkehardt Brysch** and Breeding Director **Christian Schacht**.

First, I spoke with Brysch. I asked him: What do I, as a small breeder, do now? His answer: "Nothing that you haven't done before. Totilas is not a horse that you can breed on purpose. This is a once-in-a-lifetime horse for which everything came together—natural aptitude, how he was raised, how he was handled, how he was trained. He is like an Einstein. It is not like what kind of parents can you match to create an Einstein. With the breeding system we have, once in a while a horse like this comes up. Without [our system] a horse like Totilas would never show up."

Must I breed an extravagant mover to make it at the top levels of competition today, I asked? "Yes, that is sort of true in the upper levels," he told me. But Totilas is not alone, he added, explaining to me that there are currently 20 to 30 horses at the top of the sport that are very good movers, and you have to have one of these if you want to be successful in international competition.

Brysch explained that a top horse must have three super gaits and the willingness to be trained. "In Totilas, you have the tip of the pyramid of breeding. As you go down the pyramid, the horses diminish in their abilities, although they still may be of acceptable quality." He said many breeders think every other horse should be a Totilas, but he reminded me that if you have one mare and breed her to the same stallion five times, you will get five different horses. "They may be similar, but you will get a variety—with one horse, the grandmother comes through; with the second horse, the stallion line comes through, and with the third one, the dam line comes through and so on. The same thing with my grandkids—same parents but the kids are completely different. The differences are fun to see and should encourage us to follow this route. Breeders should learn more about good genetic intake and the background of their mares and stallions. This all helps us make better decisions for matches in the future. And once in a while, you have a Totilas."

Many people dream of breeding a Totilas, said Brysch. I am thinking, *Yes, me, too!* But he reminds me that because of his incredible movement, "Amateurs would not be happy on him." He said it may be difficult for Totilas' new owner to find the right rider for him, one who will have the same partnership as Edward Gal achieved. "For any rider who takes on that job, there is no future beyond what the horse has already accomplished." Still, he concludes, "Totilas and a number of others are proof that breeders are doing the right things." He refers to the fact that all the warmblood breeding societies today have more or less the same breeding policy and selection steps. And that is what counts.

I have always enjoyed matching my choices at inspections with those of Christian Schacht, who is also a veterinarian with a master's degrees in both riding and breeding in the German system. I asked him: What is your opinion on how Totilas will change the goals for breeders? "In every generation there will be a Totilas," he said, "or a



Courtesy, Mary Daniels

Christian Schacht (foreground) and Ekkehardt Brysch confer at a keuring.

Rembrandt, who also completely changed the breeding of the dressage horse in his day. There are so many influences that make horses like these. It cannot be a breeding goal. Just sit, look at Totilas and enjoy his trot, even if there is no parallelism of the cannon bones and the lower arm. Be impressed not only by his extensions but also by how relaxed he is, by his extended canter to relaxed walk, his nice piaffe to passage."

Schacht explained that breeders are always trying to produce the perfect horse. "The main focus is rideability," he said. He has written eight books. The latest is *The Equine Conformation System* on the biomechanics of the horse and how conformation affects riding. He has a lot more to say about breeding for biomechanically perfect conformation that leads to a horse that can stay sound for 25 years (but that is a future article on how the breeder can raise his or her own bar). "Since we have the AI (artificial insemination), we have only perfect horses by pedigree," Schacht said. "Remember, 20 years ago to have a horse with an outstanding pedigree, only a few could have such a horse." But not

everyone can do justice to riding such a horse.

According to Schacht, "There are 12 million people in Germany interested in horses and only 3,000 to 3,500 are allowed to go to Third Level and higher," which he said is a minuscule amount. "We have this super education system," he continued. "But maybe 800 to 1,000 people have a master's degree in riding. We have to compete against each other in a very small country. That is why we are so successful."

