

The article that appeared in Italy about the MORINDA STUD, 2015

- How did everything start? How did the idea of breeding coloured jumping competition horses develop ?

This is the question I have since asked myself, because the answer is a little vague. I was very keen to become a breeder, but I knew that the market for youngstock was very difficult to break into nowadays. This is because there are more and more stallions around and an extremely high number of their offspring that breeders are not able to find a market for. So I didn't want to create a tiny stud that would have been "lost in the mass".

We had the idea to buy a « Tinker » stallion (or Irish Cob) for his original coat markings, telling ourselves that it was a possibility for an original horse breeding enterprise. But, of course, being myself an ex-competitive rider (having competed in classes up to 1.40m), I wanted to see this Tinker stallion jumping at liberty: catastrophic result, of course. Tinkers are not made for that.

This is what gave me the idea to see if there were any coloured horses capable of making the grade in jumping, at least at a reasonable level. Because against all the odds, my discipline remains jumping and I didn't want to breed horses for a different purpose. I then discovered Utah van Erpekom, the stallion ridden by John Whitaker, and Visage Van de Olmenhoeve, a stallion based in Australia and that we were lucky to have in France for 18 months who had competed at 1.60 m, without mentioning the famous Samber who although he did not jump more than 1.40 m also competed at high level in Dressage.

- On what basis did you found your breeding? Which broodmares did you choose and why?

I started by looking for Coloured broodmares with size, conformation, good character and especially from the lineages of good jumpers, which was rare. The coloured mothers I have today were not then to be found. So, I started by buying KWPN and other Dutch lineages because 10 years ago, coloured Selle Français horses were very rare, in fact almost non-existent.

My first broodmare whom I still have, named Stacy, arrived as a 6 year old, in 2005. Stacy is a direct daughter of the famous Samber, with a good lineage of Dressage on the maternal side. I also bought two other Pie broodmares in England, Patricia who had (supposedly) competed up to Prix Saint Georges level, and Pinto Queen Hill.

My first error ; I bought these broodmares by trusting a French intermediary, and paid for them in advance, without having seen them. Supposedly, I could exchange them if they didn't please me. Stacy arrived far too thin and wouldn't even allow us to pick up her feet.

Patricia, by Ico Sun, was the worst: supposed to have been competed up to St. George, she was not only unrideable and dangerous under the saddle, but in addition she was very thin too and hated people. A terrible character.

Finally, Pinto Queen Hill was ok, being a beautiful mare, but she did not jump very well. Since none were followed, I tested them over fences. Stacy was the best.

Afterwards, I also bought a non Pie broodmare by Uzelien x Narcos II which I still have.

But very quickly, I changed my choice of broodmares. I wanted to have produce from them with truly exceptional maternal origins, so I decided to separate myself from my ordinary Pie broodmares. I kept Stacy and Royale Star du Chene, a French Selle Francais Pie from a good strain.

To replace my first Pies, I managed to rent (because they were not for sale) some excellent SF mares from Mrs. Christine Abadie-Gien, whose affix "Du Defey" is well known.

I preferred to start with Selle Français lineages because I know them very well. At 20/25 years old, for example, I knew Almé and his most famous sons, Galoubet A and Jalisco B, and had admired year after year the champion Flambeau C ridden by Frédéric Cottier ... It was the time of Electre II by Monceaux, and of the Thoroughbred Rantzau. And fantastic horsemen, whom we shall never forget, like the Italian Inzeo brothers.

My preference was for large horses with a lot of Thoroughbred (Laudanum, for example). I think that for modern competitions, we can never have too much spirit and responsiveness.

Mrs. Abadie had, among her livestock, several mares that I liked very much, with CSI / CSIO lines.

The first, Fantine du Defey (a daughter of the Thoroughbred Laudanum) was a direct descendant of Flambeau C and Camera (through their sister Inula who also competed in Grand Prix). Their mother NARCISSE, a legendary broodmare, produced five Grand Prix horses and the descendants of her daughter Camera (by Rantzau) are exceptional.

Another, Circée de l'Erdre (a daughter of Jalisco B with Laudanum as the father of the mother) would be the mother of Ulyss Morinda. She is a grand daughter of the excellent Utricle (by the Thoroughbred Monceaux). Utricle was the Grand Prix mare of Olympic rider Marc Roguet, then the mother of several excellent horses including Quabri de Laleu, the stallion ridden by Hervé Godignon. She also produced Piperazine Laleu with Laudanum, one of the best six year olds of her generation, and herself the mother of Circee de l'Erdre.

