

Johnson

From Selection Champion to Olympic Keur Stallion

The Norwegian poet Henrik Ibsen once said, “A thousand words leave not the same deep impression as does a single deed.” Although Ibsen was speaking of people, what if a horse were to deliver not just a single deed but impressive deeds time after time? An article about such a horse would be almost superfluous. And who is this horse? The stallion Johnson, who is successful on all fronts! He has set himself apart from the rest time and again, first in the stallion selection, then in the sport under Hans Peter Minderhoud and then as a sire. Johnson’s career is an accumulation of highlights with the Rio Olympics as the icing on the cake.

TEXT: JENNEKE SMIT • PHOTOS: DIRK CAREMANS

Jeannette Benedict-Nijhof:
“It takes a long time with dressage stallions before you know if they’ll produce Grand Prix offspring. Those by Johnson are popping up everywhere now.”

In February of this year, Johnson was awarded the keur predicate for demonstrated excellence as a breeding stallion. His oldest offspring were born in 2006, a number of which compete at the highest level. Examples of Johnson offspring which compete successfully in the international Grand Prix include Meggle’s Boston (out of Orpa elite prestatie by T.C.N. Partout, breeder: Maatschap Pleyter; rider: Hendrik Lochthowe), who was selected by the KWPN as a three-year-old; Boing Boing (out of Prinses by Kennedy, breeder: Soren Luther Christensen, rider: Jacob Noerby Soerensen), who was bred in Denmark; and Butopiar (out of Sutura provisional keur preferent by Cocktail, breeder: B.J. ter Huirne, rider: Christoph Koschel). Following close behind, from the same birth year, are horses such as the talented Boston STH (out of Volmie ster s.Quattro, breeder: J.W. Temmink). After competing under Hans Peter Minderhoud in the World Championships for Young Dressage Horses in Verden, Boston STH was turned over to Dutch rider Denise Nekeman, who won the 2015 Dutch Championship in the Young Riders

division and now is excelling in the U25-Grand Prix classes. The Johnson son Bolero (Densie ster preferent by Vincent), registered to the Barbançon Mestre sisters, is also excelling in the U25-Grand Prix classes. At the national level, eight-year-old Hexagon’s Double Dutch (out of Ushimana keur IBOP (dr) sport (dr) by Rubiquil, breeder: Laurens van Lieren) enjoyed a successful Grand Prix debut last May under Dutch rider Tamar Zweistra.

Passing on Good Movement

Johnson is following closely in the footsteps of his legendary sire Jazz. In addition to producing numerous national and international sporthorses, Johnson also boasts offspring which have excelled in the ability tests, the mare inspection and the stallion selection. Through 2015, 1,864 Johnson offspring have been registered with the KWPN. This number includes 94 ster mares, 16 keur mares and 63 elite mares. Nineteen Johnson daughters have passed the mare test and 72 the IBOP. With respect to the sport predicate, 49 Johnson mares have secured the predicate at Z2-level or higher. Furthermore,

Under Hans Peter Minderhoud, Johnson ended ninth in the Olympics. He also produces remarkable offspring, the oldest of which compete at the Grand Prix level.



