

Monsieur Retires

Monsieur, the wonderful Danish Warmblood gelding ridden for 13 years by Charlotte Bredahl-Baker, was retired Saturday evening, Jan. 30. The ceremony was held during the California Dressage Society Annual Convention at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center in Burbank, Calif.

Bredahl-Baker and Monsieur performed a Grand Prix freestyle for the appreciative crowd. The 18-year-old Monsieur was then unsaddled by Bredahl-Baker's husband, Joel Baker, and covered with his 1997 U.S. Dressage Federation Grand Prix Horse of the Year cooler.

Joining Monsieur, Bredahl-Baker and Baker in the arena were Guenter Seidel, their coach for the past 3 years; Hilda Gurney, who helped develop Monsieur into a grand prix horse; and Glenda McElroy, who organized the retirement ceremony and many of the shows in which Monsieur competed.

Bredahl-Baker thanked them all and also her husband Joel who bought out Bredahl-Baker's partner in Monsieur and made it possible for her to keep him forever and retire him to a pasture at their home.

Bredahl-Baker and a partnership purchased Monsieur in Denmark as a 5-year-old green-broke gelding as an investment horse. But no one ever made an offer for him. One of the reasons may be that whenever somebody new gets on him for the first time, Monsieur pretends he has been trained by a different set of aids. As an example: if you ask him to canter, he will do one-tempi changes for as long as you canter. Or it could be the fact that Monsieur does not do awards ceremonies with other horses without everybody else involved risking their lives.

Bredahl-Baker thanked Gurney for lending one of her horses for awards ceremonies when they were competing in Europe together. There was also that moment at the Barcelona Olympics when Monsieur reacted to the crowd's clapping at his entrance to the arena by doing a sliding stop and spin, and heading for the outgate. A second attempt by Bredahl-Baker to go around the dressage arena resulted in the same thing. Bredahl-Baker knew she could always get Monsieur to back up, so she backed him down the long side and waved at the judges as she went by. Then she headed him down the centerline of the dressage arena, and he was wonderful. They tied with Robert Dover for the

second-highest U.S. score, and the U.S. team brought home the bronze medal.

Bredahl-Baker's final words to Monsieur at the retirement were: "Dear Monsieur, thank you for giving me some of the greatest memories and experiences of my life. Because of you, I had the opportunity to spend three summers in Europe, training with the best trainers in the world, competing at the greatest shows and riding in the Olympics. I am forever grateful."

"A lot of people were asking me why I was retiring him, because they thought he looked really good," said Bredahl-Baker. "That made me feel really, really, good about retiring him. I wanted people to say 'why are you retiring him' instead of 'yeah, it's time.' I really feel very, very good about it. A lot of people were asking me, 'Aren't you sad?' But I'm not. I've had 13 years of riding him. That's a long time and he's done so much for me that I wanted to make sure that he was going to retire before he wasn't 100 percent any more."

Bredahl-Baker still plans to do some exhibitions on Monsieur, and he will be ridden lightly every day to keep his basic condition. But mainly he'll be out in pasture at her home, where he has been for the last five years.

Monsieur's career highlights include: earning the CDS Grand Prix Horse of the Year title in 1990 and 1993; the USDF Grand Prix Horse of the Year in 1994 and 1997; the USDF Grand Prix Freestyle Horse of the Year in 1994; USET grants to train and compete in Europe in 1991, 1992 and 1993; and the 1992 Olympic team bronze medal.



(Sheri Scott Photo)

Charlotte Bredahl-Baker watched as her husband Joel Baker led Monsieur from the ring following his retirement ceremony at the CDS annual meeting.