A third mare, Hibiscus IV was a daughter of the famous Narcos II with a mother by the founding father of the race, Alme. Hibiscus IV has a uterine sister, La Vie du Fraigneau who had competed at 5-star Grand Prix level with Jessica Kuerten.

So for a year in 2007 I rented the first two mares, and the year after, the daughter of Fantine of the Defey, Scarlett Fontanel, by Diamant de Sémilly. I continued with Hibiscus IV and I started to breed what I wanted, coloured foals with very high level maternal strains.

- What stallions have you sent them to? How did you decide the crosses?

Of course, my priority was (or should have been) using Utah Van Erpekom and Visage Van de Olmenhoeve but I could not obtain any semen straws. In short, the first year, I chose a coloured stallion named Fetiche de Blagny for three of the mares because he was a son of Nidor Platière. This horse has been dead for years so I can say that I was disappointed in the results.

I put the fourth, Patricia, to Kronos d'Ouilly and the foal, born a Pie, became a stallion at the end of an excellent year as a six year old. But Stenthor Morinda had the same character as his mother Patricia (only worse) so I absolutely did not want to keep him. Subsequently, he was resold. I don't know what became of him or whether he was kept entire.

On the other hand, as soon as I obtained Madame Abadie's mares, I turned to the only two coloured stallions that had proved their worth by competing over 1.60 m: Utah van Erpekom and Visage Van de Olmenhoeve. They were the basis for my breeding.

Subsequently, after having obtained some excellent coloured fillies, I also chose to use some very different strains, but always performance stallions.

- What were the difficulties that you met in creating good coloured show jumping horses ?

First and foremost, it was necessary to find excellent maternal lines, mares with true base strains of CSI, or even CSIO. At the beginning, such very classical strains, with high-level origins, did not exist in coloured horses.

The problem was that with the non-coloured mares, I had only one chance out of two to obtain the Tobiano gene (that brings color). I put Fantine du Defey and Circee de l'Erdre both to Utah van Erpekom ridden by John Whitaker, and I also put in foal my coloured Selle Français, Royale Star du Chene to the same stallion, but by embryo transfer because I had resold the mother. Without a doubt, I was hoping to have a daughter of Royale Star to replace her mother, but homozygous because she would possess the Tobiano gene in duplicate, and in addition, would have as father the famous Utah van Erpekom.

So I started to try to produce homozygotes but I wanted above all to produce coloured products with exceptional competition lines. The latter could not be homozygous because the mothers were not coloured.

In 2008 the foals of these unions were born. I was very lucky because I got five magnificent coloured foals, including Ulyss Morinda. I also had the homozygous daughter of Utah Van Erpekom that I had imagined, Une Star Morinda.

In 2009, I created Vision Morinda (renamed Re Vision Morinda Z), daughter of Scarlett Fontanel (by Diamant de Sémilly and Fantine du Defey mentioned above), which gave me a coloured filly from the famous line of Flambeau C and his sister Caméra .. The number of very great champions from this strain is extraordinary.

In addition, Vision Morinda has an incredible, completely speckled coat that no one can explain since she hasn't had a drop of American blood in her veins, and her bloodline has been verified by a DNA test!

I should point out that Vision came from an embryo transfer because her mother was only two years old. To my surprise, I got two embryos entrusted of course to two carriers, and Vision therefore has a twin brother, Vidocq Morinda who currently is competing in the 6 year old classes in Belgium. He has remained entire.

The year after, in 2010, I had another wonderful daughter of Utah Van Erpekom by Hibiscus IV (Narcos II x Almé). Aloha Morinda is superb, and her daughter, born in 2014, Tropical Morinda Z is just as beautiful. I sold this line but I have the right to take an embryo transfer from this filly when she is old enough to do so.

Thus coloured dams with classical lines now exist and will have foals that should have the qualities of their ancestors.

- How did the market perceive this novelty? Did you have, at the beginning, difficulties related to the prejudices that often accompany initiatives that are out of

the ordinary?

I realized with astonishment that if many people treated my coloured horses as 'cows' and did not take them seriously (as I had expected), other riders or breeders adored them and dreamed of finding one that could jump. I can quote Mr. Marcel Lopez who bought Royale Star du Chêne, and who on my advice put her to Visage Van de Olmenhoeve and who currently has a magnificent six year old mare named Valentine de Grisys, who is spectacular. He has refused six figure offers for her.

That said, I was not the first to try to produce Coloured Sports Horses. If Utah Van Erpekom and Visage Van de Olmenhoeve existed, it was thanks to other breeders.