STALLIONS



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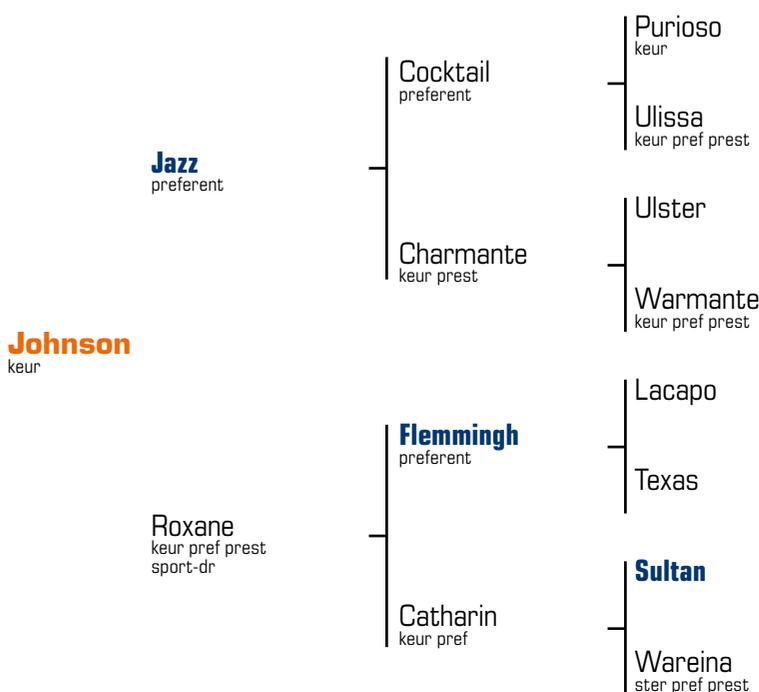
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a number of Johnson mares have earned champion titles. As for his sons, Handsome O (ds.Rousseau) won the championship last year at the KWPN Stallion Show.

Johnson boasts three KWPN-approved sons: Bretton Woods (Johnson out of Annabel elite pref by De Niro, breeder: G. Jansen-Blanken), who is excelling in the Small Tour under Matthias Rath; Breezer (out of Brieka keur pref prest s.Sultan, breeder: R.J.M. Schoenaker), who

is competing successfully in the US Small Tour; and six-year-old Firestone (out of Zelza-Bella ster s.Florencio, breeder: A.J.G. Flierman), who is progressing well under Dutch rider Joyce Lenaerts. With these offspring, we can assert that 14-year-old Johnson is making solid progress as a breeding stallion. It is all the more remarkable that, from the start, Johnson has combined his duties as a breeding stallion with a very successful sport career.

Now let's turn to Johnson's own story. On 23 February 2002, he was born in the stables of Piet van der Vleuten, who named him Verdi-V. His dam Roxane keur sport-dr pref prest is by Flemmingh, who passes on good movement. Johnson's granddam Catharin is the product of



TOP ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2016 Olympic Games, Rio de Janeiro, Freestyle, 9th
- 2016 CDI05*, Rotterdam, Grand Prix, 1st
- 2015 European Championships, Aachen, GP Special, bronze
- 2015 European Championships, Aachen, team gold
- 2015 Dutch Championships, Grand Prix, silver
- 2015 CDI4*, Villach, Grand Prix & Special, 1st
- 2015 CDI05*, Rotterdam, Grand Prix & Freestyle, 2nd
- 2015 CDI4* Indoor Brabant Grand Prix & Freestyle, 2nd
- 2015 European Championships, Aachen, Grand Prix, 4th
- 2014 WEG, Caen, team bronze
- 2014 World Cup Final, Lyon, Grand Prix, 6th
- 2011 Dutch Championships, Small Tour, silver
- 2007 World Championships, 5-year-old division, 6th
- 2006 Pavo Cup, Reserve Champion
- 2005 KWPN Stallion Show, Champion



line-breeding, as both her sire Sultan and dam Wareina represent the renowned Reina-line. In addition to Johnson, Roxane also produced four Z1/Z2 dressage horses; the mares Djo ter Kwincke (s.Jazz, EPTM 81) and Bonne Amie ter Kwincke (s.Uptown, IBOP 78), who excelled in the mare test; and the Apache son Icon Begijnhoeve, who was selected for the performance test this year.

Never Disappointed

As a foal, Johnson was purchased by the all-around equestrian enterprise Team Nijhof. “I was on the road in Brabant looking at several foals when Piet van de Vleuten phoned me. He had a Voltaire foal in pasture, and he wanted to sell him. Within an hour, I was standing on his doorstep,” recalls Henk Nijhof, Sr. “When I arrived, I saw the Voltaire foal, but my eye was continually drawn to that special Jazz foal: Johnson. I kept quiet, and when Piet wanted to do business, I told him that I only wanted to buy

the Voltaire foal if I could also buy the Jazz foal. He didn’t expect that, but fortunately it worked out! From the first moment, I had a very special feeling about Johnson. The way he marched around the pasture as a young foal was truly amazing! He seemed like ‘the real thing.’ I had to have him, and I got him. Such big expectations usually aren’t fulfilled; in fact, they’re more often unfulfilled than fulfilled, but Johnson has never disappointed us.”

