

Andrea Etter's life-changing visit to Ireland

BY SONJA GROB

PHOTOGRAPHY: CORALINE VALLINI

Since 1992, Andrea Etter has managed and operated Belmont House Stud, situated in the centre of Ireland. Her parents Gerhard and Hedi Etter bought the farm in 1987 and since then it has been a guarantee for quality horses and ponies for professionals as well as for amateurs, according to their slogan 'Breeding and producing future champions'.

Belmont – *An Lios Dearg* in the Irish language, meaning 'the red ring fort' – is a village of just 200 residents in County Offaly, close to the absolute centre of Ireland. Belmont House Stud farm includes an 18th-century manor house, with 30 stables and all the modern facilities typically associated with a thriving modern-day breeding enterprise.

◆ Andrea, you had a promising career as a showjumper in Switzerland, including European championship appearances as a junior and young rider. After apprenticing as a saddler, you left Switzerland for further education with horses in the Netherlands and the United States. What was the reason that you went to Belmont – and the decision to stay?

Basically, the plan was to learn English in Ireland. I came over at the beginning of October, that's 28 years ago. During the winter there were not many indoor shows in Switzerland at the time, so I had the time without competitions and wanted to stay for half a year. At home in our dealing stable it wasn't always easy for me since the horses came in and left again soon when they found a new owner. And here I realised that I could keep the horses for a longer time and in the way I wanted to, with a lot of space and the big fields. And I could still work together with the family, but independently from each other. That was perfect for me.

◆ Besides 30 stables, large loose sheds, the sand and indoor arena, the horse walker and many other facilities you have 80 hectares of land, some your own, some rented. How many mares and stallions are in Belmont?

There are around 30 broodmares, young horses, sport horses, and our four resident stallions. All in all, about 150 horses are at Belmont House Stud, including liveries for clients that keep them here at our farm.

◆ Among all your horses, there are many that are outstanding. One of them is your home-bred stallion Celtic Hero B Z (Calikot Hero - Cricket Z x Caretano Z). Can you tell us something about him?

He is my heart horse, my darling! He is so special for me since I bred him myself, and from the beginning he gave his best and just wanted to please you. He is such an uncomplicated and special horse. I bought his mother as a three-year-old from my friend Aukelien in the Netherlands and she was in foal to Chellano Z. This resulted in the mare Carolina B Z, who is now back here again as a broodmare. I still have Celtic Hero B Z's mother Cricket Z and another



Andrea Etter with Celtic Hero B Z (Calikot Hero)



Belmont House Stud

sister (Cera Cara B by O-Piloth) in our breeding program.

Calikot Hero, Celtic Hero B Z's sire, whom we leased for one breeding season was bred by Luc Henry (Belgium). When Luc saw Celtic as a foal, he really liked him and we did a deal for a half share. Celtic was sold to the United States as a six-year-old and is being ridden successfully by Heather Caristo Williams up to 1m40. Frozen semen is available from us and his offspring are showing his exact same characteristics. They are very careful, easy to work with, nice types, horses that always want to perform at their best. I visited Celtic this spring and was very pleased to see him, he has a special place in my heart!

◆ You are also more than proud of Mr Lincoln B (Aganix du Seigneur - Lucy in the Sky B x O-Piloth), another a homebred stallion. What's the reason for this?

Mr Lincoln B's great-grandfather Wandango was my father's favourite horse. Wandango's first product was a mare called Wandonga, successful to 1m60 level with my brother Daniel, and Cameron Hanley. After her competition career Wandonga came to Belmont House Stud for breeding and is the grandmother of Mr Lincoln B. As a yearling I sold Mr Lincoln B to Tanja, a German friend of mine. Tanja left Mr Lincoln B with us and entrusted us with his education and his stud duties. I always believed in him, he won some major competitions as a three-year-old, including 'The Young Irelander' at CSI Millstreet.

