

Totilas' 1st Year & What to Expect in 2012 With Matthias Alexander Rath – Special Report

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Totilas ridden by Matthias Alexander Rath at the European Championships in Rotterdam. © 2011 Ken Braddick/dressage-news.com

By KENNETH J. BRADDICK

Matthias Alexander Rath is excited to be preparing Totilas for the first Olympics for both of them in a period in dressage when any one of several horses can win on any given day as he puts into training what he learned in his first year riding the black stallion.

Despite the first year of the partnership with the 12-year-old KWPN stallion in which he received a lot of criticism from the German media he never once thought about quitting as he saw the competition year as “amazing,” capturing the German championship at Balve and all three tests for the CDIO title at Aachen, Germany, a virtual championship.

“If someone had told me in March that Totilas and I would win the German championships and all three tests in Aachen, I would have said, ‘You’re stupid. I could never achieve that.’ So when you see the whole year it was really successful,” he told dressage-news.com.

Matthias is now 27 year old, 14 years younger than Edward Gal who trained and competed Totilas from small tour through 27 classes in 12 international big tour events from June, 2009, until the horse was sold after the World Equestrian Games in Kentucky in 2010. The results were a string of first places broken by only two second places, the dominant force at the 2009 European Championships and the 2010 WEG as well as capturing a World Cup title in 2010. And record scores at Grand Prix, the Special and the Freestyle.

Totilas (Gribaldi x Lominka x Glendale) was sold by Moorlands Stables of The Netherlands to Germany’s Paul Schockemöhle whose Performance Sales International is probably the world’s most successful show horse breeding and sales organization, and Ann-Kathrin Linsenhoff, an Olympic dressage team gold medalist and stepmother of Matthias.

Matthias began riding Totilas a year ago, moving from home near Frankfurt into an apartment at Muhlen while the stallion was bred for the first few months at PSI.



Klaus Martin Rath teaching Matthias, his son, on Totilas last April. © 2011 Ken Braddick/dressage-news.com

In the five competitions in 2011, four of them CDIs while the German Championships in Balve was a national competition, Matthias and Totilas finished first on six occasions, third twice, and once fourth and fifth, the latter results at the European Championships in Rotterdam.

Their debut performance was at Munich in June, followed by Wiesbaden two weeks later, Aachen in mid-July and Rotterdam five weeks later.

For Matthias and his father, Klaus Martin, who trains him, the year was “extremely exciting.”

He broke it up into four parts—the initial getting to know Totilas, followed by riding the tests at home then the competition schedule and, finally, absorbing the lessons learned during the year and moving forward into 2012 and the main goal, the Olympic Games in London where the dressage will be Aug. 5-13.

“The year went so quick, all of the different parts,” he said. “In the competition season everything came really close after each other.

“It was a little problem at Rotterdam—we didn’t really have time to train the things we analyzed after the shows, the things we found out, to bring into our training. We went from show to show and it’s difficult to change something.

“We never thought Rotterdam was the one and only show, the same with the other shows.

“When we analyzed all five shows... it was an extremely successful year. To win Aachen. Some people win it once in their life. I’m 27 and I have won it once already. It’s like a championship. Steffen Peters was there, Adelinde Cornelissen was there. Everybody was there.



A frisky Totilas with Matthias Alexander Rath aboard enjoying victory in the CDIO Grand Prix.
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“Of course Rotterdam was a pity because it was the championships, the top event and we couldn’t produce the results we got before, but that’s sport.

Matthias and the group around him have always been open, candid and welcoming. Not once has this correspondent heard a complaint or excuse and that was the case again in a review of 2011.

“After Rotterdam, the press wrote a lot of negative things but that’s normal. They criticized me a lot but that is fine. I have to live with it. Before, they wrote a lot of positive things.”

During the year when he was being criticized did he ever feel like quitting?

“No,” he said emphatically. “It’s so much fun to work with Totilas. It is so much fun to work with all the group around us.

“That was something I learned this year—when a small group of people are interested in something it is easy to make everyone happy. But when a huge group of people are interested in something it is impossible to make everybody happy. In other sports, the people are more used to it. In Germany in soccer, the players are used to it.

“There was never a time I ever wanted to give up, never.”



Paul and Bettina Schockemöhle and Ann-Kathrin Linsenhoff and Klaus Martin Rath enjoying the Totilas moment. © 2011 Ken Braddick/dressage-news.com

Rotterdam was also important in another way, Matthias said, a major element in making dressage more interesting.

“You can’t say before a competition who will win,” he said.

“After Aachen no one said that Adelinde will win all three tests in Rotterdam. And she won.

“Then everyone said Uthopia (ridden by Carl Hester of Great Britain) but in London he got 75 per cent and there Valegro (ridden by Charlotte Dujardins) was fantastic and Laura Bechtolsheimer was great.

“That’s the really interesting thing. At the moment we have six horses that can do over 80 per cent and they can all win when they have a good day and somebody else makes a mistake. That’s really interesting for the sport, not like 10 years ago when you could have 31 horses in the freestyle but Anky (van Grunsven) was last and Isabell (Werth) was second last and one of them would win, anyway, and the other one would get second. It was boring to see for the spectators. You always knew who would win.

“And the team result you always knew it was Germany and Holland.

“I think for the sport at the moment it is amazing.”

Since Rotterdam, he said, it has been “a really good time, taking all the information learned throughout the year, analyzing it and bringing it into training in preparation for 2012.

And the charisma, the special connection, that Totilas has with with people everywhere seems as legendary as ever.

A recent competition by a radio station in Frankfurt offering 60 or 70 people an opportunity to watch a training session with the the horse drew about 7,500 entries. The previous record number of entries in a contest was about 4,500.

After the appearance of Totilas in Florida was announced, jumper riders at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center—a different show grounds than where the CDI5* will be held—asked if the stallion could make an appearance—“just walk around one of the arenas so we can all see him.”

The appearance at the World Dressage Masters in West Palm Beach, Florida, at the end of January will be the first competition for the pair in 2012.

“I’m looking forward to it,” Matthias said, “though it is a tough start—Steffen Peters, Valegro, Tinne Vilhelmsson-Silfven. I’m looking forward to it, to bring the experience from 2011 into the next year will be really good.”

The schedule for the rest of 2012 is still being worked out but it will include the Meggle Cup final in Dortmund in March and probably another competition in winter to work on the Olympic version of the Grand Prix Special and to work on the Freestyle. They will take a break before the outdoor competitions start in May/June and the schedule could include Hagen and Munich, as well as the required national championships in Balve. Aachen is in early July and then four weeks to the Olympic dressage.

“It’s quite a short period of time,” he said, “but when you come out in the middle of May you can develop a good rhythm if you prepare before.”

What does he predict for the Olympics?

“Of course, the British riders are favorites because it is on their home turf and they are a really strong team,” Matthias said.

But the format allows just three team members instead of four and so no drop score. Plus, the team competition will be both the Grand Prix and the Special, modified into a shorter test specially for the Olympics.

“Two tests with three riders... you will have to have really good results. That makes it really interesting. Any team that says, ‘We get the medal,’ I would be really careful about that. So many things can happen.

“From an athlete’s view I would prefer four riders on the team because I believe it’s more sportive. But for the spectators the new format is really good, more exciting. Every test is really exiting and after the last rider you know which team won because there is not a result to take out so that is good.”