A Good Start

Johnson’s first major triumph came as a three-year-old when he was proclaimed the champion of the stallion selection. According to Arie Hamoen, who was chairman of the stallion selection committee at the time, “Johnson’s biggest competition in the championship came from Vivaldi and Valeron. Vivaldi was still very immature and narrow back then, and we placed him third. We had both Johnson and Valeron trot again because the audience initially gave

1. Johnson boasts three KWPN-approved sons, among them the much-acclaimed Bretton Woods, whom Matthias Rath competed in the International Small Tour.

2. The Johnson son Boston STH has been in the spotlight since he was a young horse. Under Denise Nekeman, he is currently excelling in the U25-Grand Prix classes.

3. Offspring from Johnson’s first year at stud include several Grand Prix horses, among them the internationally successful Meggle’s Boston, ridden by Hendrik Lochthowe.

4. Christoph Koschel rightfully shows the Johnson son Butopiar at the international Grand Prix level.

		JOHNSON						
		JAZZ x FLEMMINGH						
Genetic profile		reliability:	*	*	*	average	*	*
Dressage	low	94%				144		high
Conformation	low	96%				108		high
Loose movement	low	96%				111		high
OC-health	low	-				d.n.a.		high
Height	small	96%				106		large

JOHNSON HERITABILITY DATA
 Johnson has a dressage index score of 144, with 94% reliability. His scores for passing on conformation and free-movement are respectively 108 and 111, both with 96% reliability. Johnson passes on a long (93) and somewhat vertical (93) neck. The shoulder is sloped (90), and the back is tight (85). The front leg tends to be back at the knee (107) and the hind leg sickle-hocked (89). Johnson clearly scores well for movement: the trot is big (87), elastic (88), powerful (89) and has good carriage (88). The canter shows remarkable power (95). In addition, Johnson increases height (106) in his offspring.

Last spring, eight-year-old Hexagon's Double Dutch enjoyed a successful Grand Prix debut under Thamar Zweistra.



Arie Hamoen:
 “The decision to make Johnson the champion is one we never regretted.”

Valeron more applause. He also had fantastic movement but wasn't enough horse to be the champion. Johnson was clearly the most complete stallion of his birth year. The only area in which he didn't entirely meet the ideal picture was his hind leg, which needed to step under the mass a little more. But the perfect horse still hasn't been born, and he was always able to more than compensate for that, also in the subsequent performance test. We never regretted the decision to make him champion.” After passing the fall performance test, Johnson was registered in the studbook with good scores. Among these were a 9 for his canter, 8.5 for talent as a dressage horse and 8 for the trot. In his performance test report, Johnson is described as follows: “an honest and reliable stallion with a very good disposition. The

stallion is very willing to work and has good trainability. Johnson has abundant to very abundant talent as a dressage horse and gives his rider a very good feeling.”

A Direct Hit

With his much acclaimed sport career, Johnson has met all expectations as a dressage horse. The stallion has been in training since age three with elite rider Hans Peter Minderhoud, who has experienced many successes with him. These include winning the Reserve Champion title in 2006 in the prestigious Pavo Cup championship for four-year-olds and finishing fifth the following year in the five-year-old division. In addition, Johnson competed in the World Breeding Championships for Young Dressage Horses in Verden, where he ended commendably

