

## Dominique Tardin shares her uplifting first experience riding in Europe. 1 July 2009

I arrived back from Europe last week after competing in Denmark and the Swiss National Championships.

I have been riding my horse Vienna for a total of about six weeks and I still need some time to really become a team with her, but she will teach me everything I need to learn at grand prix level.

The show in Denmark was a local affiliated competition, which I thought would be like our local shows. I clearly had NO idea of what was in store for me!! The horses and riders are so professional and know exactly what they are doing, whether its novice or grand prix. I was riding M level classes on Vienna which was the same level I would be doing at the Swiss championships. I was the only junior competing amongst the adults and there were between 20-30 horses in each class.

I wasn't nervous until I went in!! I would have been very happy coming in the top ten and was over the moon when I found out I got a second and a fourth place in the two classes. It was a great surprise and one I never expected!

Then we had two weeks to prepare for Swiss champs. Training was very hard on me, but Vienna didn't even bat an eyelid. She just goes with the flow and waits for me to get things right. It's so great having such a strong team of professionals behind me such as Morten Thomsen and his wife Sarah. They literally made a plan everyday for my one hour of training where they would both be sitting in the middle of the arena, helping me. I learnt more in one hour than I have ever learnt in my entire life! On top of this, Morten would let me get on a horse who was working particularly well that day and either feel the canter pirouette, piaffe, or even more fun, a great Spanish walk!! I ended up working in the stables as the two grooms left soon after I arrived, and therefore I offered my help. I loved it! I got to look after a yard of 20 horses and I also got to warm up all Mortens horses, which meant I also got to watch a lot of the training while I was walking the horses around.

A few days before leaving for Switzerland, my parents and head groom, Square, arrived from South Africa. I was happier to see Square than my parents by that time! We left Denmark at 2.00am in order to make the border at 4.45pm. We were finished! Then we stuck at the border for an hour as we had the wrong documents. After sorting everything out, we then had to find Daniel Ramsiers place in Horgen Switzerland, where Vienna would be staying, but the GPS (later named Doris) kept taking us the back routes and into the center of Zurich. We eventually arrived at Daniels at 7.30pm. After travelling for 17 hours, Vienna looked like she had just come in from the paddock! She travelled so well and settled in like she lived there!

Unfortunately Mortens wife Sarah was due to have her baby on Sunday the 21st of June (my birthday!) and he couldn't be there to help me, but he arranged for Daniel and his partner Jeannette Larsen to help me. They were fantastic and really showed me the ropes and lots of tricks!



Dominique and Vienna

The show started on Friday the 19th June. It was held at someones property and there was one warm up arena and one competition arena. It went all the way from ponies to Grand Prix. I couldn't believe how organized they were to have an entire national championship with one arena! O.K, it was held over one week, but still!

Once again, the quality of the riders and horses is unbelievable. The juniors are riding on ex Grand Prix horses worth millions of rands!

they also have their trainers such as Silvie Ikle and Christine Stuckelberger there with them. The show started off in the pouring rain and it was coming down in buckets! I warmed up in the indoor, but when I went outside, I found I couldn't hold my reins! Vienna was so attentive and really helped me out. The only problem was that I entered the arena with my

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stick, but dropped it as I halted. So I was going around the whole test thinking 'Am I eliminated?????'. When I finished, I saluted and the judge at B came out and handed me my stick!!! I blushed so much!!! He wanted to eliminate me, but thank goodness the other four judges decided to give me -2 each. So being an FEI competition with five judges, I ended up with -10!! But out of a huge class I still managed to come 7th, which was fantastic!

The next day I was much more settled and went in more confident and with no stick! I felt like I really rode for it, but because of this there were a few communication errors between Vienna and I, which unfortunately at this level costs you. We came 6th in the individual competition and I was really pleased!

The last day was the freestyle. Sunday the 21st and my 18th birthday and I was told that Sarah had had her baby at 3am that morning! The stands were full and there was a great electricity that filled the air. I decided to go out there and have fun! I entered around the arena in the most awesome passage and really showed her off! The crowd really enjoy that sort of thing! The kur was such fun that I couldn't help but smile most of the way through. The fact that I was actually there, Vienna and I, dancing to Abba. We did once again have a few communication errors, but this didn't spoil my fun!

I was very happy with the overall marks from the international and Olympic judges who gave me 71%, 68% and 67%. The Swiss judges however weren't quite ready to accept me. They gave me 62% and 61%. Overall out of the Swiss elite riders, I came 7th on a 64% and was very happy and just happy to ride with riders of such talent.

This left the prize giving. WOW!!!! talk about photographers and the people really love and appreciate the horses and riders, they are amazing! You receive huge prize money, a rosette and a beautiful metal plaque with the name of the championships and your placing. I was so excited to receive one of those!!!

It was a wonderful experience and I am so lucky to have the team I have over there, the support I have from everyone there and of course my very special horse Vienna. I will be putting my other horse Don De Niro into quarantine end of July so I can compete on him in small tour and Vienna in Grand Prix. I have had a small taste of what it is like over there and I am so hungry for more!



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We thank Dominique for taking the time to give us her news full of enthusiasm and appreciation and wish her all the best.