

2015 Courtney's Quest Scholarship
Lessons Learned in Germany Help Light Path to Success
By Catherine Rose Chamberlain

This summer I was granted a Courtney's Quest Scholarship through Dressage4Kids to help with the expenses of my trip to Germany to participate in the 2015 USEF Young Rider European Tour. I was selected to participate on the European tour because of my results in the Young Rider tests in four CDIs in California where I achieved a 68% average with Avesto van Weltereden. "Vito", a ten year old KWPN gelding by Gribaldi out of Tevesta by Krack C, is owned by Kimberly Pribble of Chandler, AZ. I also grew up in Chandler and I moved out to California to begin working for David Wightman and Kathleen Raine at Adventure Farms in November of 2013. Vito's owner Kim decided to send Vito for training in December of 2013. He had only been shown up to First Level at that point and could be quite opinionated and strong, so David and I began working with him together to bring him up the levels. In 2014 I showed him 3rd Level for the first time in the spring, and David showed him 4th Level in the fall. While we still had to work hard to try to get him to be more accepting and supple, he showed great promise for the FEI levels and achieved scores of up to 74%. This January, the idea first came up of me trying to compete in Young Riders with him. We all agreed to give it a shot even though he would be quite green because he is always a very solid competitor and reliable in the ring. We did our first Prix St. George in a small show and had a great result, so we then entered our first Young Rider qualifier at a CDI in Burbank in February. We competed in four CDIs throughout the qualifying season, and Vito was a trooper as he gained experience and strength all the while. At the end of the qualification period, he was at the top of the ranking list for the European tour, had made the Region 7 team for the NAJYRC and was ranked 4th for the USEF Festival of Champions. We were thrilled when we got the invitation to compete at the Young Rider Nations Cup at the CDIO-Y in Hagen, Germany. Soon preparations were being made for a busy summer. To be honest, organizing all of the travel details was probably the most nerve-wracking part for me. I was really scared that I would forget some small detail and not be allowed on the plane! Luckily I was able to get everything in order and soon Vito and I were on our flight overseas.

My actual time spent in Germany was fairly short, but definitely jam packed with excitement. I was able to bring Vito to stay at Johann Hinnemann's barn two weeks before we had to leave for the competition in Hagen. It was a wonderful experience. I was able to work at the barn and ride a few other horses during my stay. We would start at seven in the morning with feeding and stall cleaning. Once all of the chores were done we would all eat breakfast around nine. There were about six or so working students at the barn, along with head bereiter Stefi Wolf. Everyone was very nice and welcoming, I really enjoyed the time I got to spend with them and am thankful for all of the help I received while there. After breakfast we began working the horses and continued for the rest of the day with other chores and clean-up mixed in. I got lessons from Herr Hinnemann, which was great. We worked a lot on getting my half-halts to come through better since Vito loves to go and can get quite strong. This went hand in hand with working on getting him to be more supple in the jaw and looser over his top line. Herr Hinnemann also made sure that I focused on the accuracy of my tests. Each line of tempi changes had to be perfectly straight with the middle change at X. The voltes had to be precisely eight meters and my half-passes had to have a flowing line to the proper places. It was really helpful working on all of those details and making sure that I wasn't giving away any unnecessary points. Heading into Hagen, I felt prepared and ready to represent my country to the best of my ability. USEF Youth Coach George

Williams was on hand to make sure everything was organized and taken care of, which was a big relief. He did an amazing job and it was so helpful to have him there with us during our first major experience like this.

The atmosphere at Hagen was quite electric. They also had a huge youth jumping show going alongside the dressage competition for ponies, juniors and young riders. The barns, roads and arenas were always very busy and nobody gave a second thought to what might spook a horse. You had to be on your toes and prepared for anything to happen at any time. Luckily Vito handled the environment quite well and adjusted to the chaotic settings without many problems. I also got to spend more time with teammate Ayden Uhlir and her groom Jessica Hainsworth, which was a lot of fun. They are both great girls and I'm so happy that I got the pleasure of meeting them and being on a team together. Even though our group was small, we had a lot of national pride and team comradery which was great to feel at my first international competition outside of the U.S. When it came time for the team test, I tried not to focus on the fact that it was such a big competition or the expectations that I had. My only goal was to walk out of the ring knowing that I had produced the absolute best test that we were capable of on that day. Vito and I were able to do just that and had a great ride, earning a 68% and 6th place individually in the class. Our U.S. team placed 6th in the Nations Cup and Ayden and I were very proud of our efforts. It was such an enormous honour being able to represent the U.S. in Europe and it's an experience that I will always treasure.

Unfortunately, when Vito and I entered the ring for our individual test he got quite distracted by an annoyance on his ear and we had several uncharacteristic mistakes. We pulled it together as best as we could and still managed a 65% despite the bobbles that we had. It was too bad that we had to have an off test just then, but in this sport you are going to have struggles and it's best to learn to embrace them and let every experience teach you something. Over the years I've actually grown to love these challenging times, even though it's hard to accept in the moment, because I know it will help me grow and develop as a person. Without adversary you will never discover how strong, determined, accepting or hard-working you can be. We made it into the small final for the freestyle and had a solid ride, earning 6th place individually. I was so inspired by the top riders and horses that I saw and it really fuelled my passion to work even harder to achieve my goals and dreams. It was such an amazing experience and I am so thrilled to have had the opportunity. I have to give a huge thank you to USEF, George Williams, Kimberly Pribble, my trainer David Wightman and everyone at Adventure Farms, my parents Annie and Glen Chamberlain, my sponsors YS Nutrition, 2kGrey, Intrepid International, Custom Saddlery, Equine and Essential Arnica Gel, and so many other people who made the 2015 USEF Young Rider European Tour a big success and an outstanding learning experience.

The lessons I learned in Germany definitely paid off. Vito and I flew straight from Europe to the east coast to compete in the FEI North American Young Rider Championships. We had an amazing time and earned team gold with our teammates from Region 7 and individual silver! About a month after that we headed to Lamplight in Illinois to compete at the Festival of Champions. After our best competition to date, were named the 2015 Young Rider National Champions! The experiences I had and the lessons I learned in Germany definitely taught me so much and really helped us grow together as a team. This is my last year of eligibility as a Young Rider and I couldn't have wished for a better way to finish this part of my career. I am so excited to see what the future holds and will continue to work diligently on everything I learned in order to become the best rider and horsewoman that I can be. Thank you so much to Dressage4Kids

for awarding me a Courtney's Quest Scholarship that allowed me to participate on the European Tour and have a life-changing experience! I am so humbled and appreciate of the support.