

Riding through trust

Manuela Witt's true passion in life is horses. The highly qualified and versatile Swiss horsewoman is a very appreciated instructor all over Europe. She visits Sweden several times a year. With her great commitment and unique style of teaching she makes the rider and the horse work together in the best possible way.

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EVERYBODY HAS A MISSION HERE ON EARTH. MY MISSION IS TO HELP PEOPLE TO BE GOOD WESTERN-RIDERS, MANUELA SAYS WITH A LAUGH, SQUINTING IN THE EARLY MORNING SUN.

Her white smile sparkles and her eyes are tinged with brown and green. She radiates positive energy.

Lucky Rider has met Manuela Witt, many times European champion and professional trainer, in connection with a clinic, hosted by the western riders Catharina and Roger Snäll in the Swedish city of Trollhättan. Here, as well as in several other places in Sweden, Manuela has become a very popular and frequently consulted instructor.

Love what I do

Manuela lives in Switzerland where she works at the riding establishment

Reitanlage Regenbogen in Aedermannsdorf. Here she occupies herself training clients' horses and giving riding lessons. In the weekends Manuela travels all over Europe and has clinics. It is a life characterized by horses from dawn to dusk.

– I am now 39 years old and should be thinking of slowing down but I love what I do, says the talented trainer enthusiastically and, at the same time, she reveals that she lives with a man who doesn't ride but supports her and encourages her in all that she does.

She became interested in horses at an early age. First she concentrated on traditional English riding but, at the age of fifteen, through a friend, Manuela got in contact with western riding for the first time.

I was totally blown away and knew that this was my thing. Every summer for

several years I went to Canada and to the US to learn more and work on ranches. I made valuable contacts and picked up a lot of the knowledge that laid the foundations of my success later in life.

Part of my secret

When Manuela turned 18 she got a pretty Paint Vallack for her birthday, Fancy Pants Leo. With him she learned a lot. They spent many sweaty hours with different trainers in the pursuit of knowledge.

– Today Fancy Pants Leo is 23. He has been the master of many students through the years. Now he is retired and lives with a family who takes very good care of him. But I still own him, she says and her eyes are full of love when she thinks of her old friend.

Just riding in the forrest or working at a ranch was not enough for Manuela. After



THE NORTH



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her first visit to an All-around Painthorse show it all became very clear. This was what she wanted to do, Horsemanship, Trail, Halter, Western riding, Pleasure, Hunter under saddle, Showmanship, yes, the whole lot. The atmosphere at the Horse Shows was irresistible.

Slowly but steadily Manuela went from amateur to professional rider. She raced her own horses and other people’s horses and she started giving lessons.

– I have really done it the hard way, maybe that’s part of my secret. I recognize many problems from my own experiences over the years.

Today she is German champion, Swiss champion, European champion many times over, and also futurity winner in different disciplines. In spite of her qualifications, Manuela is careful always to keep up to date, never to stop.

– There are always things to learn. I go to clinics as often as I can and still go to established trainers in the USA and Canada to learn more.

Think for yourself and find your own answers

What is it that makes this resourceful

lady such a popular and sought-after instructor in Sweden and in Europe?

– Basically I would say that it is because I am so passionate about what I do. Sometimes I almost have to restrain myself. I try to find personal solutions to every individual and I believe that change is possible. To see how things suddenly start happening for a horse and a rider is a wonderful feeling. That’s the reason why I get up in the morning, Manuela says and smiles very convincingly.

She is an exacting teacher, not the kind who stays in the middle and hands out all the answers.

– I help my students to open doors, but he or she has to go through them on their own. I ask the riders loads of questions so that they start thinking for themselves and finds their own answers. Obviously this is a very demanding method, but very important for the rider’s continual growth. You must understand in your heart what is going on. Otherwise you run the risk of riding around out of pure politeness or out of fear of making a fool of yourself if you don’t follow your instructor’s orders. I read a few clever

lines some time ago: going to a horse-trainer who gives you all the answers is like going to a hairdresser who cuts your hair in an unsatisfying way - you don’t say that you don’t like the result, you just don’t come back.

Manuela is undoubtedly on the right track, because even though her students have to think hard and step outside of their ‘comfort zone’ they keep coming back. It is worth every effort when the results start coming. Many of Manuela’s students have been very successful on the Horse Shows around Europe.

Ways that are more simple

Before every clinic she is very careful about finding out what the riders’ wishes are. What they have done, what they want to do, what problems they have and what their expectations are. Manuela then tells them about herself, what she believes in, what is important to her and what her style of teaching is like.

– The participants have paid a lot of money and they have set aside a lot of time. I want them to expect me to deliver

110% of myself and for them to bring home many useful ideas to work on. It doesn’t matter if the student is a beginner or is advanced. As long as they are open, positive and really want to learn something or change something, everybody is welcome. But I don’t instruct children. That kind of work takes a different style of teaching than the one I have.

Her philosophy of training is built upon creating a good relationship between the horse and the rider. With soft methods that are based upon patience and common sense, she tries to get the most of every horse and rider.

– Many riders are afraid of letting go. They don’t trust their horse. ‘They make the horse do something, they don’t ask the horse to do something.’ This is a big problem. As a rider you have to listen to your horse. The horse has to be able to make mistakes and to realise the consequences of these mistakes. Here it is ‘super-important’ that the consequence of a certain kind of behaviour is never rough. In stead – in a plausible way and in a language the horse understands – the rider must simply show the horse that

there are easier ways of doing things. It is important that the horse wants to do his best, and when it does, the rest of the training becomes so much easier.” Go with the horse then make it your idea”, Manuela says, making it sound as if this was the easiest thing in the world.

