

Goldfinch is also the dam of Tyn-y-Cae Sandmartin who achieved the highest dressage marks at the 2006 Young Horse Evaluation. "Goldfinch has proved to be an extremely good mare; whatever stallion we put her to we get something good. We have a good pony foundation to draw on in England, the right staff to ride them here at Sheepcote and we do not have to be second class to the Continentals in this area," said David.

REDUCING THE RISKS

Breeding is not as simple as putting a good mare to a good stallion or - as David points out - it would then be easy to breed top horses be they Derby winners or Grand Prix dressage stars: "It's a game of limiting the unexpected," he says, "Because whatever you do you can still get the unexpected. If you put a Grand Prix stallion to a Grand Prix mare - both with good temperaments and good conformation then you are more likely to get a good horse. But you get a lot of

indiscriminate breeding - even on the continent, so a lot of unpredictability."

David asserts that some characteristics nearly always come down with some horses: "Certain stallions rarely throw an unattractive horse - you always get an attractive looking horse from Wurlitzer. Whatever limitations they may have - his offspring are always good looking and do very well in showing. We know with what type of mare Wurlitzer does his best job; his strengths are very good brain, temperament and carriage. He is very intelligent and so are his foals so it's not difficult to teach them all the tricks. But he needs a quality mare and does a really good job on ponies."

THE MARE

David is a firm believer in the importance of the mare: "Mares are the most important thing; statistically, the influence of the mare is far more important. For example if a stallion produces two good foals that go to Grand Prix level say - that

may be out of the possibility of hundreds of offspring. But a mare with two good offspring has done that with far fewer foals so that makes her much more important statistically. For instance, some years ago Calista had three offspring by different stallions all competing at the same Advanced Medium Regional Final.

"Some characteristics are dominant and some stallions' traits are stronger than others and that can also depend on the mare. With some mares, like our mares Goldfinch and Calista, everything you put them to, you get something good."

A.I.

For David the big breakthrough in breeding in this country came with the introduction of Artificial Insemination; "A.I. transformed breeding for us in the UK; it gave us access to the best bloodlines. A serious breeder wants to know how the bloodlines interact with each other, and this requires an absorbing brain."



Lucy Pincus with Tyn-y-Cae Offspray and her foal Rock on Fella by Sheepcote Redicci.



Wish of Sheepcote by Wurlitzer out of a mare by Rubinstein. The foal has grown up and now competes at Inter 11 with Clare Ballantyne.

WHAT IT TAKES

"To be a serious breeder you need to understand more than just knowing that Donnerhall or Florestan are good horses, it's about knowing the possibilities and what maybe produced. It's about reading all you can, watching at competitions, listening to what is said - and you can still get the unexpected - it's fascinating. Serena spends a lot of time at the stallion gradings and mare shows in Europe - you can absorb a lot of information there.

"A.I. has given us the opportunity to upgrade our basic stock. Breeding is a very long process, you produce a filly slightly better than the existing mare one year, and next year continue with the process and improve your stock over time."

VALUE OF INFORMATION

Being so involved in breeding gives David and Serena extra information about the horses they produce to ride themselves or to sell on. "When you have all this information about your stallions and mares you know how they will react. Using different bloodlines has given us different qualities - if we didn't ride our own stock we wouldn't know that. We know which horses need more time - breaking youngsters out of one of our mares, we thought would be very difficult; the youngsters looked very sharp in the field. But they turned out to be easy to break.

"Our stallion Cassander was very difficult to train in flying changes, but once he got them he was like clockwork, it was just difficult to find the key for him especially the change from right to left. His offspring have similar characteristics but now it

doesn't take me so long to deal with it - I have learnt from him and know what to expect.

"The reason you have stallion grading is to give you the information you need to breed a better horse. Proper breeders go to the stallion shows and events and accumulate information to determine their breeding plan. They cross bloodlines according to their own aims and requirements. Riding your stallion, your mares and the progeny is an extra bonus in the accumulation of information for future breeding plans. You get more details and a more thorough experience.

"Knowing the horses intimately like we do adds to the information. Then when you breed a decent horse - it's all your achievement. You planned it, you bred it, you train it and you get to enjoy it. It's all yours."