

The Olympic Diary

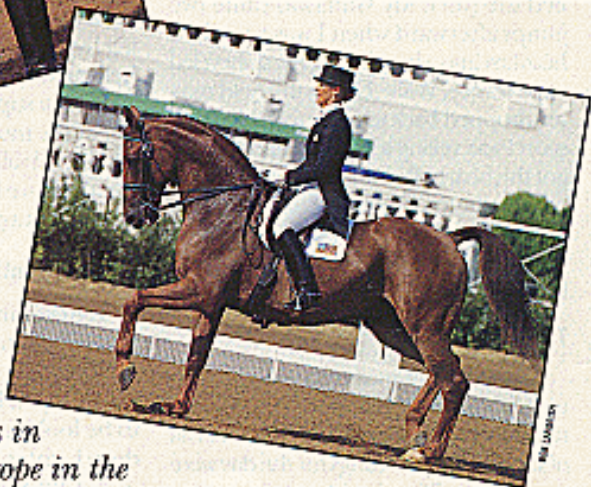
of Charlotte Bredahl

As told to Hanna Bolte



Charlotte Bredahl, originally from Denmark, was named to the United States Equestrian Team's dressage squad with Michael Poulin, Robert Dover, and Carol Lavell, following a series of trials in Florida in February and two selection shows in Europe in the summer.

After the selections, Bredahl stayed with Herbert Rehbein in Germany to train with her horse, Monsieur. They stayed there until July 20, when Monsieur left to go to Barcelona. Bredahl followed shortly afterward. Here is her account of her Olympic experience.



Left: Bredahl, far left, with Bronze Medal teammates Robert Dover, Michael Poulin and Carol Lavell.

Right: Bredahl and Monsieur lead off for the U.S.

My first impression of Barcelona was not a good one. Our luggage was lost on the way from Germany. Jessica Ranschousen (USET Dressage Chef d'Equipe) met me at the airport, and we waited for three hours until it showed up on the next flight. Then, my luggage was lost again on the way to the Olympic village. It showed up the next day.

July 21

We went to the Polo Club today. The facilities are really great. Super stabling—good ventilation, good stalls, lots of rings with great footing, and lots of

grass. There are nine dressage rings and one indoor ring. There is a race track around the jumper ring and quite a few places to ride.

July 25

Tonight is opening ceremonies. Monsieur managed to fall down on the cement while being hand walked today. He fell on his side and had to be on ice for a day. That was a little nerve wracking. His hock swelled a bit, but he's fine.

The ceremonies were quite an experience! Walking in there, it's really overwhelming. It's really, really emotional.

I was walking next to Jill Walton from the three-day team when the men's basketball "Dream Team" came out. Ev-

eryone went nuts. It was like having the Beatles there. All the girls from all the teams went completely crazy. The guys had to have escorts out of the stadium so they wouldn't get mobbed. The show was excellent, fireworks like I had never seen in my life. We got home at midnight and went to sleep.

July 26

Got food poisoning tonight. Two riders from the Danish team who ate at the same restaurant also got sick.

July 27

I thought I felt better until I fainted! I was at the apartment by myself and felt dizzy. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the floor. I was very scared—I thought I had a concussion and wouldn't be able to ride.

I went to the sports clinic downstairs. They looked me over, told me I was fine,

and gave me some pain killers and ice. My black eye lasted for a week.

July 28

I woke up this morning and felt a little better. I was determined to ride, so I rode for 20 minutes lightly. Monsieur was great.

July 29

I rode in the morning and felt a lot better. In the afternoon, I went with the British riders to watch the three-day cross-country. On the way home, we filled the car with gasoline instead of Diesel fuel, so our car died. We ended up pushing it to Barcelona and getting a cab. My trip is not dull, that's for sure!

July 31

Today was the official jog. I got up very early and we were all dressed very nicely. When we got there, we heard that six horses had already failed. Monsieur passed the jog.

I rode him in the main ring for the first time after that. The minute we walked in there, he was pretty wild—he wanted to take off. I couldn't get him down in one end of the ring. He was very tense. So I had my groom walk next to him, giving him sugar when we went near the scary places. He calmed down a bit, and in 20 minutes, he was super. I'm worried, because I won't have 20 minutes to prepare him when we compete.

August 1

Today is the draw. I was the first American rider to go. I'm quite happy, as it will be a little less pressure on me. Michael was drawn second, Robert third, and Carol fourth. I think we're all pretty happy with our draws. Three of the six horses that hadn't passed the jog yesterday passed today.

August 2

The big day! My ride was at 10:10 A.M. I caught the 7:00 bus which got to the club at 9:00. My plan was to be mounted by 9:15. I knew I'd have to work him down. He's so fit that I'd rather him be tired than revved up. I knew he was going to wake up when we entered that stadium.

I felt very calm. I just wanted Monsieur to go into the ring and not have any hassles

about it. That was one thing I wasn't 100 percent sure about. Before I got on, I visualized my ride—really rode every movement in my mind.

He was really good in warm-up. We were ushered from ring to ring at certain time intervals, making our way to the arena.

When we entered the arena, we went down the long side. People began clapping. Monsieur put his brakes on and ran the other way. I stopped him, turned him around, and he did it again. I knew if he didn't want to go forward, I'd have to back him around. We backed past the first judge's stand, and I thought, "Oh, no! Here we go again!" My biggest fear

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had come true, but at least Monsieur was responding to me. Once he got past the judge, he was fine. When we went down the center line, he was a different horse—focused and great.

He was dead honest the whole test. I was very happy with all our changes and pirouettes, but I think I overrode the piaffe a bit. All in all, I was thrilled—all smiles. I haven't been happier.

I was a little disappointed in our score, though. I thought our ride was better than normal, and our score was lower than normal. But it's a respectable team score, and that's all that matters.

August 3

When Robert [Dover] entered the ring, we were all surprised to see that Lec-tron got his tongue over the bit. I had been watching them for the past six weeks and that had never happened. Robert did a very good job in spite of the tongue. It was still a nice ride.

Carol [Lavell]'s ride was the best I had

ever seen the horse do. She got over 1600 points and we were all just jumping up and down! It was a super, super, ride.

We didn't wait for the final team scores. We just ran back to the barn to get the horses ready for the awards.

I was worried about how I was going to get Monsieur through the awards ceremony. He can be so bad and when he's that bad, he's very scary. Luckily, the FEI gave me permission to tranquilize him and put cotton in his ears. Before I mounted him, his head was hanging between his legs, but once we walked into the stadium, he was wide awake! You would never have thought he was tranquilized.

My adrenaline was really going during the victory gallop and I don't think I stopped smiling!

We had a big champagne party back at the barn. The whole team, plus some of the jumpers and horse owners, were there. Everyone was so happy! We went to the pier that night and celebrated again!

August 8

Monsieur is hitching a ride back to Denmark with the Danish and Swedish teams. The other horses left on the sixth.

Looking back, it was an experience of a lifetime. But surprisingly, I don't feel down or empty. I always thought I'd feel empty after it was over, but having been a part of it opens up a lot of opportunities. Now I just want to do it again. I'm already looking forward to 1996. ■