

# At home with...

Their father need never worry about the postman – it is quite obvious that all four Böckmann-brothers are very much alike. Not only do they all bear a resemblance to their father, Anton Böckmann, they also share in his great passion for horses.

A photograph of four men, the Böckmann brothers, standing in a stable. They are dressed in practical, outdoor-style clothing. Two horses are visible in the foreground, one on the left and one on the right. The background shows the interior of a stable with wooden walls and a window.

# The Böckmann family

By Kim Kreling  
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Tönne Böckmann looks after the stallion station at Lastrup and Gilbert Böckmann runs the jumping stable. If there's a party, all the Böckmanns have an easy journey for the whole family lives in the same village.

But the four Böckmanns are much more than just four horse-loving brothers. In one way or another they all play an active role in the German national equestrian scene and in worldwide, international horse sport. It would be hard to find another family that is so completely involved with horses like the Böckmanns are. Between them they have taken horsemanship to a new level, embodying a unique combination of knowledge in riding, breeding and transporting horses.

#### ANTON THE SMITHY

Father Anton started out as a blacksmith. "My father was always crazy about horses but he didn't have the chance to ride himself because of the time and the situation after the second world war," explains Klaus Böckmann. It was different for the four boys. They all took to riding ponies which was an excellent reason for father Böckmann to start breeding versatile mounts. The siblings learned their craft in a number of ways. "Our ponies used to do everything," remembers Klaus, fondly. "They did jumping, they

went in front of a coach, they did flat racing, trotting races in front of a sulky, steeplechase and of course the usual children's competition where you just have to sit nicely on your pony. So they did up to six

**"They did up to six competitions a day and most of them without a saddle – that was normal at that time."**

competitions a day and most of them without a saddle – that was normal at that time." When the sons and their ponies had to be transported to shows, their father converted the old cattle cars into something he could accommodate the ponies with. When the boys grew too tall for ponies they changed to horses. So, once again their father indulged them and started breeding horses -- and building new transporters, every one better than the last. And that is how the family's business started. Its development over the years

has been breathtaking. Nowadays, Böckmann transporters are known worldwide. They build and sell up to 6,000 horse trailers a year and 20,000 trailers for everyday use. Böckmann is the

biggest horse trailer company in Germany and in most parts of Europe. In the last half century, the Böckmanns have produced more than 200,000 horse trailers. Not only that but they also designed and built the airplane boxes used to transport horses to Atlanta for the Olympic Games in 1996.

#### STALLIONS AND STABLES

The Böckmanns' stallions are another facet of the family business which has grown dramatically. Around 1,300 mares are inseminated annually with

semen from the clan's 26 stallions. And then there is the Böckmann show-jumping stable – where horses and riders are trained at international level.

#### FAMILY TIES

If the Böckmanns have a family party they all have a very easy journey. All members of the dynasty live in the same little village of Lastrup, in the north west of Germany. At one end of the village is the very large premises of Böckmann trailers which is run by brothers Klaus and Roger. On the other side of the village is the Böckmann equestrian centre. Here, Tönne Böckmann looks after the stallion station and Gilbert Böckmann runs the jumping stable.

#### GILLI ON THE GO

Although all four sons were quite successful riders, Gilbert, otherwise known as Gilli, was the only one who never wanted to do anything but ride. "I always wanted to ride – nothing else," Gilli confesses. As young men all the Böckmann brothers rode military, as eventing was called then. At 16 Gilli was already German Champion in this



Gilbert Böckmann with No Father's Girl, the horse he has been having such remarkable success with recently.



Klaus and Roger run the family's trailer business which is one of the largest in Europe. "I think our father implanted the horse bacillus into all four of us," says Roger.

discipline but then decided to swop to show jumping. "At that time you had to train the horses many hours a day to get them fit enough for a competition," remembers Gilli.

#### NO FATHER'S GIRL

By 1996 Gilli had joined the German Championship cader and since then has made more than 25 Nations Cup appearances. This past year however has been one of

marvellous run. He won the Grand Prix in Münster, was runner up in the World Cup qualifier in Verona and helped the team finish second in the Nations Cup at Gijon. He arrived at the Riders Tour Final in

brothers sat in front of the television, palms sweaty and fingers crossed. He started a little too frantically in the jump-off and in the end finished third in the tour ranking -- still an achievement to be proud of.

"Yes, I had a sensational year with No Father's Girl, but I would still have to say that the very best moment of my career so far was the first time I started at Aachen. That was something really special. And so was the year (1996) when I took three horses to Aachen and all of them were bred by my father."

