



# PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES!

Sandra Mitchell reports on her trip to the FEQA  
26th European Championship of American  
Quarter Horses 2015 in Kreuth, 7th – 16th  
August 2015

**W**ell, that's what it took to get there.

On my inaugural visit last year I had company: a driver willing to face the scary German autobahns, even though he is still to forgive me for making it impossible for him to accept a hire car upgrade to a sports car, and a stress free journey to my destination. This year things were very different. I was going it alone and was not willing (read: brave enough) to hire a car at the airport and drive myself to the competition venue.

Firstly, let's straighten something out—we all refer to it as Kreuth. It is nowhere near—it is Kreuth 2, Rieden—and that in itself was enough to completely confuse me. Secondly, let's appreciate how rubbish I am at navigating public transport systems of any sort in this country, let alone in a country where I have no knowledge of the language beyond please, thank you and beer. Luckily my ever-loving husband knows me well and furnished me with a complete travel itinerary.

With trepidation I set off for Stansted airport from March railway station. That bit went well. I arrived in plenty of time and had no holdups going through security. Now for the

dreaded Ryanair flight. I am second-from-last to board and my heart sinks when I spot my seat; in the centre and between the two hugest people I have ever seen. Now, don't get me wrong, I am not as svelte as I once was but . . . really. I wedge myself in and spend the journey perched on half a seat, no access to arm rests because they are hidden beneath man boobs, and it got worse when my travel companion on the left falls asleep. I have to endure his head lolling further into my personal space and restrict my oxygen intake due to his halitosis. Thankfully it's a short flight to Nurnberg.

Now for the really scary bit. I have to buy a ticket, find, and get on the correct underground train to take me to the main train station. Actually, it was really easy. The ticket machine is right outside the airport as is the underground station. Once on the underground platform I asked a group of lads to make sure I got on the right train and that was it, I was on my way. I could feel my heart rate reducing and my breathing returning to something closer to normal. At €2.60, it was great value and exceptionally clean. Arrival at the main station—think Kings Cross—caused my heart rate to sky rocket

once more but I eventually found where to buy my ticket (€10.80) and which platform I needed to catch the 18.33 to Amberg. Challenge number whatever-it-is, there are two trains on my platform. Do I get on the front one or the back one? It's only 18.15. The only person I can find to ask, a fellow traveller, tells me that my train isn't in yet so I wait. 18.30 and still no sign of any other train arriving to this platform. Cue heart rate bongo drum symphony. I spy someone in a uniform and I lose all rational thought and barge my way through the crowd of people who I dare say have equally pressing questions. "Which train is it to Amberg?" I yell. "Amberg! This train or that train?" Louder this time. It's the one at the back. I run, I thump the button on the big red train, only to be faced with steps going up. These trains are massive. I haul my little case up the steps and collapse on a temporary seat in what appears to be a cargo area. I don't care. I can't breathe. The doors swoosh closed and we depart. It's 18.33. Amberg, here I come. Taxi from Amberg to the hotel on site, Waldhotel Gut Matheshof (€40) and the drama is over. I drop my gear at the hotel and wend my way to the competition venue. I head to what was 'Brits Corner' last year and the first people I see are Lisa John and Sarah and David Deptford. It only remains for a gin and tonic to be placed in my hands and I can feel the anxiety draining from me.

Last year I was with a fairly large group and we were able to watch Dee Russo's gorgeous mare Angel Until Dark as the home interest. This year my own trainers were taking three horses, two of their own and one belonging to their client, and my friend, Ruth O'Reilly. I was only going for the last weekend so I needed them to make the finals so I would have something to watch.

Although the Deptfords have competed abroad before this was their first appearance at the European Championships and hopes were high. The other hot subject was that of the Swamp Fever or Equine Infectious Anaemia. After consulting their vet, the show's vets and their client, it was decided that they were actually at less risk than they would have been before the infected horses had been dispatched. Both of which were well outside the recommended distance. All precautions were taken.



## IN HE CAME, WALKING WELL, AROUND THE CORNER AND LOST A BACK LEG, MY HEART LURCHED BUT HE DIDN'T BREAK.

I needn't have worried about having something to watch—both competitor, horses and back up team (that would be Sarah) more than held their own.

Ruth O'Reilly's Poppet Smoked A Jay—Ozzie to his mates—went Grand Champion and Reserve Champion Gelding at Halter. He was also first under one judge and second under another in Aged Geldings at Halter and open finalist in Senior Ranch Horse where he came fifth plus further placings.

Sovereign Quarter Horses' Blazin Chic Olena was Reserve European Champion in FEQHA Performance Stallions at Halter, four times AQHA Reserve Champion Stallion at Halter, four seconds, and one third in AQHA Performance Stallions at Halter.

### *So far, so good.*

Then came Heir To A Jay (Leo). This horse is a culmination of a thirty plus year breeding program and a lot more than David Deptford was riding on this young fellows back. He is royally bred by Jays Smokin Story out of Miss Star N Snips. He carries the blood of Snippers Heirogance, Colonel Freckles, Mr Gunsmoke, and Hobby Doc. He made it to the Junior

Ranch Riding final.

Although we were both in Brits Corner Sarah sat on one bank of seats and I diagonally across from her in another. Neither wanted to be near the other in case anything went wrong.

In he came, walking well, around the corner and lost a back leg, my heart lurched but he didn't break. The rest of the pattern was a smooth blur; his extended jog was sublime as was his pole work. Fast walk after the poles, don't forget to back up—he didn't. I had written all the previous scores down and was listening hard for his, it came and it was the highest. I stood and clapped and cried. Sarah beckoned me over and said in the smallest voice I have ever heard: "Did I hear that right?" She had and we cried some more.

David Deptford and Heir To A Jay, owned by Eleanor Deptford, European Junior Ranch Riding Champion 2015. It was the first time that the British National Anthem had been played since 2010.

### *What a result!*

It was a great show. See the interview with Judge Karen McCuiston to hear more. Having felt all of that emotion and how wonderful it was I wish I had gone to support the guys in Paris, Aachen, or anywhere to support our Brits. It made me feel so proud I thought my heart would burst.