The difference is that I wanted to use only very classical maternal lines, while others also used Paint Horses (Pintos). Or put very ordinary coloured mares to famous stallions. In my opinion, the mother is the most important thing. She must have a really good base strain!

Even now, many people think that Pies are recreational horses, at best very average show jumping horses. Certainly there was Utah Van Erpekom and Visage Van de Olmenhoeve but they are already forgotten because they have been retired for four or five years.

On the other hand, many people are changing their minds having seen the quality of the new generations that are arriving. And sponsors as well as all those who want a unique horse without sacrificing its quality, adore coloured horses. Everything that is very rare is highly sought after and sells easily. Almost all my foals are sold while still on their mother.

The Americans love coloured horses, I am asked for Ulyss Morinda nominations in England, Switzerland, and perhaps in Italy ...

- What is the aim of your stud ? What is the dream you're following ?

At first, I think it was pretty vague in my mind. I wanted to breed coloured jumping horses, hoping to get horses that would compete from 1.25 m to 1.40 m. Good amateur horses.

Then later it became clearer and I realised that my dream was to see one day a "Morinda horse" make CSI 4 and 5 star level. This dream is being realized since in 2016, Ulyss Morinda is starting in CSI 4 *.

Going even further, I wanted to create a future stallion who would be both HOMOZYGOUS and a Performance horse, so that those who would buy his semen straws would be assured of a coloured foal. There were already stallions that were homozygous but none had a true show jumping lineage. None appeared in horse shows, or even in very minor classes (1.05 m).

- In 2008 your stallion Ulyss Morinda was born who is currently competing successfully with Rik Hemeryck. Can you tell us about him and tell us about his training?

Ulyss Morinda was always a nice and easy foal, with a very balanced personality. He had a very happy childhood surrounded by other foals and fillies at the start, then of course, with other males only. They spent their days outside and their nights in the box. Of course, he was very well handled from birth and very well cared for. I am sure he was never sick for even one day.

At the age of three, I sent him to a young rider whom I trusted, Alexander Goar, for I knew he was very gentle with his horses. This is where Ulyss was first backed (a formality) and then jumped over a few small bars at liberty. The first two or three times I thought, "He looks like he's jumping, but he's not doing very well with his back." And the 3rd or the 4th time, suddenly, for no reason, Ulyss showed us an exceptional back movement. I don't know when he discovered this, but suddenly he found what to do!

Since then, he has progressed nicely and we presented him to the Selle Français stallions approval board. He performed very well but he missed the final by just a few points. I'm not sure that his coloured coat pleased the judges.

As a 4 years old, he entered his first contests. As he was doing very well, he continued with his season and qualified for the 4 Year Old final in Fontainebleau where he had a clear round and then 4 faults on the last obstacle; he ended up with twelve clear rounds in the year over 16 courses. He was rated "Very Good".

He was retained for final approval by the Selle Français board at the end of the year but despite a double clear round, again, he was not approved. I was disappointed because he deserved it.

On the occasion of his eventual approval, he was given a complete osteo-articular assessment at CIRAIE. Ulyss was rated 5 star, that is, perfect!

In 2013, I decided to wait for him and not to put him on the 5-year-old A course that I thought was too big for babies. He nevertheless had five outings during the year, on

training courses.

At 6 years old, the same thing. I didn't want him to start this young on courses that, in France at least, are too big for horses of this age. So I had the idea to send him to compete as a Hunter, and some smaller jumping courses none exceeding 1.20m maximum.

Ulyss took the opportunity to win the 6 year old Hunter championship of France, ELITE with a final score of 19 out of 20, which was unheard of!

- How did you come to find yourself with Rik ? What does Rik think of Ulyss ? (would it be possible to have a little commentary from him ?)

I got in touch with Rik thanks to a professional rider, Julie Crasson, who had worked with him and said he was one of the best. I knew him as a great rider of course. I watched videos I had of him again and I asked Julie to get us a meeting. We arrived at Rik's with Ulyss on January 20th, 2015 and he gave Ulyss a long trial, mainly on the flat.

Then he asked why we were thinking of bringing the horse to him. We told him that we had it in mind that he would keep him and ride him in competitions, if he thought he was good enough. We explained to him that Ulyss had never jumped more than 1.20 m, even at home. Rik put him over a few poles (Ulyss was flying and didn't touch any of them) and Rik concluded: "Leave him with me for a month, and then I'll tell you if I will be keeping him on." After all that, we agreed to bring him back one week later because he had no box free for him that day!

