

Hardy Zantke talks with Equine VIP

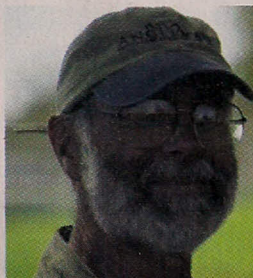
by Susan Ashbrook, owner Equine VIP



Hardy Zantke is one of the biggest names in combined carriage driving in the United States. Equine VIP took the opportunity to interview Mr. Zantke to get a quick overview into the world of carriage driving from a true expert in the sport. Mr. Zantke is a Director of the American Driving Society (ADS) and a member of the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) Driving and Active Drivers Committees. He has also been the United States driving-team Chef d'Equipe at 11 world championships and international competitions.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU GOT YOUR START IN CARRIAGE DRIVING? I grew up at my grandfather's home, after WWII, in East Germany. My grandfather had a local drayage company and two Pre-WWII trucks, which were in the repair shop more than out on the streets! He also had half a dozen teams of draft horses doing local pick-ups and deliveries. I hung out with the teamsters and learned to drive. When I was 13 a teamster who I usually hung out with was sick and unable to come to work. That threw my grandfather's disposition for the day. He looked around and said "You have been doing this long enough. I give you some light loads where you don't have to do too much heavy loading. You think you can handle that by yourself today?" What a question for a thirteen year old! Of course I could. Fortunately the teamster stayed ill for the rest of my summer vacation, so I continued driving. From then on Grandfather scheduled the vacation of his teamsters accordingly, so I could fill in and drive. Later, when I joined the West German Army, in Officers Training, we were asked to do something for our "Gentlemen's" education. We could either take dancing or riding lessons. I thought I knew what I wanted to know about dancing, so I opted for riding lessons. After moving to America with my wife Jutta, in the late 1960's, we picked up on my horse love again. On a trail ride I learned from other riders that there was a sport called "carriage driving" around. I didn't even know that driving still existed. I thought that was a thing of my childhood. I had the time and interest and quickly got involved capitalizing on my childhood dreams and memories and then grew along with the sport.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THIS PARTNERSHIP? My wife had dreamed of horses as a girl but had not had a chance to do much about it. She started riding with me in the late 1970's in Calif. and quickly became interested in dressage. She felt comfortable in the saddle, but had no



Dressage is very beneficial. She would come along at competitions as groom and navigator on the back of the carriage. Driving is a true team effort and on the cross country phase of our competitions a good navigator is as important as the driver. At times such a partnership can also be taxing, and we joke in our sport that at the end of a marathon perhaps they should have a marriage counselor along with the debriefing judge!

Jutta's thorough knowledge of our horses from her daily work under saddle was always of



great advantage during the competition. I am more willing to take risks and do the precision planning, while she can foresee our horse's reactions much quicker. In addition, she has a medical professional background so proper nutrition and medical care of the horses is always her part, while I cared for the technical



aspects of carriage, truck and trailer.

Jutta has a great sense of humor and can always bring me down to earth quickly when she thinks my head is swollen too much!

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES YOU SEE (IN THE SPORT OF DRIVING) BETWEEN EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN COMPETITIONS? The sport is just much more developed over there, which mainly means, you have more well organized competitions, more competitors and much more public interest. With larger fields of excellent competitors you have competitive pressure there which brings out experienced competitors.

YOU AND YOUR WIFE SELL HOLSTEINER

interest in driving a horse from the carriage. She would ride our horses and train them under saddle to dressage, while I did the driving.

HORSES – WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS SPECIFIC BREED YOU LIKE SO MUCH? When we started to compete, the top competitors were driving Holsteiners. They are one of the top breeds of excellence for all around sport horses. They have athletic ability for dressage, as well as the stamina necessary for a cross country marathon. A good level headed brain to me is very important for a good driving horse too. Since our home in Germany was right next to the main breeding area of the Holsteiners it was easy for us to fall for that breed, find young horses and buy them.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE BOND BETWEEN A DRIVER AND HORSE (OR TEAM) THAT MAKES A WINNING PERFORMANCE? All team members must know each other very well and need to fully trust each other and depend on each other. It's a two way street of mutual trust that doesn't come quickly but is formed over years of working with each other. Horses must completely trust the driver and he must know his horses and completely trust them. They work well together and have the will to win and be willing to focus all energy on that.

AS THE UNITED STATES DRIVING-TEAM CHEF D'EQUIPE AT 11 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS, YOUR METHODS HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE. DID YOU HAVE TO

PROVE YOURSELF? As chef d'equipe, my role was a team manager. Although I am known to be very opinionated, I still believe in a management style in which I don't need to force my opinions on any team member. I prefer a softer approach to convince them and let them share in the process of finding the best solutions. I tried to assist each team member to bring out his best potential for a team medal and then an individual one. Forcing issues only creates resistance, and that creates negative energy. Harmony creates positive energy leading to more success in my opinion. Besides it certainly is more fun that way, and after all, although we all often work very hard at it, most of us still do it ultimately for the fun of it. When it's not fun anymore, we should get out of it!

HOW WOULD YOU RECOMMEND SOMEONE START IF THEY ARE INTERESTED TO LEARN THE SPORT OF DRIVING? By joining the American Driving Society (www.americandrivingsociety.org), as well as becoming a member of the closest driving club. You can find listings of clubs on the website of the ADS. Then go to club meetings, meet other drivers, volunteer at driving events, and/or team up with another driver and become his groom/navigator and learn from there what it is all about. Then take some driving lessons from an experienced driving teacher.

WHERE CAN WE FOLLOW YOUR APPEARANCES AND CLINICS TO LEARN MORE? I regularly judge at Combined Driving Events. Contact The American Driving Society for more information:

www.americandrivingsociety.org

Equine VIP is written by Producer/Host Susan Ashbrook who is also developing a TV series based on her interviews with celebrities and top equestrians. For more information go to www.equineVIP.com

Equine VIP interviews celebrities and equestrian VIPs because "If It's About Horses, We Cover It".

