

# EMILE FAURIE

## THE QUIET MAN OF BRITISH DRESSAGE

STORY - CHRIS HECTOR

PHOTOS - ROZ NEAVE

*It's only when you start seriously looking at his career results, that you see just how long Emile Faurie has been operating at the top level of international dressage. His is a career that has spanned two decades, and now with a gold team medal at the European Championships, and with the team going into a home-town Olympic Games in London as firm favorites for another gold medal, the future is bright. I caught up with Emile at Rotterdam to find out more about the trainer who will be conducting the Master Class at this year's Dressage and Jumping with the Stars....*

### Nice to be standing on the podium with a gold medal...

"Nice, very nice, it has been a dry old spell for me recently. I had a wonderful horse that had to sadly be sold – he was only eight when he was the reserve for the Europeans before he was sold, so I missed out there. I am so lucky to have another really good horse."

### It must be amazing to be part of such an exciting team...

"It's absolutely incredible. To be part of a team like that is a once in a lifetime experience."

### How do you explain this amazing emergence of Britain as a dressage force?

"I think like anything in the world it is about evolving. For years, we have always said we had the calibre of riders, and we have been slightly lacking in horse power, but now we've got better and better horses, and Carl Hester has proven it to the world, if you can really ride, you can do it. Both Carl's horse (Uthopia) and Charlotte's horse (Valegro) were produced from young horses starting at the ages of four and three, and it is about riding and training, and now we've got the horse power as well. And we've got the infra-structure, it's hugely important. It is not just about psychology and nutritionists, we have an incredible back-up team: we've got one of the best vets in the world to make sure our horses are on top form. We've got financial support, it's a whole support system that is so superb that it can hardly not breed results. It takes a lot of pressure off the riders when you know you can pick up the phone and say to the vet, 'can you just check something here?' or go to a farrier, and say, 'you know what, I think if we can change a bit here, we can get a better result'. All these fine-tuning things help."

"It's an incredibly structured team behind us and it does make an enormous difference."

### Let's get back to you – you are South African originally?

"I was born in South Africa."

### And you came through the PSI 'factory'?

"I did. I first came to England straight out of school and then went to PSI when I was 20, in my little rubber riding boots, and that's where I learned my craft. People tend to think of PSI as a selling stable but they are not just about that, they are about real quality riding and training as well. I found a fantastic basis of education there."

**But it is a sink or swim situation – there are some people who grab the opportunity at PSI, and some just can't handle the pace, the size...**

"I was hungry for it from the first day I can remember. I told my mother when I was a thirteen, having never seen a live horse, that I was going to ride at the Olympics one day. I've always wanted to do it, and I think I had just such grit and determination that I was going to do it – and they are wonderfully kind people at PSI. If you go to PSI and they see that you are interested and they see you really want to learn and get better, they encourage it. They were very supportive and gave me an incredible basic knowledge of what dressage is."

"When I got back to England I scrounged a ride here and there, I had to do a bit of eventing because I didn't get any dressage horses to ride. I was never very good at eventing but I was brave and that counted in my favor. It was just a question of sticking at it until I got my big break, which was when I got Virtu. He was my Barcelona horse, and the horse I won my individual bronze medal with the following year at the Europeans in Lipica."

### How did you find him?

"He sort of found me. He was sent to be sold and they couldn't sell him because he was notoriously lazy and the owner gave me the ride on him and said, see what you can do. In those days I didn't have an awful lot to ride, and my next door neighbor was a racehorse trainer. I basically trained him on the gallops, never took him into an arena – rode him on the gallops until he became a much more forward going horse and a much more electric one. Two years later, he won me a medal..."

"It was very quick jump up. I'd never competed until I was 26, never even cantered down the centre line. Then when he came, I did one year of Grand Prix and we went to the Olympics and the next year, we won a medal."

"After that I had Legrini, he did the European championships in Verden and the World Championships in Rome, he was tenth or eleventh there, then I had Rascher Hopes, who did two Europeans and the Olympics in Sydney and made the Special there. But I never had that great quality horse, Rascher Hopes was a 16hh pony basically bought for €1700, but he served me well, he always made it into the finals at championships."

"Then I rode a horse for Dr Bechtolsheimer at the WEG in Spain, Insterburg." ▶



EMILE AND VIRTU

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## Your current horse Elmegardens Marquis he looks a trifle hot...