So we delivered Ulyss back to Rik on the 26th, and then on February 5th, he took him to an indoor training session over 1.20m. Ulyss walked it, doing a lovely clear round.

Ulyss was brought out to do a 1.20m in late February and then in mid-March a 1.30m, followed by two other 1.30m in late March, clear each time. Rik never said to me "I'm keeping him" but it was self-evident because his phone calls were more and more laudatory; "I'm very happy with Ulyss", then "He's doing very well, he's progressing quickly" "He gives nothing a second look ..."

Having said this, at the time, he also said to me: "I must warn you, he will not be able to do the seven year old classes this year because he doesn't have enough experience."

From April, everything unfolded very quickly. Rik took Ulyss to his first CSI at Hardelot (the 125/130 events) and Ulyss was placed twice. He jumped better and better

and it was obvious the pairing got along very well. Rik is an extraordinary rider and very kind with his horses! As for Ulyss, he very much caught the eye. At the end of April, he competed in a 130 in Gesvres where he was placed 3rd. I felt Rik was quite astonished at Ulyss's rapid progress.

Thereupon he said to me: "Well, I think I'll enter him in the seven year old class in the CSI at Le Touquet. I jumped 140 with him at home. " " So what? " "He jumped that the same way as he jumps 120."

In addition, at Le Touquet, the 7 year olds were limited to 135. Ulyss was thus at the CSI at Le Touquet at the beginning of May 2015, and again, he had two places out of three events (just one rail down on the last day).

In June, he was ridden in his first 140 in Belgium, without any problem. He seemed to have to make no effort. Rik then told me that he was taking him to Ascona, Switzerland in July to do the seven year old class. Ulyss again was placed twice including in the big final over 140. This was the last time that Rik told me that Ulyss was not giving anything a second glance. He understands now that Ulyss NEVER looks at anything.

At the CSI of Mâcon in August, the partnership was formed. Ulyss was placed three times out of three events at 130, 135 and 140 including a beautiful 4th place in the 135 which rode very fast. Rik was teaching Ulyss to be competitive and Ulyss loved this new game.

It was there that the Selle Français judges came back to see him, a delegation led by Michel Martinot (an ex rider of the highest level). Mr Martinot didn't hide from me that he very much liked Ulyss and that he was going to insist that he be approved Selle Français. Indeed, Ulyss was finally approved in September 2015.

I then asked Rik if he could take him to the Masters for Selle Français Stallions in October. He was available and he accepted, which proved to us that he wanted to hold on to Ulyss. It's very rare that a rider of his calibre, on returning from the Longines in Los Angeles (where he was 6th in the Grand Prix 160) would agree to do a fourteen hour round trip for a single horse.

So off they went, and it was not useless at all because Ulyss won the seven year old section with very good grades: 16 out of 20 for conformation, 8.5 out of 10 for style, 8.5 out of 10 for bloodline and awareness of poles ... He had a double clear at 135.

And finally, Ulyss finished his season at the famous 4-star CSI in Liège at the beginning of November when he was again placed twice, 5th in the 135 for seven year olds, in the

competition 'Best of Belgium'.

Rik suggested we should give him a break after Liege, in November and December (paddock and quiet walks in the woods). In January, we could freeze his semen in straws, and then he would gradually begin to resume work in mid-February. He will not have jumped an obstacle for three months.

To quote Rik: "Ulyss always wants to do well, always gives of his maximum. He is brave, very competitive, and in Liege for example where even my old experienced horses looked at everything on the first day, he didn't bat an eyelash. He looks like he spent his life on a show jumping course. "

- What are the athletic characteristics of Ulyss ? Those which make him stand out as a promising sports horse ?

His best quality is probably his mentality. He's not afraid of anything, and concentrates well in competitions. He never stops. Nothing moves him, nothing disturbs him. He is not only calm and well balanced but also shows a great deal of spirit over fences. He has no defensive behaviour and no nerves. He loves to compete. And he is very sweet natured. An 8-year-old child could take care of him.

His next best quality is his magnificent style. He is VERY fast in front and has an excellent movement in his back. If one adds to this a lot of balance, power and respect for poles, you get a very good all round horse who is also very supple. Like a cat !

- Ulyss is also an approved stallion. How have you managed your career as a breeder? How many horses has he covered? He was recently accredited by the SF.

- What characteristics does he pass on to his offspring?