Recently he was bought by Studfarm Zangersheide and

will be ridden by Christian Ahlmann. I am really looking forward to see this combination in the ring together. To have bred such a stallion subsequently sold to the famous Zangersheide Stud and getting the opportunity to compete with such a top rider is a great pleasure for me. I am very pleased to have Mr Lincoln B's full brother, the five-year-old Mr Quincy B standing here at Belmont House Stud. Mr Quincy B is already a winner at three and four years of age, including the four-year-old finals at CSI Mullingar and the preliminary final at CSI Cavan.

◆ And not to forget, Stetter (Manhattan - Nicole x Goodtimes). He is also well known in your home country as Swiss rider Claudia Gisler competed him to 1m55. She competed him from the age of five to 14. How is he doing?

He had an injury at the age of 14 and then came to Belmont House Stud to stand at stud. Stetter had sired the successful 1m60 jumper Wetter before his competition career. The oldest of his Irish offspring are now six years old, and show his attributes, they are very careful and competitive, they are all very motivated, they want to win. Stetter is doing very well at the age of 21.

◆ We could fill pages about all your horses, but there is a newcomer that lately joined your stud. Can you tell us something about Stockholm van't Roosakker Z (Stakkato - Quasibelle du Seigneur x Rubens du Ri d'Asse)?



Stockholm was bred by the Belgians Marc Kluskens and Luc Henry, from the damline of Glocks London, Golden Hawk and many more 1m60 performers, probably one of the strongest mother lines in the world. Stockholm was approved as a three-year-old in Zangersheide and we have leased him for this season, I'm looking forward to see his foals born next year.

For three seasons we had Ganesh Hero Z here at stud, bred by Gerry Marron and Luc Henry, from the famous Belgian mother line of Usha van't Roosakker, by Gemini xx, the clone of Gem Twist xx. After two successful jumping seasons here in Ireland, Ganesh Hero Z is now competing in Belgium. We have frozen semen in stock and are expecting a good few foals from him again this year.

◆ Since we made this interview in April, the first few foals have been born. How many are to follow?

Five have been born, so far, all by Ganesh Hero Z, in total we are expecting 25 foals this season. The 2020 foals we are expecting are from Mr Quincy B, Ganesh Hero Z, Quartz Rouge and Kassander van't Roosakker.

◆ All this, of course, means a lot of work, yet you manage everything by yourself with regarding to breeding and reproduction. But also administration, sales, marketing, and coaching your riding students. How many employees help you with all the work?

Yes, there is a lot of work, I definitely won't get bored. I have a great team of people helping me, including my partner Seamus who helps wherever he can.

During some of the breeding seasons we have a repro-vet here at the farm, other than that we have about four employees working with the horses.

◆ For generations your family in Switzerland has been well-known in the

international horse world. The main quarters are located in the Berne canton, and your brothers are also successful. Daniel is an international showjumper, trades horses, is a showjumping commentator on Swiss television, and Marc has his company 'Etter Events'. Besides horse trading he offers timing equipment and fence material for hire and for sale. I assume you work closely together, sending promising horses to Switzerland?

Exactly. We work very closely as a family, along with my parents Gerhard and Hedi and my brothers. Some of the home-bred 'B' horses (all Belmont-bred horses carry the 'B' suffix) go to Müntschemier to be sold from there. For amateur clients from abroad especially, we offer guest rooms here at our farm so they can come and see which horse suits them best. They can get to know a horse over a period of time, ride it out on the cross-country course, jump a course of fences. Some of the other horses and ponies are sold here in Ireland.

◆ Together with your two sport horses Utopia and Candyman, you brought your Minishetty with you to Ireland. It was a very sad day for you in January this year, when Marylou died at the age of 35. You still have her best friend Allagh B, the 25-year-old donkey, that was born on your farm. How is she doing without her best friend?

Like Marylou did, Allagh walks everywhere freely around the stables. But she is not alone, we have Cheeky B and Princess B, two small Shetties (Shetland ponies) bred here at the farm, they are her little friends. And since Allagh walks around she is very connected to all the people here. So when she wants attention she will let you know, and believe me, her voice is not to be overheard! ■

For any further information about Belmont House visit the homepage: www.belmonthousestud.com