

Jessica von Bredow-Werndl

Germany's 29-year-old dressage star talks to **Selene Scarsi** about mental strength, passion over pressure, and finally finding her place on the big-time podiums

JESSICA VON BREDOW-WERNDL is one of the most familiar faces in German dressage and her smile truly household; the face of Pikeur for the past 11 years, she has appeared in most of the equestrian clothing brand's advertising campaigns and catalogues. After a five-year hiatus from international competition following her successful career in junior and young rider divisions (totalling six gold medals and two silvers), she is now back taking the dressage world by storm — finally becoming a familiar sight on senior teams and big-time podiums.

Jessica's classical seat and poised riding style are matched by equally impressive empathy and strength of character. Her innate love for animals led her to turn vegetarian at the age of four and she hasn't looked back.

"I was having dinner and all of a sudden I looked at the sausage on my plate and asked my parents, 'What is this exactly?' Mum replied, 'It's part of a pig.' I stopped eating any kind of meat there and then. Mum followed suit, and my brother a few years later," she says.

It is with elder brother and fellow international grand prix rider Benjamin (Benni) Werndl — "my eyes on the ground" — that she runs Aubenhausen, a training and selling yard near Munich, with the help of their mother, Micaela Werndl.

"Benni is my main trainer; he's a big part of my success," she explains.

Also playing a big part in Jessica's life are her rescue dogs — some of whom she saved from culling stations in Greece and Spain — and this genuine love for animals is reflected in her relationship with her horses.

"I want my horses to be on my side, to want to work for me," she says.

They certainly seem to. Her top ride, Beatrice Bürchler-Keller's black Gribaldi stallion Unee BB, has shown astonishing improvement since joining Jessica's yard, the 14-year-old Dutch warmblood progressing from inter II in 2013 to regular plus-75% scores at grand prix.

Patience is key when working with horses, and is something the German rider needed a lot of during the five years between the end of her under-21 days in 2005 and her breakthrough to seniors.

"You need to have a really strong will. Rather than competing internationally, Benni and I spent five years selling some horses and investing in youngsters, for which we needed to wait."

She admits it was a tough time, especially after such

enormous success as a young rider.

"We decided to go the hard and honest way, producing young horses up the grades. I was very aware that it takes time to develop new horses and that there are no shortcuts, but it was still hard.

"I had some good horses," she adds, citing Renommée 41, the gelding who brought her back to international grand prix after that long hiatus. "They were the few little sparks that kept me going and persuaded me not to give up, but I did lack self-belief at times," she admits. "It is really hard to keep on believing in yourself when you have been away from the top for so long. You inevitably end up with self-doubt — 'am I really good enough?' — but, in hindsight, this was healthy and possibly the most important time in my riding career. I had to take so many steps back and learn to build up horses from three years old to grand prix."

An electrifying 2015

JESSICA is now reaping the fruits of all her labour, determination and patience. Unee BB is catapulting her to the very top with an electrifying 2015 season — a bronze medal at the Las Vegas World Cup finals in April, a season-high of 82.5% at the CDIO Hagen in July, and helping Germany to team bronze at the European Championships in Aachen in August.

Of course, horses need to be sold, which Jessica also does responsibly.

"We decide who the horses go to, that's important for us. We have a responsibility towards them and need to know they are going to the right person. That's what makes buying a horse from us so special. People can trust us — they know the horses are used to living as horses, and go in the field every day and are clear in the head. Keeping them happy and motivated in their work is our main priority," she explains.

Over the years it has brought her enormous happiness to see her horses thrive with their new owners and benefit from a one-to-one relationship with their rider.

"At Aubenhausen, the emphasis is on quality over quantity. We train world-class horses but without excessive pressure. You need to do it with passion," Jessica explains. That, she naturally radiates in everything she does. To finally blossom on the senior stage is a fairytale — and no one deserves it more. **H&H**

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'It's hard to believe in yourself when you've been away from the top'

JESSICA ON...

Fashion

I will leave Pikeur in September to become an ambassador for Hermès, where I will work in brand development.

Exercise

I include yoga, some weight training and jogging in my training regime. Nothing too extreme, but everything regularly, to keep me fit. Riding is more than just sitting on a horse. Weight training helps me be strong enough to have positive body tension, while jogging improves condition. I want my horses to move like a rubber ball, so I need to do the same, or I will disturb them.

Mental strength

I've always found mental training interesting and I've learnt it by myself, through reading. I now have a coach, and find it invaluable to talk about life goals and aims and to have a different perspective — a bird's eye view — from a professional.