



Pleased to meet you:
SAP Hale Bob OLD,
14 years old, by
Helikon xx-Noble
Champion. From
naughty boy to Ingrid
Klimke's number one

IMAGE: J.M. PROQUET

Reiter Revue Readers Vote SAP Hale Bob OLD Voted 2017 Horse of the Year

“He was not the horse of my dreams.”

Germany’s eventing rider Ingrid Klimke has achieved her greatest individual triumphs with Hale Bob. Here she talks about Hale Bob, the clown of the yard and a horse with a big personality, and about determination and second chances. Her story is not for romantics.

Reiter Revue International: When I think of Hale Bob, I think natural jumper, fearless, clown.

Ingrid Klimke (with a laugh): That’s him!

Was that your first impression of Bobby?

What can I say. A friend had told me about him. He was five at the time. She said: “I’ve seen an interesting thoroughbred cross. I think you should try him out.” He was not as handsome as he is now. Nor as well-muscled. When I saw him I thought he’d better have a good jump in him. And he did.

That does not sound like love at first sight.

No, it really wasn’t (Ingrid says laughing). But I soon spotted that he had great ability, was very careful, and, above all, loved jumping. As far as his gaits are concerned, well, they were a bit different from what I was used to from riding dressage horses.

What do you mean??

Let’s just say he was very economical. He’s not the most comfortable ride either. I used to say it was like sitting on a railroad tie. He was a bit stiff and wooden, not so smooth, especially laterally. Mr. Stecken said, “You need to

do lots of figures-of-eight, lots of serpentines, and lots of cavalletti work.” Bobby has really come on over the years. We earn points now because he is very confident and listens to the rider. We have top scores in the extended paces and he has a very good gait. Riding him in the arena is actually fun these days. He’s very easy to teach and doesn’t stand in his own way.

Certainly not on the cross-country course.

Right from the start his canter felt so effortless that I thought he could go on forever. His canter and the scope of his jump are his greatest strengths. Out on the cross-country course you don’t notice the going, or whether the course is undulating or long. Perhaps that comes from hunting.

Hunting?

We often take our young horses hunting. The first few times Andreas (editor’s note: Andreas Busacker, Ingrid Klimke’s husband) took him on a hunt. It lasted until Bobby decided to overtake the hounds. He became really ambitious and enjoyed it so much that as soon as dog barked he got frisky.

Frisky is the polite way of putting it. He’s almost thrown you out of the saddle on many an occasion.

Oh yes. As soon as we start doing uphill canter work, practice some cross-country obstacles, or go out for hack and he’s supposed to be at the back of the group, then he starts playing up. If we are out in a group, everyone knows not to get too close to Bobby and not to overtake him. He can kick out even at a gallop. He leaves you in no doubt about what he likes and what he doesn’t. He’s comical sometimes. He used to bolt regularly. I do all I can to prevent it but sometimes before I know it his head is down and he’s off. That’ll always be part of him. You need a really secure seat. He’s not interested in whether you are still on board or not.

What made you keep Bobby? Rational thinking or gut feeling?

To be honest, he wasn’t the horse of my dreams. I can’t say whether I’d buy him again today. For two whole years I was close to parting from him. But I couldn’t find a buyer. And once I found one, Carmen (editor’s note: Carmen Thiemann, Klimke’s long-standing stable manager) and Andreas both said to me one evening, “No, you can’t do that. We believe in Bobby. We want you to give him one last chance.” Chris Bartle (editor’s note: former trainer of Germany’s eventing team) helped me hugely at the time.

Typical Bobby:
His efficient
canter is priceless
on the cross-
country course
and makes him
agile and fast.



Bobby's trophy
collection: "No-one
told me you can't so
I did it anyway"
marking his four-star
win in Pau, France;
plus his Olympic
silver from Rio



Hale Bob – at ease
with himself and the
world around him.
Happiness is a good
roll.