REMARKABLE OFFSPRING

- **Meggle's Boston** (ds.TCN Partout), Int'l Dressage Horse, Grand Prix with Hendrik Lochthowe
- **Boing Boing** (ds.Kennedy), Int'l Dressage Horse, Grand Prix with Jacob Noerby Soerensen
- **Butopiar** (ds.Cocktail), Int'l Dressage Horse, Grand Prix with Christoph Koschel
- **Bolero** (ds.Vincent), Int'l Dressage Horse, U25-Grand Prix with Alexandra Barbançon Mestre
- **Boston STH** (ds.Quattro B), Int'l Dressage Horse, U25-Grand Prix with Denise Nekeman
- **Hexagon's Double Dutch** (ds.Rubiquil), Nat'l Dressage Horse, Grand Prix with Thamar Zweistra
- **Babu** (ds.Hurricane), Nat'l Dressage Horse, Intermediaire II with Sylvia Naagen
- **Chocolate Cookie RDP** (ds.Livingstone), Nat'l Dressage Horse, Grand Prix with Nikki Schaap
- **Breezer** (ds.Sultan), KWPN-approved stallion and Nat'l Dressage Horse, Small Tour
- **Bretton Woods** (ds.De Niro), KWPN-approved stallion and Int'l Dressage Horse
- **Dion Johnson DVB** (ds.Ferro), Int'l Dressage Horse, Small Tour with Marlies van Baalen
- **CJ** (ds.Grafiet), Nat'l Dressage Horse with Imke Schellekens-Bartels
- **Firestone** (ds.Florencio), KWPN-approved stallion
- **Handsome O** (ds.Rousseau), Champion of the 2015 KWPN Stallion Show

in sixth place. Since then, the duo has become a regular asset to the Dutch team, winning medals in the European Championships in Aachen, the World Equestrian Games in Caen and this year's Olympics, in which they were the best Dutch combination.

"To reach the top, you need both a very good horse and a good owner with patience. As a young horse, Johnson had to show in all the competitions because he's an approved stallion. Once he reached the Small Tour, I hardly showed him anywhere for almost 18 months. The owners really gave me the time to train him to the highest level. Because I took that time, it was also done right. And from the beginning, we scored well in the Grand Prix," explained Hans Peter Minderhoud previously in *In de Strengen* magazine. The elite rider succeeded in training Johnson to the highest level. "I was given Johnson as a three-year-old to ride, and he already stood out then for his beauty, suppleness, good trot and canter. He was already a very beautiful horse at that time. It was for good reason that he was declared the champion. We've always had confidence in him: he showed talent for the Grand Prix movements, and he has a fantastic disposition. He's really cooperative, and he has an uncomplicated character."

Ambassador for Nijhof

Johnson has become a fantastic ambassador for Team Nijhof. "It was super cool to be there in Rio de Janeiro. He had a small mistake in the Grand Prix, but everything went really well in the Special and the Freestyle. As far as I'm concerned, they deserved a few percent more,

but that's easy to say. Hans Peter and Johnson showed very well, so it's unfortunate that they just missed out on a medal with the team," says Jeannette Benedict-Nijhof.

Stallions in the sport are great advertising for Team Nijhof's stud farm, although the stallions' offspring are obviously the deciding factor. Benedict-Nijhof: "It takes a long time before you know if a stallion will really produce horses for the highest level, especially in dressage. In contrast to jumpers, dressage horses stay home a lot more and a lot longer. If they're at the Small Tour level, they often stay home a year and a half or two years before they start at the Grand Prix level. Then it remains to be seen whether they can really do it.

"With Johnson, we're now seeing Grand Prix offspring popping up everywhere, which is great confirmation of his qualities as a sire. Those offspring are also being noticed abroad, and that's a favorable development. He produces horses with a beautiful outline and that have talent for the Grand Prix. His own weak area is the walk, so that needs to come from the mare. With respect to character, Johnson passes on one that is easier than that of his sire Jazz, who was often too spooky for the average rider." Glock has held a fifty percent share in Johnson since April 2014. "As long as he's in such excellent condition and can do the work easily, he'll stay in the sport. Perhaps he can compete in more World Cups or maybe another European Championship. We'll have to discuss that. Everyone enjoys seeing him perform in the sport, and we still want to enjoy that too," concludes Benedict-Nijhof. ●



Marlies van Baalen and Dion Johnson DVB (ds. Ferro) were unbeatable at small tour level, they won the Dutch Indoor National Championships.