

# Dressage at Devon

By Wanda Escobar



*Dreams do come true.* I can say this because it happened to me. As a child we often traveled to West Virginia where my grandmother had a horse. She used to let me ride often and those were some of my happiest moments as a child. Now that I own my own farm, my dream has been to have a horse of mine compete at the FEI level.

I have a wonderful horse named Marwick, who is a 15 year old Dutch Warmblood gelding by Ecuador. Marwick has fantastic gaits and a kind temperament. As I worked with him, the more I realized he had tremendous potential. In February 2009, I decided to send him to Patrick and Lani Tigchelaar of Tigchelaar Dressage in Hanover, VA. He came to them as a project to see if he could get going again at the Prix St. George (FEI level) and to compete at some recognised shows.

After successful shows at the PVDA Ride for Life (66.316% for 2nd place and 70.263% 1st place) and Dressage at Lexington (73.947% 1st & FEI High Score of the Show) Marwick had the scores necessary to apply to ride at Dressage at Devon. Devon is in Pennsylvania and is one of the most prestigious dressage events on the east coast of the United States. We submitted his scores and had to wait a little more than a month to get official notification that we were accepted. I can't describe the happiness and pride I felt when I knew we would get to take Marwick to compete there.

The next few weeks were filled with the myriad details needed to get him there including getting his FEI passport, vaccinations, health certificate and much more paperwork (this includes writing more than a few checks in the process). Patrick

and Lani put in countless hours to keep him in top form both physically and mentally. They rode him five or six days a week in the months leading up to the event with lots of sweat equity! Lani coached Patrick both at home and at the shows and handled all the paperwork for the show. Everything was going as planned until a week before the event when I broke my leg quite badly. There was serious doubt in my mind that I would be able to make it to Devon and I was heartbroken. It took encouragement from my family and friends to get me there, and my son Matthew who drove the trailer, bundled me up in the back seat of the truck with lots of pillows, books, food, drink, crutches and a wheelchair along with ice and medication to get me through the six hour drive.

Our first day there (Wednesday) was spent traveling then unloading everything. I think it was easier to move our entire family from one city to another than it was to take one horse to Devon. Marwick spent most of the day getting acclimated to his new surroundings and the hundreds of horses throughout the many barns. That afternoon Patrick schooled Marwick and they looked great. I think Marwick felt like he was where he belonged.

The second day (Thursday) was spent with more schooling and lots of prep work including numerous, grooming, braiding and bathing activities. Hillary Clinton once said "it takes a village." Now I know what she meant by that. It seems like both Patrick and Lani were always on the move. My son Matthew and my daughter-in-law Heather were invaluable in taking care of the numerous details that always come up during a show. Having to push me around in my wheelchair (sometimes in the sand) was only one of the numerous tasks they had to do. In addition to getting prepared for the big event on Friday, every single horse in the FEI classes had to be publicly vetted, i.e. "the official jog," by the FEI show veterinarians with the judges present. This caused a rise in my blood pressure as some horses were excused from the show if they were not deemed sound for competition. We had a few anxious moments as the vets did not overlook anything, but fortunately Marwick passed the vetting process.

Friday, show day, finally arrived. I hardly slept the night before as my nerves got the best of me. Marwick was in the Prix St. George class with a total of forty three horses entered. The class started at 8:00 in the morning. Marwick was one of the last entries to show, so we got to watch lots of horses from across not just the United States but some from around the globe including Caesar Parra (who ended up winning the class). I was truly impressed with the quality of horses at Devon. They were all world class and truly athletic horses. As each horse competed, their scores were immediately posted so we were able to know who the leaders were. After about 30 horses competed, it was finally Marwick's turn. Needless to say, I was both eager and extremely nervous. As he came into the ring I could barely breathe. Sitting in the stands I could hear comments from people sitting around me and they were impressed with Marwick. He looked terrific and he had the best ride I have ever seen him have. Even with a broken leg, I just about came out of my wheelchair when he finished. Tears came to my eyes even before his score was announced as I know both Marwick and Patrick gave it everything they had and left every ounce of heart in the ring! Marwick's average score was 65.7% from three judges, which placed him seventh. They called back the top ten horses for awards. I don't think I have ever been more thrilled. Patrick did a terrific job and he is one of the finest trainers and riders I have ever met. The joy I felt at the awards ceremony is indescribable. Even Marwick knew he did well as he kicked up his heels in excitement more than a few times during his victory lap.

Special thanks to all those who helped me make my dream come true. Patrick, Lani, Matt, Heather and Marwick – it could not have happened without you. You all are the best!