

IDOCUS

All-Around Sport-Horse Champion

A look at the career of a remarkably
versatile achiever

BY SCOTT HASSLER



CALIFORNIA DREAMING: Idocus (who now resides in the Golden State) and his most enduring partner, rider Courtney King-Dye, at the 2008 US Olympic dressage trials in San Juan Capistrano

SHARON FIBELKORN/HORSESTOCKBIZ

When sport-horse breeders talk about success stories, the Dutch Warmblood stallion Idocus is usually mentioned.

Not many horses have such an influence on the sport, both in performance and as breeding stock. From winning his 100-day stallion testing as a three-year-old to competing in an Olympic Games and two FEI World Cup Dressage Finals, Idocus (Equador – Eretha, by Zonneglans) has been at the forefront of the sport. His wins at Grand Prix are too numerous to mention, and he has sired multiple champions in both dressage sport-horse breeding and performance competition, including approved sons.

I met Idocus as a three-year-old at his stallion testing, and I have had the opportunity to follow this remarkable stallion throughout his career. The details of his character, abilities, and accomplishments are illuminating for any sport-horse enthusiast who seeks to breed or buy a horse with great potential. In this article, I would like to use Idocus's career as an educational point—not just a story about how wonderful he is, but a detailed look at how and why this stallion has been so successful.

Precocious Beginnings

Idocus was born in the Netherlands in 1990. His owner, Christine McCarthy, of Mt. Kisco, NY, who also owns his dam, imported him as a weanling.

Idocus did not do the typical young-horse breed-show classes or things of that nature. He was raised in the fields of Chris's Royal Starr Farm in Bedford, NY.

Here is where the first rare, unique situation occurs for Idocus. In 1993, he was sent to the 100-day stallion performance testing at November Hill Farm, Keswick, VA, as an unbroken three-year-old. Although sending an unbroken colt to a stallion testing is not recommended, Idocus performed everything required of him: jumping a course of approximately 3'6"-3'9"; walk-trot-canter dressage with some lateral work; galloping and jumping cross-country; and free-jumping. The 100-day testing is demanding, and Idocus was started and did all that was required of him, all at the age of three.

The stallion performance testing is where I got to know Idocus. I was a guest rider at the testing, which meant that I was invited to ride the stallions for the last three of the 100 days. I was to evaluate and ride all the stallions for a few minutes to give a ridability score.

As I watched Idocus with other riders and then when I rode him, I realized that he was a very special horse. What impressed me was his character: He was so kind yet alert.

He was a horse that caught your attention; he was confident within himself but not cocky. He jumped beautifully and moved nicely; his natural balance, self-carriage, and athleticism were outstanding for his age.

I considered myself fortunate to become Idocus's rider after the testing concluded, and I rode him through the end of his six-year-old year.

The Young Prodigy

Idocus amazed me with his trainability and desire to work. In my short time with him, I showed him up through the levels, competing him through Fourth Level. As far as I can recall, I don't think he ever came in second in any class he entered. He was wonderful at horse shows, and he was great to train.

Idocus loved to be ridden. Therefore, our sessions were really just playing with him. There were never hard days of training; it was only cherishing and trying to bring out and utilize his desire to work. Because of his playfulness, he never thought the work was difficult.

As a young horse, Idocus was not tremendously fit in his back, making his workouts very short in the early years. At horse shows, I would warm him up for about ten minutes—literally out of the stall—and then go do a test. He was fresh, and he loved to go out and perform before he got tired. He would go into the ring focused, athletic, and totally in the game. As he reached the age of five or six, he was more fit, his back was stronger, and he had more stamina. Still, he did not need the standard 30-minute warm-up before tests. He was at his best with a ten-minute warm up and then right into the ring.

Another of Idocus's exceptional traits was his beautiful canter in both jumping and dressage. He demonstrated extraordinary lightness, self-carriage, balance, and expression. Often we think of young horses as having or needing huge gaits, but Idocus did not have a huge trot. His was very classic—efficient in movement, active through the back, with a very nice hind leg and knee—but it was not this stunning trot where you would go, "Wow, I have to have that!" But it was a very nice trot, and I think more riders need trots like this, instead of those huge trots with so much power and expression that they could be hard to train. I should mention that Idocus's walk was also very good.

Breeding Stallion

The only breed show Idocus ever attended was Dressage at Devon (PA) in 1994, where I showed him in hand for his owner, Chris. Idocus was the DAD breed-show grand



TOP TO BOTTOM: TERRI MILLER, PHELPSPHOTOS.COM

DEVON, PART 1: *At his first Dressage at Devon, in 1994, Idocus (with handler Scott Hassler) was the breed-show grand champion*

champion that year, and a successful career as a breeding stallion soon followed.

