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## Rider of the Month

# GITTE DONVIG

I guess this month's rider of the month, Gitte Donvig was born to ride. Her late father, Gert Donvig was one of our first Grand Prix riders and trainers, and her mother, Mary Hanna is still one of our front line competition riders. At the most recent Dressage and Jumping with the Stars, Gitte showed her mother's young black stallion, Shiraz Black, and took him all the way to the Champion of Champions title.

*You must have been a little bit nervous riding Shiraz Black... Brett Parbery had done most of the work with him, and even with Brett he was sometimes a handful – and I understand he was more than a little bit naughty with you outside?*

Gitte laughs: "I guess he hadn't been to a show since June last year, and being the lad that he is, he was a bit excited to be out. I'm not the bravest

of riders, and I was a little bit nervous about him but in the end, he knew his job in the ring. He gave me a lot more confidence once we went into the arena."

*Do you think it helped that you spent some time at PSI in Germany – where Shiraz came from – and you are into their system?*

"I think it helped that I'd been at PSI and the help that the PSI manager, Ulf Möller gave me at Dressage with the Stars before the competition was invaluable. He is the master of young horse classes, isn't he?"

"The way they ride them at PSI is special. It's not something I'd done for a few years – it was 2001 when I was there, but definitely it started to come back over the couple of days. The way they ride the horses is different – if the horse wants to spook on something, then instead of putting the

horse a little deeper, which is what I would normally do, they get them up and use that nervous energy to show off the paces. It can make them more sparked up than you counted on sometimes, but I was pleased with how it worked and how he behaved himself. I thought he did an exceptional job for such a young horse. He's born to European time, so he's really about half a year behind the others, but he coped."

*What is the approach at PSI?*

"They keep the horses a lot more forward than most of us are used to. It's all about forward and quite 'up'. It's about the reaction, they have to be in front of your leg all the time, and if ever you have a problem with a young horse – and it's mainly young horses that they have there – forward is always the answer. Send them forward, send them forward. Even on a

Monday morning, when the horses had been standing over the weekend, the first thing you had to do was take them out to the racetrack, and get them really awake!"

"They are preparing horses for sale and auctions and young horse classes, so as Ulf explained to me at DWTS, it moves a bit away from accuracy to more showing off the paces."

*There is an awesome professionalism at PSI...*

"It works like a fine oiled machine, there's a lot of horses and a lot of staff and it is incredibly organized. Everything you do is done to a system, the horses are looked after beautifully – especially considering the number of horses. I think it comes down to the people who run the place. Bianca Kasselmann, who is the king of the stables so to speak, she's in

charge of the day to day running of the stables and who rides what horses, she knows the name of every horse and where it is stabled, and they have almost 200 horses. It's the people who make that place work."

"They really know how to put on a show. I just came back from the Hagen CDI, which is their show, and they market themselves and their horses, and create this very special mystique that is PSI."

*The future for Shiraz Black?*

"I've been away for two weeks. Now it is a matter of getting him back in work, and out to a few smaller competitions, and get him behaving himself in the atmosphere – it shouldn't be a problem now I've got the hang of him. I only had six weeks riding him before Dressage with the Stars. We've been discussing the World Champs at Verden, and think that we probably

won't take him because it is such a big trip for a young stallion – it's so risky all that stress. We'd like to stand him at stud, and train him all the way through because he feels like he is going to learn all the work easily, we want to look after him rather than push him out. Hopefully we can win the six year old class next year, then maybe we'll go overseas then...In the meantime, he's looking good thanks to our sponsors, HyGain Feeds."

*And have you suggested to Mary that he might be a nice horse for you to keep riding?*

"At this stage she is cool with that. For the moment I've got the ride but having ridden him, I wouldn't blame her if she wanted him back..."

*Each Eqvalan Gold Rider of the month receives 6 syringes of Eqvalan Gold in recognition of their achievement.*