Up until 2015, Ulyss was not known at all and not licensed by the Selle Français, simply the AES. So he only covered two mares and a pony (a nomination won during a competition because I would not specifically have thought of putting him to a pony). In 2015, he covered ten mares and I think that next year he'll be having many more candidates since I've already received many requests. Breeders are in the process of discovering him. His base blood line (in his maternal line) gives them great confidence in him. Ulyss doesn't have the qualities that he possesses just by chance.

I should point out that his semen is only available frozen. It's out of the question to tire him out by doing it fresh with actual coverings, and besides, Rik would not have time to take him every time there was a need.

So it's too early to know what he's passing on to his offspring. The two existing foals are very big and as nice natured as their father. He had excellent mares in 2015 and we can't wait to see the babies.

- After Ulyss, this year Flamboyant V, a homozygote male, was born. You have also acquired another homozygote foal, Vantage. What is special about them? What are your plans for them?

To my knowledge, what they have that is special is that they are the FIRST future homozygotic stallions with show jumping lines. Both are sons of Visage Van de Olmenhoeve (whom I consider to be an extraordinary stallion), and Flamboyant is also the grandson of Utah Van Erpekom.

Une Star Morinda, mother of Flamboyant was inseminated by Visage in 2011 and 2012 but gave me two fillies – both homozygous Tobianos. They were not the future stallions that I had been dreaming of producing. Finally in 2014, I got a superb male by Troubadour d'Aurel (who was spectacular as a six year old over poles) but ... he was not homozygote. He was exported to England.

It was only this year in 2015 that I finally managed to obtain a homozygous colt foal by VISAGE VAN DE OLMENHOEVE and UNE STAR MORINDA, daughter of UTAH VAN ERPEKOM. This foal, Flamboyant V Morinda, a Selle Français, represents the crossing of the two best coloured stallions that have existed to date, and which have both competed over 1.60 m courses.

I learned that a second homozygote son of Visage had been born this year in England. Since he was for sale, I bought him. His name is UCS Vantage, and he is very similar in appearance to his half-brother Flamboyant with whom he will be brought up. They have just been weaned.

These two males have some true show jumping lines as all of Visage's produce jump., without mentioning the very good maternal line that Une Star Morinda brings to Flamboyant. As I have already said above, the homozygous stallions that existed before today are not competition horses.

What I wish and hope for is that at least one of these two foals will be able to compete one day at international level.

- Do you have any advice for breeders who would like to start a coloured horse breeding operation?

In my opinion if you want to raise coloured horses, you should start, if possible, with one or two coloured fillies from good bloodlines. I had to create them. Now, they can be found, even though exceptional fillies or mares are still very rare.

One can, of course, also put a good single coloured mare to a quality coloured stallion, with good results. The quality of the two parents is paramount.

Then, do not succumb to the ease of doing so: the risk of having a whole coated foal after having put your mare to a good stallion is, in my opinion more interesting than using an average homozygote stallion to have a coloured foal at all costs. Personally, I prefer quality first, and then colour.

When Vision Morinda was three years old, I put her to Canturo and the colt was born coloured! But it could also have not been!

- What sort of qualities should a breeder have, in your opinion ?

First, love your horses and don't sell them to just anyone. What a catastrophe to bring forth a magnificent foal, to raise it with love, to school it and then to let it go to a home where it will be used no better than a bicycle, even badly treated and abused. You have to choose the families, and if a foal is delicate (as some are), don't sell it to an amateur who won't know how to bring it on. Fortunately, most of my foals prove to be very easy and many are the delight of their amateur owners. Because we can't hope just to be raising foals destined for the highest levels.

This leads me to say that you should also be aware of why you want to be a breeder and what kind of product you are trying to obtain. You don't raise foals of rustic races destined for leisure, Thoroughbreds destined to race, or Sports Horses in the same way at all. Similarly, we don't choose the same mothers or stallions to try to create good practical amateur horses, to those we choose to produce horses that may one day rise to the highest levels. However there can also be surprises and you should direct a young horse according to where his natural gifts lie, towards show jumping, eventing or Dressage.

You must be critical of your foals and for example don't hesitate to castrate the males. There are few who deserve to become stallions. I know I'm repeating myself but a stallion must have both an exceptional bloodline, and an excellent character. And he must prove that he deserves to remain whole once he's tested over poles (for my part, not before 3 years of age).

And finally, the main quality of a breeder (apart from the love of his horses which must come first), and apart from a minimum of indispensable knowledge ... is perseverance.

We refine slowly over the generations, we try other crosses, sometimes more daring and eventually we improve.

Hérica Ravel

Les Pies de Morinda