He only wants to
play. Ingrid Klimke
and Hale Bob have
had natural
horsemanship
training so that
Bob comes back
whenever he
charges off without
his rider.

“Bobby was so wild. I
wasn't sure I could tame
him or whether he'd be
better with a male
rider.”

FOTOS: J.-M. TROINQUET

What are the strengths of Bobby's character?

His biggest strength is that he is totally at peace with himself. At home he is completely relaxed. You have to drag him along on the leading rein out to the paddock and back. And he is so easy to deal with in the stall. He doesn't waste any energy at all then, not a bit. And he is really gentle around children. Here in the arena I'd put the smallest child on him any time, backwards even.

There's a sign outside his box saying: "No-one told me you can't so I did it anyway." Where did he get it?

From Pau, France, after we won our first four-star competition there. He was always in Escada's shadow. The way she moved meant that she had far more potential and quality. Bobby could never quite match her and never had a chance to grab the attention. But in Pau he simply outclassed her.

Has he changed since becoming a bit of star in the yard?

I wouldn't say so. He doesn't behave as if he cares what we think. He does like people and attention but he's not pushy. He's just very much at ease with himself and the world around him.

Who are his friends?

His best friend is Carmen. He has his favorites among the horses as well. He doesn't mind Asha standing next to him. Or Braxxi on the other side. If any of the others come up to him he'll have a go at them. He once jumped over the fence into the next paddock to chase Soma Bay. She was totally afraid of him, poor thing. He can be a bit of a rascal.

What's Bobby's daily routine?

He spends half the day out on the pasture. I exercise him either beforehand in the morning or in the afternoon. Every five days we drive to the hill for some stamina work. Otherwise every day is different. We have one day off a week, one day of caveletti work on the lunge, plus cavalletti work for dressage, practicing movements ahead of a competition, and hacking. In winter we do some jumping exercises but apart from that I don't do much jumping with him any more.

Last winter I taught him the flying change on every second stride and on every stride because he'd got a bit bored with dressage. We also had some sessions with natural horsemanship trainer Claudia Miller.

Where is Bobby happiest?

That's easy: on the pasture. And on the truck. He loves going places. But not on his own. He has to take a friend along.

What are his favorite titbits?

He likes pellets best of all, sometimes apples. But not sugar or bananas.

Bobby helped you realize your dream of an individual title when you became European champion at Strzegom in Poland.

Sometimes it's not the horse of your dreams that makes your wishes come true. Strzegom was special: Bobby had been in really good form all year. Even warming up outside the arena felt good. Bobby was really on his toes. Hans Melzer told me to stay focused and not get overexcited. The fact my showjumping trainer Kurt Gravemeier came to watch the jumping was fantastic. I could not allow myself a single time penalty because Michi Jung was hot on my heels. That was a thrilling head-to-head finish.

Hale Bob carried you to your first four-star title in 2014. You went on to win team gold at the European championships in 2015, and Olympic team silver in 2016 before becoming European champion in 2017. Where do you go from here?

When Sam won gold at the Rio Olympics when he was 16, at the medal ceremony I whispered to Bobby that in four year's time he would be 16. And that he could be the best in the world. All you need is a dream.

Ingrid Klimke was in conversation with Karolin Leszinski..

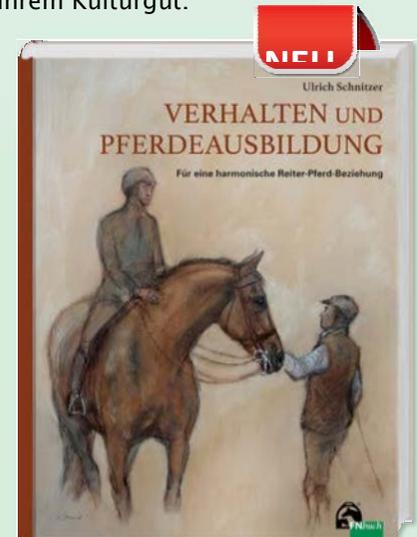
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