

PHOTOS: Susan Finnerty



Horses at Elmshorn, curious about their visitors from Ireland

At last year's WBFSH ceremony at Geneva International, where Cavan man William Kells received his event horse breeder award for Mighty Nice, Günter Schemer was also in the spotlight for breeding Chesall Zimequest, the top showjumping horse of the 2016 WBFSH rankings.

Casall jumped five places to finish fourth in the 2016 show jumping sire rankings, while Contendro I was the leading sire in the eventing division.

This year's rankings see the Holsteiner Verband in third (eventing) and sixth (show jumping) places in the studbook rankings. The KWPN has

WHAT THEY SAID

"Even though we Holsteiner breeders have been trailblazers or trendsetters on many topics, we will not jump [on] any bandwagon. For some of you, progress might seem a bit sluggish sometimes, but, let's face it, bustling activity just for its own sake has never achieved anything" – **Thies Beuck**, Holsteiner Verband chairman.

"You have to be critical of your own mares" – **Prof. Dr. Hartwig Schmidt**.

"Nowadays buyers don't ask about mare reports, but if she was in sport" – **Gérard Muffels**.

"It's easier to sell the super horse, and it must be the super horse, for €10 million than one for €5,000. You need 20 times the coffee and schnapps to sell the €5,000 horse! A big price is no deal [problem], they want the super horse" – **Harm Thormählen**.

traditionally ruled the show jumping rankings, yet it is the meteoric rise of other Benelux studbooks such as the BWP, sBs and Zangersheide that was the most remarked-on feature of the various farm visits.

An over-reliance on certain bloodlines – it is estimated that Cor de la Bryere appears in 80% of Holsteiner bloodlines, while Casall and his stallion sons are so popular that they now account for 40% of recent covering statistics is one issue facing Holsteiner breeders.

This and other factors, such as changing global markets, are of some concern to breeders, so it was interesting to note the Verband chairman Thies Beuck's comment in the foreword of its inspections catalogue.

It seems the farmer-breeder of the Holstein region has more in common with Irish breeders than perhaps either realised.

FROM FARM TO FAME

Two days at the colt inspections and Elite auction completed, it was on to the next part of the trip; a series of farm visits. And as it turned out, the itinerary proved tailor-made as it matched up with the top stories from Neumunster.

There was little time for celebrating their Casall filly Catharina's top price



Elmshorn, the former German state stud, now operated by the Holsteiner Verband

of €150,000 at the Elite auction the previous day for the Schmidt family as they were up at 6.30am to prepare for the Teagasc group's arrival.

Like all the stud farms we visited, the yard, featuring a 250-year-old traditional horse barn, was immaculate. German owners evidently take great pride in presentation, with important

details like multi-generation pedigree cards on each stable door and finishing touches, such as equine statues and rose beds.

A modest man – some research afterwards revealed Prof. Schmidt had received the Holsteiner Verband's 2009 breeder of the year award for the European medal-winning mare Corradina – the retired scientist has built up an enviable group of Holsteiner mares.

That mission began after his move from southern Germany in 1974 to be closer to the main breeding heartland.

After an early lunch at a restaurant, where the river Elbe backdrop provided a view of a gigantic cargo ship making its way to Europe's second-largest port in Hamburg, it was off to Hof Thormählen.

EYE-CATCHING

An eye-catching sight there is a life-size statue of Capitol I, the work of artist Heike Landherr, which was unveiled at a ceremony in 2008.

The studfarm's owner Harm Thormählen is an even larger-than-life character with a series of paintings including the Hamburg Derby winner Retina and Cor de la Bryere on display in the indoor school.

Harm, who also co-judged this year's *The Irish Field* Breeders Championship, put several horses through their paces in the school including Sandro Junior, the champion colt at this year's inspections, sold the previous evening for €260,000.

Star of the show though was the retired Fein Cera, bred by him. Courtesy of *YouTube*, several of the group later watched her faultless record on the final day at the 2002 World Equestrian Games in Jerez, where Dermott Lennon won a gold medal, with her regular American rider Peter Wyld.

Another statue greeted us on arrival at Elmshorn, where the foundation sire Landgraf, by the imported thoroughbred Ladykiller, stands in front of this training and stallion station.

Gérard Muffels, its Dutch-born manager, was another to give up his Sunday off after the busy Neumunster sessions and obligingly took Casall out of his stable for selfie sessions with his Irish fans.

It was all light years ahead of the stud's original purpose.

Another realisation, on an equine scale, in the run up to Armistice Day was the fact that as many continental bloodlines, as well as the Irish Draught, were affected by war. Studbook rankings battles and selfies are a better path now.

Next week: Final part of Teagasc Tour

jumping against the clock, saying: "They are racing over the fences, that is not good for the horses, not good for the future."

Thormählen also bred the powerhouse that was Capitol I, the WBFSH leading show jumping sire in 2000 and 2001.

A producer of seven Olympic show jumping horses, he also produced household name stallion sons such as Carthago Z, Dobel's Cento and Carthago.

The entertaining character had a barrage of questions aimed at him, replying "Make expensive horses!" when asked what was his next aim.

"But they must be quality with international potential. My wife says I have too many horses, I say not enough. The

mother family, that is most important. A super horse is very, very sensitive. The rider must love the horse and the horse must love fighting for the rider.

"Belgium is the best in the world, three of the top five studbooks are Belgian: BWP is first, then KWPN, the sBs and Zangersheide. The Belgian horse is not so modern [in type] but has lots of scope.

"Breeding must be difficult; if not, it is no fun," he quoted, adding: "If it is easy, then the men with money, they can all do it. Breeding is not easy."

GÉRARD MUFFELS



IT was the calm after the Neumunster flurry at Elmshorn, as all the Elite auction entries, plus their own group of five colts are prepared in advance for several weeks at this former state stud. A mixture of traditional red brick stables overlooking a courtyard and modern American stabling, plus three indoor schools make up the main complex, with the stallions housed in a separate area.

Stud and production fees fund Elmshorn. "We don't get money from Brussels. Every stone, every hair of the tail is funded by breeders. This old place ... it costs a lot of money!"

The star of the stallion barn is of course Casall, retired full-time to stud this summer at a fee of €3,000, after a story-book win on home ground at the Longines Global Tour Grand Prix at Hamburg. Also in the main stallion barn are Cameron Hanley's former horse Livello and one of the few remaining Cor de la Bryere sons: Corrado.

"In Holstein, once a stallion is approved, it's for life. It used to be different, once a colt was not approved at 2.5 years, they had to be

castrated, but that was 100 years ago. The responsibility now is on the stallion owners to say 'I carry on with him or I stop'. The breeders too will decide of course."

The Verband, unlike the KWPN, does not operate a watch list for stallions. "We were a similar system for three years but then, who is using a stallion that is on a watch list?"

There are two thoroughbred stallions currently based at Elmshorn: Ibisco, sire of Fischerincantas, winner of the WBFSH six-year-old title at the WBFSH young horse championships at Le Lion d'Angers in 2015 with Michael Jung. He covered 14 mares this year, while the Winged Love-sired Armand covered just eight.

Another interesting fact from all the farm visits is that youngstock are routinely X-rayed for bone chips and OCD. At Elmshorn, that is done as foals. "Otherwise, you've bought a foal, fed the horse until the age of two and then find a problem.

"Sending mares into sport costs and embryo transfer depends on how much you can spend. That's the point where the Dutch and Belgians are far ahead of the Holstein. Back with Cor de la Bryere, Landgraf ... it was so easy to sell foals from Holstein, even a foal that wasn't even born yet. It was so easy for the breeders to make money, they could ask any price."