"He has been known to be quite hot. He was quite a difficult horse when I got him, he was very excitable but he is slowly but surely coming around and getting better all the time."

## There does seem to be a change in what the international judges are looking for – the tests that went well at Rotterdam, were softer, more sympathetic...

"If you look at Carl and Charlotte's tests they were technically brilliant and they were spectacular horses..."

## But spectacular in a nice way...

"Absolutely, in a completely unforced, natural way of going. The quality of the horses has changed so much, if you look back in history the horses were totally different. I hope that is a good change, that the judges are focusing more on quality and classically, technically correct, good soft riding."

## Who do you look at now for inspiration in your own riding?

"I look at everybody. I don't think there is one person that I can say 'that's the one', I'm a bit old for that now. Being so busy at my yard, it is hard to get one solid trainer to train with all the while, I get help from people where-ever I can. Conrad Schumaker has helped me a lot over the years, I've had help from Herbert Rehbein, from Klaus Balkenhol, Jan Bemelmans – but it is very difficult when you are running your own business the way I do with a busy yard, to take time and to train with someone in particular. But I have a great friend at home, Stephen Moore, who is a brilliant rider with a fantastic eye and he makes me ride better, if I am not technically correct, he pulls me up. Don't. Do it again."

"Especially with my horse who is so sensitive, he keeps focusing on me: sit better, ride better. He makes me ride better."

## It's not rocket science is it?

"It's not, especially at our age, we don't need to be told how to ride,

but we need to keep being brought back into the basics. Focus on the technically correct way of riding. Stephen comes over religiously, once or twice a week, and he sits and watches me ride three or four horses. And he says, no, sit better, he keeps me on the straight and narrow."

## Can you tell me a little about your charitable foundation?

"It's something I just decided I wanted to do. I'd probably had a pint too many one night. I spoke to someone who had a lot to do with a similar scheme in Sweden – in Sweden, riding is government subsidized, and in Sweden they have the lowest teenage pregnancies, the lowest teenage crime. It inspired me. Riding in England has such an enormous history, and riding schools used to be the focal point of society. With government changes, riding schools are struggling and they are closing down every day because they can't keep up with ridiculous business rates on indoor schools, insurance policies, crazy health and safety rules – not that health and safety are wrong but with horses you get to a point where it has to be realistic."

"I decided one night to do something, and a friend, Maryanne Horn said, right if you are going to start it, you are going to do it. Basically what we do, is go through the schools, because it is only Maryanne and I who run the charity. It has entirely developed by word of mouth. We started with one project in Manchester, where the school heard about the foundation, they contacted us, we searched for a Riding School in the vicinity of the school, we go and check out the Riding School, that the kids are going to get good quality lessons – and then we pay for it. We organize for the transport from the school to the riding stables. We are now paying for over 9000 children to ride."

## How do you raise the funds?

"We work our backsides off to raise money. We constantly hold fund raising events, more and more to just keep going."

## What is it called?

"The Emile Faurie Foundation."

Emile is laughing.

## Very modest of you...

"It wasn't my doing. We had to register the charity and I was competing abroad, and Maryanne couldn't get hold of me. It is difficult to register a charity, there is paperwork this high, she decided just call it the Emile Faurie. So she did it. But it has also helped a bit with our fund-raising..."

## Riding in England is such a class-based thing – to an outsider it seems the preserve of the rich and wealthy...

"No. Charlotte Dujardin is the prime example, she is a small time girl done good, and there is no question of class or finance involved... no I think the class thing disappeared a long time ago. If you look at the broad spectrum of people who ride in England, I don't think it is class based, that's long gone. Anybody who really wants to do it can do it. Carl and I were talking about it last night, and we started with absolutely nothing. We were laughing about it last night, one European Championships, we set off with two little wagons with our horses, driving our broken down old lorries ourselves, and that wasn't that long ago. Neither of us came from a class type family, and here we are in a gold medal winning team."

## What can your students expect in your master classes in Australia?

"I'm a stickler for basics. I'm a stickler for making sure that basics are correct. What happens a lot, especially with younger riders, and in countries where they don't have this constant exposure to world-class horses and what I call old school technical riding, they will try and take short cuts. I refuse to tolerate sensationalism; I want horses to go in a technically correct way. If they expect to come and do piaffe and passage in my clinic, they are going to be disappointed."

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