Gilli is not only a passionate rider, he is also a very popular teacher. Two years ago he was invited to give a clinic in Australia. So impressed were the authorities that they offered him the job of national coach and Gilli accepted. Once or twice a year he flies to Australia for training sessions and this spring squad members will come to Lastrup to train and compete in Germany and Europe in preparation for the World Equestrian Games.

#### BREEDING BOCKMANN

Tönne Böckmann, the eldest of the four brothers, is responsible for the family's breeding operation. That wasn't the plan but that was the way it worked out. "It was something of a coincidence," explains Tönne. "I wanted to study veterinary medicine but it was awfully difficult to get a place, so I decided to study agriculture instead." After his studies he

his most successful. With his uniquely named nine year old mare, No Father's Girl, he had a

Munich as the big favourite to win but nerves may have got the better of him. Back home in Lastrup his

"Before school I used to ride them walk and trot, and after school training went on for several hours. Walkers and the like didn't exist then and the sport was different from today." Gilli soon earned a place on the German show jumping Young Rider team where he rode under Herbert Meyer, who at that time was the national coach.

After his national service Gilli went to German Equestrian Olympic Committee headquarters in Warendorf where Lutz Merkel was his show jumping trainer and Siegfried Peilicke was his dressage instructor.

Although the Warendorf crew wanted Gilli to stay on, he decided he needed some experience of how things were done in a commercial environment so he went to work for Peter Weinberg. "Those were two very interesting years for me and I wouldn't have wanted to miss them," Gilli confirms. Age 24 he returned home to start his own business, another decision he has never regretted.



Around 1,300 mares are inseminated annually with semen from the clan's 26 stallions.



Tönne Böckmann, the eldest of the four brothers, is responsible for the family's breeding operation. The stallion station stands such notables as 2008 Hanoverian stallion of the Year De Niro, Quattro, Cordalme Z and Clinton I.

wasn't quite sure what to do so went back home to mull things over. His father put him to work with the three stallions he had then and before he knew it Tönne had taken over.

It wasn't long before the number of stallions increased to more than 20. They are not discipline specific as Tönne explains.

"We try to do both -- we offer dressage and jumping stallions, but it is really difficult to offer new dressage stallions. There are just a few lines so it is very hard to offer something new."

Tönne says he is always on the look out for a good Thoroughbred stallion as they are hard to come by. "It also is very difficult, but I really do think we need Thoroughbred for our warmblood breeding."

In his younger days Tönne was a Junior European eventing team gold medalist, but now even though he doesn't find the time to ride regularly, he enjoys "sitting on a horse every now and then."

#### WHERE WE BELONG

"I think everyone of us has landed where he belongs," observes Klaus Böckmann.

Klaus is responsible for the trailer company's marketing, sales and finances. "I didn't have as much talent to ride as Gilli, but I was always interested in technical things. So I studied machine construction."

Brother Roger is a master in body making and is in charge of production. Apart from Gilli he is the only other brother who is

your own. I can see this with my brother. People like to come over on Sundays and see a stallion. But I like to be away sometimes and in my spare time do things which are not related to horses."

Gilli and his wife Yvonne, who is fully involved in the business, make a point of going out for dinner and talking about things that don't involve horses. "You need that from

they can really keep their word when they say: "We build trailers to make horses feel at home during transportation."

#### SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

With 400 employees the Böckmann company is the biggest employer in the area. Hand in hand with family pride comes social responsibility. The Böckmanns have their role in

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actively competing but he stuck with eventing.

"I think our father implanted the horse bacillus into all four of us," says Roger. "We all have found our fulfilment in the horse business." As similar as the four brothers seem to be, of course there are differences. While Tönne Böckmann lives on site at the stallion station, Gilbert's home is off campus. "If you live at the stables you are never on

time to time," emphasizes Gilli. The Böckmanns are a close family unit who understand each other very well and work as part of a team. While they all have their own areas of expertise, there is a lot of constructive to and fro between them.

Gilli, for example, rides some stallions for Tönne and together they test out new ideas from Roger and Klaus. That is one reason why

Lastrup where the family is not only well known, but also respected. It is with great joy that Brigitte and Anton Böckmann preside over their brood. All four brothers are married and the Böckmanns senior have 10 grand children. So it is nearly impossible to go through Lastrup without meeting at least one of the 20 members of this unique equestrian family. <<