Schacht said the important thing for small breeders is to have a friend or a judge take a critical look at your mare. If you have a flat, on-the-forehand hunter mare, then it does not make sense to put a dressage stallion to her; it makes more sense to get a show-jumper stallion to get more knee action. "Rubenstein was more highly ranked on his stallion test in show jumping than in dressage," Schacht said. He was very successful in dressage, so everybody with a dressage mare went to Rembrandt to improve the dressage horse."

Don't choose a stallion by name only. Over the years, the Germans have developed a statistical system of the stallion's final scores from the stallion testing (ISR also discloses the results) as well as the results of the parents. "Go only by statistics," he advised. "Think: What do I need to improve my mare? Look at the Internet as a tool. Don't use only the modern stallions. That is how you improve the breeding." He recommended, as a source for statistics, the Web site hengstregister.de, where you can find the final scores of stallion testing. But even this is not a guarantee. "The mare line is so important. Sport-horse breeding is always a dream to make the best better," he concluded.

Dreams do live on, especially for small breeders like myself.

of the modern Danish Warmblood.

Gribaldi himself was a top international Grand Prix dressage competitor under Edward Gal. He was also a successful producer in Holland. As a result, he was given the Keur and Preferred ratings by the Dutch Warmblood studbook, The Royal Dutch Sport Horse (KWPN). In 2008, Gribaldi was named Trakehner Stallion of the Year. In addition to Totilas, Gribaldi sired a number of Grand Prix horses, including Dutch team horses Sisther de Jeu and Anky van Grunsven's mount Painted Black.

Gribaldi sired 16 approved sons, including Hofrat, sire of the Hanoverian stallion Hotline, champion of the Hanoverian licensing in 2005. In a foreshadowing of things to come, Hotline was sold for the record-breaking price of 800,000 euros to Olympic jumping medalist and breeder Paul Schockemöhle in partnership with the Danish Blue Hors Stud.

Two of Gribaldi's approved Trakehner sons now stand in the United States: Kobra von C and his three-quarter brother, Kougat von C. Unfortunately, Gribaldi died in February 2010 from a tear in his aorta, only a few days after retiring from competition.

The Young Totilas

As a foal, Totilas was "very nice in character, a perfect foal," says Jan Schuil. "He was very personable and he liked people. That comes from the Freiminka line. They want to be with people." He was also extremely trainable. According to Jan, "When he learns something, he knows it forever."

Old-time Trakehner breeders will find the name "Totilas" familiar. The Schuils needed a "T" name because, in the Dutch system, all foals from a given year are named with the same first letter. This sequences through the alphabet. So Jan and Anna looked back in the pedigree of their foal and found the famous Trakehner stallion Totilas, who appears twice in the seventh generation and

twice in the eighth. At the end of World War II in Germany, when the Trakehner horses fled East Prussia, the elder Totilas survived the brutal trek to the west and become one of the founders of the modern Trakehner breed. After they had already named him, they discovered that Totila was also a king in the Gothic army in 6th century Italy.

As the modern-day Totilas was started under saddle, the Schuils saw that they had something more than just a really nice horse. "We saw in the training when he was 3 that he could change the dressage world," says Jan.

Under Dutch rider Jiska van de Akker, Totilas participated in the Pavo Cup, an annual competition for young horses under saddle in the Netherlands. To their disappointment, he didn't finish in the top 25. "The judges in Holland never liked him much," says Jan. "He was better liked in Germany and in England."

Totilas qualified for the 2005 FEI World Breeding Dressage Championships for Young Horses in Verden through a special selection. At the championships for 5 year olds, Totilas finished fourth and was the top KWPN horse. After that "everyone was interested in buying the horse," says Jan. "Every day there was a phone call."

Edward Gal was also very interested. Two of his top mounts had recently been sold to the United States: Ravel to Steffen Peters' sponsor, Akiko Yamazaki. And a few months later, his long-time Grand Prix mount, Lingham, was sold to Karin Reid Offield. Looking for a new horse, Gal put together a deal with Moorland Stables to buy Totilas. The Schuils were thrilled, as they thought he was a great match for their stallion, and it would mean he would stay in the Netherlands.

