

E Q U I N E

PROFILE

He walked down the ramp of the lorry, was cold, and had lost so much weight . . . he looked, no not awful . . . APPALLING!" Dressage rider Serena Morgan was recollecting the moment when her Dutch Warmblood stallion, Cassander, arrived at Sheepcote from Holland six years ago. "I thought, 'My God! I've spent all my money on this . . .!' " But of course, the bay three-year-old looked much improved once he was installed in his warm box and Serena mused, "I've never been sorry that I bought him, he's such a nice character."

Serena is a practical person, but to be romantic, Cassander was something of a dream horse for her. "I'd never had a horse of my own. I'd always ridden for other people, and the horses got sold on or something. Even though I was brought up on a stud, I was never given a well behaved, 'made' pony to ride. So when I sold my house in Cardiff six years ago, I wanted to buy a horse of my own that would hopefully make Advanced level.

Quest for a Dressage Horse

Germany seemed the obvious place to visit in Serena's quest for a dressage horse. "I had in my head that I wanted a mare that I could eventually breed from, at least 16.3hh. I was en route to the Westfalia sale when the friends I was with stopped off in Holland to try and find some show jumpers. At one yard, a breeder offered me a ladies' horse, but Nick Smith laughed and told him I was a dressage person. I had a look over the door at the colt and immediately thought that he was much too small at 16hh. But when I saw him out, he 'grew' as he pulled himself up together. I watched him loose jumped over a decent fence and he had a very good technique. I asked to ride him, and they told me it was impossible because he was unbroken."

Serena, who had been competing at that time on Topper, a 17.2hh horse with a most uncomfortable sitting trot, had vowed that she would never buy a horse that made her grit her teeth at this pace. The fact that the colt had never been sat on did not deter her. "He'd been led out in a bridle, and obviously been well handled, and we were in an indoor school, so the worst that could happen was that he would buck me off, and I needed to get a 'feel' of him. We lunged him with the tack on, and the breeder held on tight as I sat on him and patted him until he relaxed a little. He went off at a very sharp trot, and after a few minutes, it was obvious he wasn't going to buck, and I felt that I would easily be able to ride him in time."

After this unorthodox introduction, Serena thought hard about the son of Komeet, but was half-afraid that she was getting desperate as it became apparent that the money she had available would not be enough to purchase a horse of the calibre she so fervently wanted. Seeing the mare that she had earmarked fetch a fantastic sum in Germany, Serena realised how much she liked Cassander, and returned to Holland to negotiate, eventually striking a deal. "Of course, I broke him in properly, my first real proper horse! And then came the splints . . .!" Cassander



STELLA HAVARD talks to **SERENA MORGAN** about her outstanding dressage horse, **CASSANDER**