

David Will's way; "What motivates me is that I want to become better – every day"

At 27-years-old, David Will has done his family name justice. As they say, where there is a will there is a way – and never has it been more true than in David's case. The German rider has worked hard and relentless every day for the last ten years to get to where he is today, and still he strives to become better.



David Will pictured at Gestüt Prinzenberg with the 9-year-old Monodie H. Photos (c) World of Showjumping.

According to Will, he grew up in 'every horse-crazy-kid's dream' with two parents running a riding school. "But, I was not so into it. I was more about soccer and things that were a bit 'cooler' than riding," David says with his own boyish charm. "Honestly, I found riding quite boring in the beginning. My parents never pushed me to anything, so instead I had other hobbies and activities. But, when I was 9-years-old I started to ride a little – and one time a week I had a jumping lesson on a horse called Blueberry. The dressage I did not care for at all, back then that was too boring. Then it went from once a week to twice a week, and the intensity increased. After a while I started doing some competitions on my dad's horse; it would jump the 80cm with me first and then later in the day the 1.40 with my dad. Then of course everybody started asking for it, because it must be such a good and easy horse," David smiles of his early meeting with the horse trade.

While David was still in school, it became more and more clear for him that he wanted to do horses professionally. “So after the 10th grade, I went on to start with an apprenticeship for Uwe Schwanz – a top dressage rider. At this time, I was riding 1.40 and 1.45 classes – but I would say it was more bad than good,” Will laughs infectiously. “There I got my basics in a proper way though.”

At 19-years of age, David got the opportunity to work for acclaimed German trainer Dietmar Gugler. “Dietmar was the junior and young rider coach in Germany at that time, so it was a big chance for me to come here,” David explains.



David on the promising 7-year-old La Mirage together with his boss Dietmar Gugler.

The early days were tough. “I had to groom, I had to drive the lorry – and take a bit care of the dirty work. I actually went to the Europeans for juniors and young riders as a groom for Angelica Augustsson and Jason Smith in 2008 as well as grooming at the 2010 World Championships in Kentucky for one of Dietmar’s clients. But, that was also a good time. I knew it would be this way, and I was determined. I wanted to continue to get my chance. At this time Cameron Hanley was here, Angelica was here – so I got to see some good riders in action every day and I learned a lot,” Davis looks back.

To get David a bit up-to-speed as well as giving him more experience, Dietmar got his young rider into the army support program in Germany that also has a highly-regarded equestrian wing. “That really helped me,” Davis says. “I had six horses to ride every day, and good trainers that helped me develop. I went to a show every weekend, and got the much-needed experience that I lacked.”

Soon, the hard work would pay off for Will. When he came back to Gugler at the end of his army-training, a horse called Don Cesar was waiting in the stable. The chestnut gelding had returned from Georgina Bloomberg, and needed to go to the Sunshine Tour in a build-up after an injury. The plan was that David would ride him in Spain, and then hand him over to Angelica. “Then he jumped so good, that I actually got to keep him! That was that one horse that changed everything for me!”

In 2011, Dietmar was pushing on to get his 23-year-old protégé into bigger shows. “For me that alone really impressed, so when I got to ride in Wiesbaden that spring it was a huge thing for me. Then I was placed in the Grand Prix, and Dietmar said ‘And now I will get you in for Aachen’. I almost laughed out loud, because for me that was completely crazy – Aachen is Aachen, the one and only show and why would I get to ride there? But, Dietmar did as he said and I got to ride. Don Cesar was also the horse that got me selected for my first Nations Cup team, and we ended up winning it.”



David with his top horse Mic Mac du Tillard, that has been on fantastic form this season.

David had gotten the taste of the international top sport, and he wanted more. When Don Cesar was retired, he already had Colorit ready in the stable and he moved on to be Will’s next Grand Prix horse. “Colorit had such a good education from Peppi Dahlmann when he came to me in 2009, which made a huge difference as to how quickly he progressed,” David says.

And, it was with Colorit that David became a household name when he won the 2012 World Cup in Den Bosch. “Edwina was second and Marcus third, it was unbelievable. I took my

chance there and it paid off. I am a competitive person and I try never to hide. You should always try to win, for me there is no such thing as a slow clear.”

“Colorit was special. I never had a horse like him,” David smiles when speaking about the stallion that he had some major wins on, such as the 2012 Mannheim and Munich Grand Prix as well as the 2015 Grand Prix in Hagen. “To loose him was sad, not because of my sports career but because I liked him so much. He was my friend, and that was the hardest part,” Will says when talking about the rider-swap earlier this year when the owner decided to give the horse to Christian Ahlmann to ride. “I am happy Colorit is doing so good with Christian though. For me it is also quite fun to watch them together, it is something I learn from every time I see them in the ring,” he says generously.

That horses come and go is something Will is used to, after all Gestüt Prinzenberg is a dealing stable. Jovina, Carriere and Chesall are just some of many other familiar names that once used to be a seen next to David’s on the start list. “That is the less flattering side of a dealing stable. It is hard to see horses you care for being sold. It has it advantages though. I learned to adopt to any kind of horse, and this way you will never be a one hit wonder – you learn to do it on any horse!”



David Will and the 7-year-old mare La Mirage pictured at home at Gestüt Prinzenberg.

This positive approach towards what others might have considered a huge minus for any rider trying to build a sports career, says a lot about Will’s way to approach life. “I try to be positive in any part of life,” he says. “And I always like to look at things neutral, and try to figure things out myself rather than being influenced by others’ opinions. That helps sticking to who you are!”

David's motivation is never found in what his string of horses looks like. "No. What motivates me is that I want to become better – every day. I always want to improve, and hate when things go bad. If I don't ride proper, I get really angry with myself. My mum does not call me then, she knows me well and waits until I call her. But, I think this hunger for being good is necessary to succeed."

David's appetite for top results has definitely showed this year. With the 15-year-old super star Mic Mac du Tillard, Will has won major classes in Hamburg, Aachen, Mannheim, Samorin and Munich. The two were also recently third in the Salzburg Grand Prix, closing off a great 2015. Taking over such a well known horse was not a walk-in-the-park though.

"It was a bit difficult in the beginning. Mic Mac and Angelica were a couple, and had done so much together. Everybody knew Mic Mac," David says. "And then I wanted a lot more control than Angelica used to ride her with, and she did not jump well at all for me this way. After some bad results I changed completely, and let Mic Mac be herself. Then it started to work out, but unfortunately she sustained an injury last year and to be honest we were quite close to retire her at this point. In the end she came back to work, and returned to competition in May and she has been on fantastic form the whole season. It's not often a word associated with Mic Mac, but she has actually been really consistent."

In the stables in Pfungstadt, are younger horses waiting to take over and step into the spotlight. Le Mirage, a 7-year-old mare, is one that David has high hopes for. The grey 9-year-old Monodie is another one David thinks will make it to Grand Prix level. "I always had good horses here, and I still do," David says. "I was lucky to be at the right place at the right moment to get this job. And I have worked hard and determined. And I always tried to keep my head high, and keep on going even when a good horse left."

"And I love what I am doing," Will says. "You have to. It's a huge effort a professional rider puts in on every day basis. I ride and train my horses at least eight hours every day; so my job is a lot more than those few minutes in the ring. Still, it is the competition part that really gives me the drive. Not just because of the performance in itself, but because that is where I really get pushed on. My best friends are also my competitors, and we always try to make each other better – motivating and helping each other. And I guess that is also why I think our sport is so special and unique!"
