



I decided to attend the winter auction in Verden, Germany, for several reasons. An earlier trip convinced me you could find a nice young horse, well started in the basics, for a reasonable price. (Indeed, I had hoped to buy a young mare last December but she didn't vet.) Similar horses about which I inquired in the United States seemed overpriced in comparison. Additionally, I thought it would be more cost effective to spend a week in Germany and see many horses in one place rather than to travel to several states over many weekends to see one or two horses on each trip.

The idea of buying at auction, even in a different country, did not daunt me. I wrote about the major Thoroughbred auctions for many years and know much about the game. I have looked at thousands of horses for aesthetic pleasure, so I have a pretty good grasp of conformation. Another selling point: the Verden auction horses all undergo a fairly extensive veterinary examination. Their X-rays are available for review and for e-mail to vets back home.

I had definite criteria, not least of which was type of horse to suit my adult amateur needs and skills, price range, and general comfort level with the endeavor. I accepted that I might come home empty-handed. My husband, Rogers, encouraged me to go for it.

A few weeks before I left, we sent letters to the key auction officials at the Hannoveraner Verband to introduce me. I received a catalog and also looked at video clips on the verband's Web site. I went to the Verden city Web page and found reasonable accommodations that would put me in walking distance of the auction hall. I contacted Mersant International in New York to talk about shipping.

Through business contacts I befriended a young lady who works on the largest Thoroughbred stud farm in Germany. Petra Kleymann, a dressage enthusiast herself, became a great ally during my six days in Verden. She picked me up at the Bremen airport on Jan. 17, and we immediately headed for the auction hall in Verden, 30 minutes away. There I

received a warm welcome from Dr. Günter Friemel, who coordinates the auctions and helps select the horses. Petra and I walked through the stables to look at the 130 or so horses in the sale. I had already made notes next to several hip numbers, so it was interesting to see how these horses measured up in the flesh.

That evening I found a handy restaurant, in a hotel with a German-style bowling alley, near my B&B. With my non-existent German I managed to order a schnitzel and a small beer. Perfect. This restaurant would become my little sanctuary during the week.

The next day I evaluated about a dozen horses for conformation, then watched five hours of formal presentations. The horses came into the main arena in groups of four accompanied by Euro-disco music and showed off their trot and canter work. Horses marketed for their jumping pedigrees jumped a small course. Skillful auction riders, each assigned seven or eight horses, ask a lot of these youngsters (mainly new 4-year-olds), yet they impressed

me with their patience and tact. After the presentation I reviewed my notes, found Dr. Friemel, and arranged to try several horses the next day.

Although he was not on my initial top-three list, I noted, "take a second look" next to No. 127, a dark-brown gelding by the Trakhener stallion Polarpunkt. Right away I felt comfortable on this horse, Polaris, who seemed unperturbed by the lively atmosphere and the dozen horses zooming around the small schooling ring. He moved to my short list, which now numbered four. I particularly liked him and a Rotspion filly.

I tried three of them again the next day. I watched them in every presentation and when other potential buyers rode them. I stopped by their stalls at odd hours to observe their demeanor. By midweek, the filly seemed vexed by the ordeal and kept her head in a corner. Polaris, on the other hand, always seemed happy to see people.

Auction Adventure

By KDA member,
Jacqueline Duke Beasley

Buying a horse in Europe when the euro reaches a record high against the dollar might not seem like the sanest plan. Nor would it seem particularly supportive of the buy-American mentality so recently expressed in some equine publications.

But I did it — and so far I have no regrets.





I watched, took notes, met with the examining veterinarian, and had some X-rays sent to Lexington. I threw one horse off my short list because of ankle chips. On my earlier trip to Verden I had met a talented rider named Hennig Klughardt who starts and trains young horses. I asked Hennig to try my three favorites and help me rank them; he liked Polaris the best.

By Friday, the day before the sale, Polaris had become the “it” horse. Everyone wanted to try him, and my heart sank as I watched girls hug him after their test rides. I asked Dr. Friemel for pre-sale estimates for him (higher than I could go) and three other horses.

