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*2003 USDF Grand Prix
Horse of the Year Rocher
with George Williams*

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FORMER ADVANCED YOUNG RIDERS

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HORSE OF THE YEAR • *Intermediate II*

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THERE'S a tie for a USDF Horse of the Year national title. Of the 40 horses qualifying, Tracey Lert's Lexus and Charlene Summers's Phirst Solo—both, remarkably, cross-bred—finished with the same median score of 68.293 percent. And both have some at-the-show help from Olympian Debbie McDonald.

Lert bought Lexus as a two-year-old from breeder, California's DG Bar Ranch, in 1995. She'd recently lost a young horse to a pasture accident; at DG Bar for a show, she told trainer Willy Arts she was looking for another young horse to bring along. He showed her two, both grays; she went home to think about it, had them both vet-checked, then brought her parents along when they came back to decide. "My dad [California Dressage Society president Peter Lert] is the analytical one; looking from the breeder's point of view, he actually liked Lexus a little more." But what clinched the

decision was that "my mom said, 'He's the one you ought to get because he's the one you're going to ride well. He has soul in his eyes.' OK," she laughs, "Mom chose the horse for me. Actually, I'd watched their behavior and had sort of come to that conclusion for myself."

Lert left Lexus at DG Bar, "and the next spring Willy started him; he got about 30 days under his belt. Then I brought him home the following May and started poking along." She got some early help from Elizabeth Searle, but since then she's done most of her own training, though she works with Lilo Fore "as consistently as her judging and clinic schedule and my judging and clinic schedule will allow. She's three hours away from me, so it's not like a weekly thing. But she's been very positive; you always need to have an eye on the ground."

Lert says Lexus is "an interesting combination: He's a very gentle horse, very sweet horse. Riding, he's just a little looky

and maybe a little lazy," although moving him up to I-II seems to have gotten him "a little less lazy, a little more interested, a little more energized."

A "lightbulb" experience for both of them happened at the Great American/USDF Region 7 Championships in October, Lert says. "Debbie McDonald was at the show, and I asked her to help me; she schooled me one day and then helped me get him warmed up. And I rode my first I-II with no whip, and it was a test like I never would have thought he could do. It all sort of came together—all the work that Lilo and I had been doing, and then the help from Debbie, in that one package. He tripped around happily, putting out a maximum effort, and I was thinking, 'Oh, my, there really is a horse in here!' I came out and looked at Debbie, and she said, 'That's what you have to do!' It was a real eye-opener. Winning was just sort of the frosting on the cake." ➤

Lexus

1993 gray 16.1-hand Dutch Warmblood gelding (Wanroij x Famous)
Rider/owner: Tracey Lert, Soquel, CA

Phirst Solo

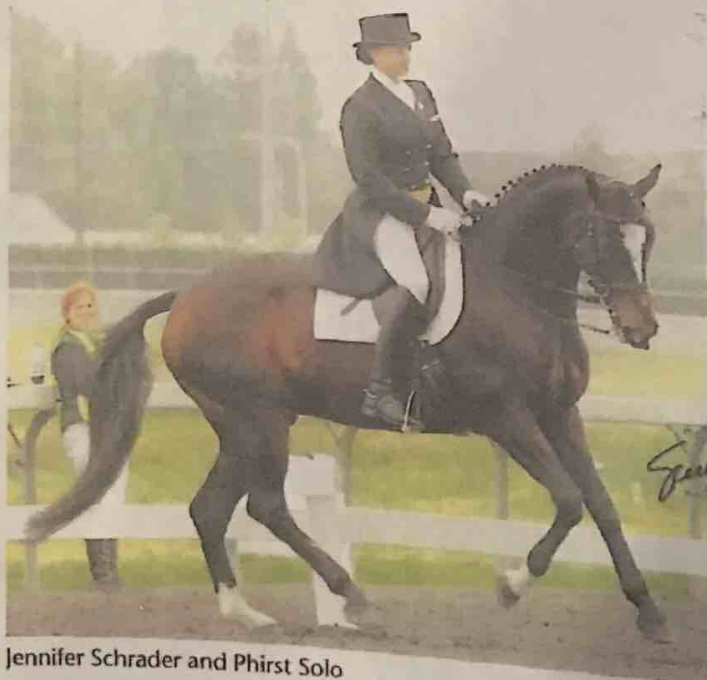
1988 16.2-hand bay Oldenburg mare (Pik Solo x Dumpty Will)
Rider: Jennifer Schrader, Spanaway, WA; owner: Charlene Summers, Eatonville, WA

Median score 68.293%; number competing: 40



PHOTOGRAPHY
SHERI SCOTT

Tracey Lert and Lexus



PHOTOS BY SCARLETT

Jennifer Schrader and Phirst Solo