Right away, Idocus was very popular as a breeding stallion. With fifteen years' worth of offspring to evaluate, we can now see that Idocus was not only an incredible sport horse and performance horse but also an outstanding sire of both jumpers and dressage horses. Among his best-known offspring are the stallion Olivier, winner of the 2007 Brentina Cup and now competing at Grand Prix; and the stallion Opus, who has consistently ranked highly in USDF's sport-horse-breeding statistics.

New Riders, New Horizons

Toward the end of his six-year-old year, it was decided that Idocus needed to be closer to home in New York state, where Chris could handle his breeding. I recommended that the horse be sent to my good friend, the respected rider and trainer Lendon Gray.

After Idocus arrived at her Gleneden Dressage in Bedford, NY, Lendon phoned me to say that Idocus was a dream to ride and to thank me for recommending her. I felt good that the transition had gone smoothly and that Idocus was moving on to the next phase of his career.

In the late 1990s, when Lendon took over the ride on Idocus, a teenager named Courtney King was a working student at Gleneden Dressage. Lendon allowed her working student to exercise the stallion occasionally, and over time

Courtney began to school Idocus under her mentor's supervision. Later she would take over the ride altogether.

Because Courtney and Idocus were paired as recently as last year, when their last major competition was the 2008



NEXT PHASE: *Idocus competing with his second regular rider, Olympian Lendon Gray, at Dressage at Devon (PA) in 1998*



DEVON, PART 2: In 2006, *Idocus* returned to Dressage at Devon to win the Grand Prix under Courtney King

US Olympic dressage trials, some dressage enthusiasts may not realize that there was a break of several years in their partnership. In 2001, *Idocus* returned to the Netherlands, where he was approved at a KWPN (Royal Dutch Warmblood Studbook) stallion testing. Under Dutch rider Marlies van Baalen, *Idocus* competed extensively in Europe, with wins at several prestigious shows. He competed with van Baalen for the Netherlands at the 2004 FEI World Cup Dressage Final and at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

In 2005, *Idocus* returned from Europe and was reunited with Courtney. I began supporting her as a fresh set of eyes, and it was a pleasure to see horse and rider together again. It brought me great pleasure to occasionally see them at Lendon's and to watch them progress. Courtney and her longtime trainer, Lendon, did a fabulous job with the horse.

From there, *Idocus's* many fans know his high-profile accomplishments. With Courtney (later Courtney King-Dye) in the saddle, *Idocus* won the 2006 Grand Prix at Dressage at Devon, making him the first horse to win a DAD breed-show grand championship and later to return to win the GP at that show. This win was a personal highlight for me, as this was a great moment for American dressage: to see a horse win the in-hand championship at Devon and then later to watch that horse come back and win the Grand Prix at the same show.

Idocus went on to compete for the US at the 2007 Rolex FEI World Cup Final. In 2008, he contested the US Olympic dressage trials. (Although *Idocus* did not make the team, Courtney did, aboard her other mount, Harmony's Mythilus.)

Another Chapter

In December 2008, *Idocus* began a new phase of his life when he arrived at the well-known sport-horse breeding

facility DG Bar Ranch, in Hanford, CA. *Idocus* is standing at stud at DG Bar and, in his typical multifaceted fashion, is remaining active in performance, this time teaching junior rider Ashlyn DeGroot the ropes of upper-level riding. But

Lendon Remembers *Idocus*

How lucky I was to have *Idocus* come into my life. From the beginning, he was so much fun to ride: such a cheerful horse; so willing to work; so supple to ride.

Idocus thought he was the head stallion at my four-stable facility (53 horses total). He always knew immediately when a new horse was on the property and informed anyone who was willing to listen. Yet many times he would breed in the morning just before going to a show, and he was always a perfect gentleman at the shows.

When I had to give up riding, he made it very hard. Who would want to give up such a fun horse to ride and train? But he stayed "in the family" when my longtime student Courtney took over.



HEAD HONCHO: *Idocus* was the self-appointed top stallion at Gleneden Dressage, according to Lendon Gray

at the age of nineteen, breeding is becoming the focus of the stallion's career.

It is rare to find a horse that has stayed healthy and sound through his entire career. Idocus was able to breed and show throughout his sixteen-year career. Good management was

in place to allow him to handle both breeding and showing; many stallions cannot do both, especially handling the number of breedings while showing.

In closing this article, I thought it was important to showcase this exceptional horse and to look at why and

Courtney Remembers Idocus

I had the privilege of riding and being a part of Idocus's life from when he was six until eleven and again when he was fifteen until nineteen. We did our first Grand Prix together when I was 22 and he was ten.

I don't know how I got so lucky to play the role that I did in that amazing horse's career. When he arrived at Lendon Gray's as a six-year-old, I had never seen anything like him. Lendon trained him and showed him up to Intermediate. In the beginning, as a working student for Lendon, I had the honor of just hacking him and galloping him in the fields. Eventually that grew into starting him for Lendon, and as time passed, Lendon trained the two of us from the ground. I don't know how she convinced Christine McCarthy, his owner, to let this young, completely inexperienced kid take over the ride on such a special horse to make his debut at Grand Prix, but I have never gotten over my great fortune in that decision. I was his rider and his groom, and our relationship was as special as one can be between horse and human.