Success, Change & Siblings

The phenomenal success of Totilas has been life-changing for the Schuils. Jan



Another Totilas waiting in the wings? Totilas' full siblings (Gribaldi by Lominka) include Bussard (left), a 5-year-old stallion, and Uusminka (right), a 10-year-old mare, competed by Edward Gal through Prix St. Georges.

says they are constantly contacted by journalists and national magazines, and he went on Dutch TV for the second time in November. Totilas was named 2009 KWPN Horse of the Year and the KWPN granted Totilas Erkend (Recognized) status for his success at the highest level of competition, making his foals eligible for registration. In his first year of breeding, Totilas received an impressive 350 applications from 15 countries. Though only half Trakehner, Totilas promoted the use of Trakehner blood for top quality dressage horse breeding. In 2010, Jan and Anna were awarded the Doruto Memorial, a trophy in recognition of high-quality Trakehner breeding.

Regarding the recent sale of Totilas to Paul Schockemöhle, Jan says: "I feel bad for Edward, but I'm not the owner anymore." He says the original sales contract with Moorland Stables specified that Totilas would stay with Edward until the Olympics in 2012, so somehow the contract was broken. Still, Jan feels good about the horse going to Schockemöhle. "He's a horseman, and we trust him to do the right thing by the horse." Jan doesn't know if Totilas will be used only for breeding or if he will get a new rider. "We have to wait and see just like everyone else."

Totilas may have moved on, but the Schuils have several siblings in the

pipeline. The oldest is his full sister, the mare Uusminka, who has competed with Gal through Prix St. Georges and has returned to the Schuils' farm to start a breeding career. The Schuils also have four full brothers to Totilas: Bussard, Creon, Danzig and Goldregen. (In the years between "U" and "B," Jan says Lominka was competed and not bred.) Bussard is 5 years old and has been started under saddle.

Grandmother Elsa is now retired after having her last foal in 2009 by the Trakehner stallion Hirtentanz (Axis/Kostolany). Hirtentanz, owned by American breeders KD Trakehners, is a jumping sensation in Germany. He is the first Trakehner stallion approved by the Holsteiner Verband since Donauwind, 40 years ago.

As for future foals, Lominka has the year off and Totilas' sister, Uusminka, has been bred to Axis. The Schuil's other foal for 2011 will be by Silvermoon (Kostolany/Mahagoni) out of a TCN Partout/Gribaldi mare.

In recent years, Dutch Warmblood breeding has shifted from breeding a "riding horse" to becoming more specialized—breeding dressage-type or jumper-type horses. Each foal eligible for KWPN registration is assigned a breeding direction and throughout its life is graded only in regard to that direction.

The Schuils dislike the current trend. Jan explains: "We are different from most breeders in Holland. We look to the bloodlines. Other breeders would never use a dressage stallion on a jumping line, but we want to breed an athlete, a dressage horse that also jumps very well. Jumping is related to the power in the canter. If a horse can't jump, you get no canter pirouettes. Also, since the Gribaldi offspring are declared dressage, they don't have to jump. That talent isn't measured, so you don't know. I prefer the German system, where all the talents are measured." Jan feels the system in Holland tries to make a decision about stallions at too young an age, when they are not always mature. "They make a lot of mistakes. In Germany, they pass more and let the breeders decide," he says.

The Schuils like to cross Trakehner stallions with Holsteiner or Oldenburg lines. "We feel that produces the best," Jan says and he points out that Trakehners have been bred for riding-horse qualities for centuries. It is one of the oldest sport-horse breeds. Jan believes that crossing the beauty and riding-horse characteristics of the Trakehner with a warmblood line that has a lot of power produces a world-class sport horse. And, of course, with Totilas, the Schuils have proven their point. 🐾