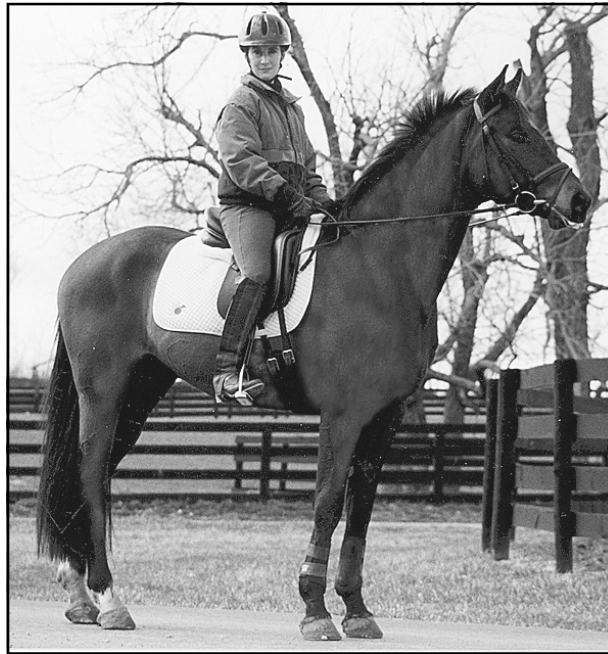
Dejected, I went to try a horse offered for sale privately at a stable nearby. This was the fifth non-auction horse I had tried during the week, and he did not provide a back-up plan. Indeed, none of the private horses seemed nearly as nice as their auction counterparts, and I knew their owners inflated the price when an American showed up.

Later that evening I reviewed the week and my options. I liked Polaris best, but he was one of the last horses in the sale. Should I take my chances and wait, especially considering his popularity and possible big price tag? The Rotspon mare and a flashy, smallish gelding by Rouletto also appealed to me and either would be a good choice. I agonized and didn’t sleep much.

A truly international and spirited crowd packed the auction hall, clapping in rhythm to the oompah music that started the proceedings. I had a good seat in view of the auctioneer and the bid spotters, and my friends Petra and Hennig sat with me. I had the luxury of watching 30 horses sell before I decided whether to bid, as the Rouletto gelding was No. 36 and the Rotspon filly, No. 51. It didn’t take me long to realize trade was a little spotty, with many horses coming in well below last year’s winter average of 13,335 euros. I figured I would try to “steal” the Rouletto. However, someone

wanted him more than me, and I dropped out when the price escalated beyond my comfort level. It was fun, though, to “get my feet wet.”

When the beautiful Rotspon filly trotted into the arena, I never raised my hand. My friends looked at me in surprise. But somewhere between the Rouletto gelding and her, I made the decision to take my chances on Polaris. I had a long wait, nearly two hours, for he was No. 127. Had I done the right thing, I wondered nervously? Then he was there, alert and a little spooked by the flashing cameras and the



Jackie and her new partner Polaris

crowd. The auctioneer enumerated his many qualities and bidding began quickly, coming from five or six sources. I did nothing — why bid against myself? Then as bidding slowed I jumped in. One other party remained. We went back and forth but I persevered. Polaris came in well under the Friday estimate and within my limit, though higher than the sale average of 10,331 euros. My hands shook as I signed the sales ticket and accepted a bouquet and four crystal glasses etched with the Hanoverian brand. I waved happily when the auctioneer thanked the lady from Kentucky.

I learned more about Polaris from the breeders, who stopped by the stall to say goodbye to their boy. The wife cried and gave him treats while the husband poured champagne for everyone.

My excellent adventure concluded the next day when I flew home from Germany. I had great fun, learned a lot, and would certainly go that route again. But buying at auction requires a certain commitment and sang-froid. I couldn’t recommend it for everyone.

Polaris, who followed me a few weeks later, has settled into his new Kentucky home. So far he has been a joy, and I look forward to many adventures ahead. ♦