

L'Equipage Farm

Sunbury, Ohio

by Laura Miller

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Marie Antoinette Potts-Renwa believes the horse breeding business should be about people making a difference. And that is exactly what she has set out to do.

In 2004, Marie Antoinette opened L'Equipage Farm, located in Sunbury, Ohio, just north of Columbus. She specializes in the Belgian Sport Horse breed and the sale of imported frozen semen.

Like many European breeds, the Belgian Sport Horse was initially bred to be a warhorse. The Belgian Sport Horse registry, known today as sBs Studbook, was founded in 1920 as a means to remount the Belgian army after World War I. It was originally named Societe d'Encouragement pour L'Elevage du Cheval d'Armes, which translates as the Society for Encouraging the Breeding of Horses for the Army.

When the use of motorized vehicles decreased the army's need for horses, the registry adapted by promoting the breeding of lighter, more elegant saddle horses. Since a name change was relevant, in 1930 the registry became Demi-Sang Belge, or the Belgian Half-Blood Society.

Another obstacle faced by Belgium horse breeders was German occupation during World War II depleting much of the breeding stock. After World War II, horses were imported from France, Germany, England and Ireland in an effort to re-establish and improve the breed. Then in 1967, the registry was renamed the Royal Belgian Sport Horse Society. Finally, in 1991, the new name Stud Book sBs took the place of the Royal Belgian Sport Horse Society.

Today, sBs focuses on producing a performance animal. Belgian Sport Horses are used primarily for show jumping in Belgium, but are also competitive in dressage and three-day eventing on an international level. This is the result of many years of selective and controlled breeding.

The sBs carefully controls the breeding stock, particularly stallions, by only granting breeding privileges to those horses that meet certain criteria. The selection of stallions is very strict. They must first undergo a veterinary examination to assess fertility and

detect any undesirable inheritable traits. The stallion is then evaluated on its

pedigree, conformation, speed, free-jumping talent and behavior under saddle. Final approval depends upon the stallion's performance in the competitive arena. It is Marie Antoinette's goal to make some of these exceptional breeding stallions available to the American public.

Marie Antoinette, who was born and raised around the town of Waremmé, not far from Brussels, Belgium, and moved here in 1978, has been involved with Belgian Sport Horses for about 10 years and has been breeding them for the last three.

In addition to working with overseas companies involved in the horse reproduction business, Marie Antoinette frequently travels to Belgium to further her expertise and knowledge of the breed. A sponsored trip is organized every year by the sBs for the February Stallion Presentation for qualified prospective buyers. She has experience with horse importation and connections with Belgian breeders, whom she has known and trusted for years. These breeders have many fine horses for sale and Marie Antoinette offers her services to equestrians looking to purchase a Belgian Sport Horse. "I know I could find the right horse for them," she says.

At this point in time, that may be the best way to acquire a Belgian Sport Horse. Although Marie Antoinette is expecting three foals in 2006, she is not planning to sell offspring yet. She cites the 2007 foal crop will likely be the first she offers for sale.

In addition, she plans to keep her 2005 colt with thoughts of using him as a stud. The colt is from a BWP stallion out of a Thoroughbred mare. Both mare and colt are registered with the Belgian Warmblood Breeding Association, North American District (BWP-NAD). To be registered, they had to be approved at one of the keurings or inspections sponsored by the BWP-NAD.

The BWP-NAD operates under the same rules as the Belgian Warmblood Breeding Association (BWP) in Belgium. Like the sBs Studbook, BWP stallions must meet stringent criteria before they are approved. Mares listed in the main studbook must be registered with one of the sport horse societies. The auxiliary studbook is for mares of unclear or unrecognized sport horse pedigrees. Mares must be at least 15.1 hands, three years of age and not have more than 25% draft blood.

Although the Belgian Warmblood (BWP) and the Belgian Sport Horse are two separate registries, Marie Antoinette states, "They are basically the same horse." As is European tradition, horses are registered by geographical districts rather than by bloodlines. "[Breeders] who live in Northern Belgium usually register with BWP, while those in Southern Belgium register with sBs," states Marie Antoinette.

She also explains that the nationality of the breeder is the nationality of the horse. Marie Antoinette is hoping this gives her the distinct privilege of registering her foals with the sBs in Belgium. But she assures us that when an sBs horse is sold, the passport transfers to the new owner regardless of their nationality.

An sBs passport is the equivalent of an American horse's registration papers. It looks like a passport, and contains the horse's pedigree and a physical description of the animal. An sBs passport is in compliance with requirements from the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture, the National and International Federations of Equestrian Sports and the World-Wide Federation of the Studbook.

Marie Antoinette says American breeders can register foals through the BWP-NAD or one of the other sport horse or warmblood registries here in the United States. She explains that artificial insemination and embryo transfer are acceptable methods of breeding and that sBs and BWP do not limit the number of offspring from embryo transfer from the same mare during the same calendar year.

She currently offers frozen semen from five sBs stallions. All five stallions have impressive show jumping pedigrees and contain Darco bloodlines. Darco, a Belgian Warmblood stallion, was an international show jumper with numerous Grand Prix and World Cup wins. Teamed with rider Ludo Philipaerts, the pair competed at the 1992 Olympic Games. Darco's talent is readily passed on to his offspring, as attested by the number of international show jumping horses he has sired.

The semen, shipped from Belgium in liquid nitrogen containers, is inspected once it arrives here in the United States. Due to the cost of shipping and the paperwork that must be filed with the USDA, Marie Antoinette finds it more economical to purchase in quantity.

For more information on the Belgian Sport Horse or L'Equipage Farm, visit www.equipagewarmbloods.com, call 614-477-6008 or email equipagewm-bloods@aol.com. ■



Marie Antoinette and Quinquina Z, a chestnut mare imported from Belgium.



Jane Sharp, a Thoroughbred mare approved for the BWP Studbook, with Frankie J.



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