

# The Petite Warmblood

Meet the German Riding Pony. Third in an occasional series on ponies in dressage

BY MELISSA MULCHAHEY



**COMPACT EYE-CATCHER:** *The champion German Riding Pony stallion Golden State NRW, owned by Melissa Mulchahey*



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**W**hat looks and moves like a warmblood but wears a 70-inch blanket? A German Riding Pony! The Germans have been breeding and showing these “fun-sized” dressage and jumping dynamos for the past 40 years, and over the past decade American dressage riders and breeders started following suit. Let’s take a look at the history of the breed and a couple of “pony addicted” USDF members and breeders.

## Breed History

The development of the German Riding Pony (GRP) began in the mid-1960s, primarily in the warmblood-breeding areas of northern Germany. Breeders and trainers saw a need for a large pony with athletic ability and a temperament suitable for children to compete in dressage, eventing, and jumping. The goal was to maintain the pony character, type, and willingness to perform along with the competitive athleticism of the full-sized riding horse, but in a smaller package.

Early cross-breeding attempts between local farm ponies and Arabians or small Thoroughbreds to produce a sport pony were not successful. In the 1970s, breeders began importing British ponies—primarily Welsh and New Forest—for use as foundation stock. By 1975, a recognizable and consistent pony type was established. Ongoing efforts have resulted in the development of a modern pony that is athletic, elegant, and intelligent, with a good disposition and suitability for small adult riders and children.

According to Westfalia breeding director Wilken Treu, “In Germany, we need ponies to start the relationship between children and horses, especially at the beginning of riding. The pony competitions are open to children up to sixteen years, and it is the plan to bring children into horse sport with small horses that they can handle so that they keep having fun with riding and develop a love for the sport that lasts even as they are grown up. There has been a newer development during the last years—that smaller adults like to use ponies for riding as well due to their good character.”

As with the warmblood breeding structure, pony studbooks were developed in each breeding district, and formal inspection and approval processes for breeding stock were established. The Westfalen and Oldenburg (Weser-Ems) studbooks are the most successful and largest breeding regions for ponies in Germany today.

## Breed Standard and Inspection Process

The German Riding Pony should stand between 138 and 148 cm, or approximately 13.2 to 14.3 hands, without shoes (up

to 149 cm with shoes). The athletic and refined quality of a riding horse that retains the pony type is essential. The desired breed type includes a small head, large and lively eyes, small ears, a clean throatlatch, a long and well-set neck, pronounced withers, and an athletic topline and croup.

In order to be accepted as breeding stock, stallions and mares must be presented for inspection. In Germany, licensed stallions receive a two-year provisional breeding approval. They then must complete a two-day test in addition to either successfully completing a 30-day performance test by the end of their four-year-old year, or competing successfully at the *Bundeschampionate* (German National Championships for Young Horses).

Most GRP breeding organizations in the US now sanction the North American Stallion Test at Silver Creek Farm in Oklahoma as the official stallion-testing site, including a scaled-down version specifically for pony stallions that is administered in accordance with the official Germany Equestrian Federation standards.

## The GRP in the USA

Two US-based breeders and importers laid the groundwork for today's GRP breed in our country. Klaus Biesenthal imported the first GRP stallion, Makuba, to his Bell Oaks Farm in Freeport, IL.

"Makuba was bred by my father, who with a friend helped start the GRP in Germany," Biesenthal says. "I want-

ed a pair [of ponies], so in 1998 I decided to bring six of these ponies over, thinking to sell some and keep two. Well, within six weeks they were all gone! So then I talked Dad into letting me have Makuba."

The other early GRP supporter, the late Nancy Ferebee, imported three stallions in the early 2000s to her farm in Alpharetta, GA, and played a vital role in early breeding efforts.

Other sport-pony supporters have continued the effort that Biesenthal and Ferebee began. One, Audrey Maschue, says that she became involved with the GRP breed "by chance" after a combined-driving client asked her to help with his ponies' driven dressage by training them under saddle.

Maschue, who stands two GRP stallions and manages a pony-sales barn at her Xanadu Dressage in Loxahatchee, FL, says that she's noticed two trends: an increase in the number of mare owners who are booking breedings to GRPs, and greater interest in sport ponies from both adult riders and children who are getting into dressage.

## Big Things in Small Packages

German Riding Ponies have personality, physical hardiness, and super ridability. They are sensible, confident,

## Meet the Pony Expert

**M**elissa Mulchahey, a USDF silver medalist from Livermore, CA, discovered the German Riding Pony on a buying trip for her RoseLane Sporthorses. She bought a GRP for herself to ride, and in 2011 she made headlines with the purchase of the 2009 Westfalen pony stallion Golden State NRW (by FS Golden Moonlight). Based in Germany at the time, "Goldi" stood at stud for two years and also won the *Bundeschampionate* in 2012—a first for an American owner. After his import to the US last year, the palomino stallion won the 2014 Adequan/USDF First Level Horse of the Year title under rider Kelly Casey.

In 2013 Mulchahey purchased a second Westfalen pony stallion, the 2011 cremello Golden West (by Golden Dream). Golden West went on to win the 2014 *Bundeschampionate* and is currently competing and standing at stud in Germany.

Mulchahey is a member of the USEF/USDF Pony Task Force.



PONY ENTHUSIAST: Mulchahey with the latest addition to her GRP lineup, the nine-year-old FEI-level Holsteiner pony stallion Petit Marc Aurel (by Monte Christo)

COURTESY OF MELISSA MULCHAHEY



PONY PAIR: German Riding Pony breeder/trainer Audrey Maschue with her breeding stallions, *Hilkens Go for Gold* (by FS Golden Highlight) and *Highlife's Bulgari Boy* (by Bodyguard)

smart, and quick to learn—in short, they combine the positive attributes of the pony breeds with the athletic ability of the sport-horse breeds, but without the infamous “pony attitude.” To anyone who’s looking for a great competitive mount in a smaller package: We encourage you to check them out! ▲

*Editor’s note:* This article is the latest in an occasional series on ponies in dressage. This series is a collaborative effort between the United States Equestrian Federation Dressage Committee and the USDF, both of which believe that ponies play an important role in dressage, especially in fostering interest in our sport among children.

We’re going to Las Vegas!

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