There could be no greater horse to learn on. Between Scott Hassler and Lendon, Idocus's training up to that point was impeccable, and the special thing about Idocus is that he allows you—and forces you—to ride subtly. He is so sensitive, and so willing, and he hates to be niggled at. He taught me the power of balance and quietness so that only small aids were required. And he had a very strong sense of justice. If he understood you and he thought you were being fair, he would always say yes. There could be no greater teacher, even as we learned together.

Out of the saddle, too, Idocus taught me a great deal. He is the smartest and most emotionally aware horse I have ever met, and a relationship with him was incredibly fulfilling. He could hold a grudge, put you in your place, or lighten your spirit when you were down.

Chris made a great deal of sacrifice in order to let this horse achieve his success in sport. "Idy" is a super breeding stallion, and he could have been



CIRCLE OF TRUST: *King and Idocus at the veterinary inspection at Dressage at Devon 2006*

successful at that without being a top sport horse. I can assure you, when I was competing him, I wished she wouldn't breed him at all! However, in reality, she allowed him to be great at both of his careers—a balance that is not often achieved in the US—and the whole of our sport should celebrate that.

As for Idy's departure from me, I must admit that I was initially heartbroken. I wanted him to stay with me; I didn't want him to have to have another job. In a typically vain human mindset, I thought, "But he loves me. He won't be happy somewhere else." How ridiculously self-centered of me. Idocus has always loved an adventure. He is well cared for, worshipped appropriately, and has a lovely quiet rider to grace his back. Not to mention that his main job is breeding! Another lesson Idocus taught me: Regardless of how much we try to humanize them, horses' worlds are much simpler than ours. Treat them well and with respect and make their lives fun and interesting, and they are happy. And I am so happy that Idocus has found another perfect match, and that he will be able to teach another talented young rider the wonderful lessons he taught me. I cannot think of a more perfect happy ending.



NEW PARTNERSHIP: *Idocus and the teenaged Ashlyn DeGroot giving a demonstration at the 2009 KWPN-NA meeting*

how he became such an asset to equestrian sport. Idocus is a shining example of a long run for a horse with such a diversified career of breeding and sport, and athleticism in both jumping and dressage. What stands out for me is his soundness throughout his long career, and his trainability and ridability. He had a great demeanor; he wanted to work; he was easy to ride, in terms of light in the contact; he always had a nice energy in front of the leg and was comfortable. Idocus embodies the “whole package.” Let’s celebrate him now while he is still in the game. ▲

FEI-level trainer and competitor Scott Hassler chairs the USDF Sport Horse Committee. He is the USEF national young-horse coach and a member of the USEF Dressage and Breeders Committees. He is the director of training at Hassler Dressage at Riveredge, Chesapeake City, MD.

Christine Remembers Idocus

I picked up Idocus at the Newburgh, NY, quarantine facility in November 1990 when he was just five months old. I took him off the trailer and placed him in a stall. He immediately ran to the back of the stall. He was not approachable and was very uneasy. It took me approximately one week of sitting in the doorway of his stall (with grain, of course) to finally get him to approach me. Once he realized I was not going to hurt him, he began to trust me. The one thing I can say about Idocus is that, as long as he trusts you and he’s happy, he’ll give 110 percent.

I’d been breeding horses for ten years before Idocus came along, and I must say that he has been the most intelligent horse I’ve ever worked with. Guiding his career was never easy. Finding appropriate riders and trainers is always a task. I am fortunate that every trainer and rider who had the opportunity to ride Idocus added another dimension to improve the total picture. I thank all who have contributed.

It has been a daunting task trying to balance Idocus’s breeding career with an international showing career. Breeders get upset if a horse is unavailable due to competition, and riders get upset if you breed during the competition season—and the two inevitably overlap at the most inopportune times.

My approach has been this: Stallions are meant to breed, and they are happy and relaxed when they breed. Idocus has a phenomenal work ethic when he’s happy, so it makes perfect sense to keep the competition stallion happy. Yes, things can go wrong, and there are risks, and this scenario may not work for every stallion, but for Idocus it did and still does.

Idocus is still breeding and still competing, albeit not at the same rigorous level, but he loves to work. He is not the type to retire and be put to pasture, being used only for breeding. I owe it to Idocus to have him do what he likes to do: breed and work. I am so pleased that he is continuing the last leg of his journey at DG Bar Ranch. Idocus and his new rider, fifteen-year-old Ashlyn DeGroot, are a perfect match. He has made me so proud over the years, and now that he is a Breyer horse for 2009, that is just the icing on the cake.

Christine McCarthy, Idocus’s owner and breeder, has been successfully breeding Dutch Warmblood horses for 30 years. She is currently the chair of the KWPN in North America.



FULL OF PROMISE: *Idocus as a yearling*