Dancing and seat give you away

Manuela is very creative and often uses unexpected methods in order to visualise things to her students. For example, in order to make the rider aware of his or her energy, Manuela makes the riders dismount and ask each other for a dance. Pretty soon it is obvious who is the boss and runs the equipment.

As a matter of fact, riding is like dancing and in order to function smoothly there has to be one party who decides where to go and one party who follows willingly. The party who does the latter, the following, should be the horse if things work out properly...

Manuela is a strong advocate of the so called centered riding. To her, the seat is absolutely vital in order to ride well and to influence the horse the right way.

– I would like that every rider started out in the traditional way of riding. There are so many western riders who sit in a ‘chair seat’ and are totally unaware of how wrong the centre of gravity of the horse becomes that way. It doesn’t matter what sort of riding you do, you have to sit correctly, have the right kind of balance and make sure you are not ‘in the way’ of the horse so that it can perform the movements that you want it to do.

Once I had a rider who came to me and wanted to be a western rider. I asked him why? Because it’s much easier, he said. Then you have come to the wrong place, I told him. All my students have to go to the same school, no matter the discipline.

Proud optimist

She looks upon herself as a positive person who looks on the bright side of life.

– To me, the glass is half full, not half empty. I am a very sensitive and a very honest person and I am not afraid of speaking my mind, telling the truth. Unfortunately there are people who cannot handle this and who have used this



Hunter under saddle, Manuela rides one of her clients horses, Majestic Red Shany.

– I fell in love with her at first sight and knew right away that the horse was going to be famous.

against me. I like people a lot, but I trust horses more.

Manuela demands a lot from herself, and works very hard all the time to improve. Yet today she has the ability to be satisfied and to feel proud of what she has achieved so far in life.

– I am happy about my eleven European Champions. And it is great to remember all the horses that were average when it came to character, horses whose potential I noticed and were able to turn into winners, she says.

The mare Jazz Revolution, a quarter with a lot of thoroughbred in her, is part of those happy memories. The first time Manuela laid eyes on her was in the USA fifteen years ago. A pretty mediocre one year old was grazing in the pasture.

– I fell in love with her at first sight and knew right away that the horse was going to be famous. She completely lived up to my vision of a hunter horse. She was going to be mine! I was allowed to buy her and brought her with me to Switzerland. There people said: what is this, she's so thin and skinny!?! Two years

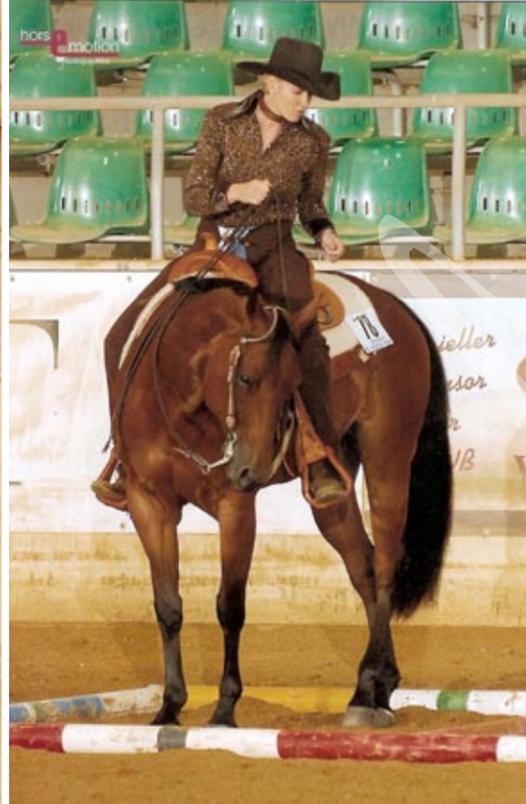
later we became European Champion in Hunter under Saddle. After that, the successes continued for this mare. I suppose I created a trend in Europe because if you look at Hunter horses today there is a lot of thoroughbred in them.

Sources of joy

Working with young horses, especially the difficult ones, is what Manuela finds the most fun and also the most inspiring.

– By difficult I don't mean dangerous, because I am not very good at dealing with those. But the "green" and rowdy ones who are only full of life, who hasn't learned anything and have no bad experiences. It is a joy to experience how these horses "ask questions" and develop every day. It is also wonderful to watch my students getting better and better. Taking part in their joy when they are successful, both when training and competing, that makes me happy!

Manuela's advice to Swedish western riders is to take the opportunity of development that competitions offer.



Trail, Kreuth. Claudia Weiss is the owner of the horse "She's hot and Foxy". Together with this mare Manuela has won the European Championship/ Hunter under Saddle. Photo: Private and Horsemotion

– If you think that somebody is a good rider, say so. Co-operate more, exchange experiences, make new friends and get new ideas. And, most important of all, have fun!

It's time to start dealing with the first lesson of the day on this the second day of the clinic. Eight students, each with his own or her own goals, will be scrutinized by the Swiss horse guru. So, what do they think about their teacher? The answer is unanimous.

– She's a fantastic instructor, she's pedagogical, flexible and dedicated. Sure, she is tough and doesn't give us any ready-made solutions. But that's what this is all about. We have to think for ourselves! What is important to Manuela is that we and our horses improve and every time she visits us she brings along new exciting ideas. Manuela is a true source of inspiration, and the best of it all is that she is coming back in a couple of months!

Info: www.witt-training.ch



Manuela together with Swedish and Norwegian students.

