

Kindly Handling the Resistance

By Karin Reid Offield

I remember the day like it was yesterday. Mike and Katie Etherly and I were at the August Waterloo Dressage Show in 2003. My first Grand Prix was scheduled late in the day at 6:30 p.m. It was a perfectly warm Michigan afternoon. There were bugs flying around. The sun was angled behind C, and the long rays were hitting the hillsides where the spectators were sitting. This scene is etched in my memory.

I was lucky to find Tiamo Tracadero (by Trapper)—a 16.3-hand Hanoverian stallion who had done the 100-Day Test. Mike Etherly and I had shopped in Europe extensively, and when Bernard Ix showed us Tiamo, for me, it was love at first sight. The reserve horse for the English Olympic team in Sydney, he was quite simple to ride, light in the bridle and, boy, was he flashy. I knew that we'd stand out, no matter what. Buying stallions was also a matter to consider. Tiamo was licensed by the German Hanoverian Verband, approved by the American Hanoverian Society and the North American and German Oldenburg organizations.



The Hanoverian stallion Tiamo Tracadero was Karin Offield's first Grand Prix horse.

Tiamo and I had been going up the ladder from Prix St. Georges to Intermediaire II, and now I was ready to try the Grand Prix. I had been schooling all the movements since I had purchased him—but sometimes, not when I wanted to. I remember one day trying to ask him to trot. All I got was piaffe! Mike laughed and laughed and said, “Someday, Karin, you will understand how funny this is.”

So there I was, in front of Gary Rockwell and Dr. Max Gahwyler in Arena One. Dr. Gahwyler was tough on me that day. That forwardness I was finding so elusive was evident only in the extended canter (I got a 7), the flying change of lead (7), the flying change of lead between pirouettes (7) and the final halt at X (7). My piaffes and passages were 3s and 4s. My pirouettes and tempis were 4s and 5s. His final advice was for me to develop more expressive passages and piaffes. Wow!

Gary liked my collected canter work and gave me 7s. As the judge at C, he liked my entrance. The zigzag that hadn't gone so well was given a 3 and, in the end, I received 36 scores below a 6. Oh, have I forgotten to mention that I did my last extended trot to P instead of F? That error cost me two points. My score was 54.167 percent, and it earned me a fourth place ribbon. I was happy. In fact, I was deliriously happy. I knew that I could do it! I knew I had a ton of

work to do, but those two judges saw me on my way. They gave me their time and attention, and I listened.

Years later in Florida, I was training with (six-time Olympian) Robert Dover as Tiamo and I went into our last Grand Prix together. Gary Rockwell, Col. Alfred Kitts and Gen. Jonathan Burton awarded us lots of 7s, but I still got some low scores here and there. I hadn't mastered piaffe yet, as I was unable to sit still, yet here I was back in the Grand Prix arena trying again.

In one of the tests, Gary said I had “kindly handled the resistance,” and his words have stuck with me since then. That's exactly what I have wanted to be—a rider that is well-mounted, is educated by the best teachers and is thoughtful and kind to my horses. I will never forget my first Grand Prix ride or my last. I am thankful that these wonderful horses are so trainable and forgiving. Dressage is certainly not easy, but if you pay attention to the details, have great persistence and sit correctly in the saddle, you will succeed in mastering your art.

Today, I am still riding and am also in the breeding business. I bought Tiamo at age 15 and rode him until he was ready to retire and stand at stud. During his quarantine, he had sired a colt named Trenton that I found this last summer in New Jersey. I put Tiamo's blanket on him yesterday, and it fit just perfectly!

Karin Reid Offield has been a tireless promoter of the sport of dressage, including the 2005 FEI World Cup Dressage Final. She has worked with classical trainers, including Jean Bemelmans and the late Egon von Neindorff. With Hexagon's Louisville, she earned the 2006 USDF Adult Amateur Grand Prix Horse of the Year and the 2006 USDF All-Breeds Award (KWPN-NA) Adult Amateur Grand Prix Horse of the Year. Her Offield Farms is located in Harbor Springs, Michigan—offieldfarms.com.