

# ROUSSEAU

## From Top Auction Horse to Sire of Champions



Jacob Melissen

**As a young horse, Rousseau**

**competed in the KWPN**

**Championship and commanded**

**the highest bid at the 2001 KWPN**

**Select Sale. Over the years, he**

**developed into a sire of sires and**

**a producer of champions.**

**Nowadays Rousseau stands at stud**

**in the U.S. where he is becoming**

**just as influential as he is in**

**Europe.**

Rousseau's story begins on breeder Jos Haak's property in the town of Philippine, located in Zeeland province. Years ago, Haak purchased Rousseau's dam Zsuzsa as a young mare. "At the time, I was looking for a sport horse for my daughter and a broodmare for myself. Zsuzsa's previous owner was concerned that she would grow too tall, so he put her up for sale. I went to look at her and liked her immediately because she looked like a real horse. So, I bought her and bred her right away as a two-year-old because I hoped that being in-foal would stop her from growing. Nevertheless, she grew another two inches after foaling and ended up being 17 hands tall," explains Haak. Zsuzsa, born in 1981 and now deceased, descended from the stallions Roemer, Homerus, and the Thoroughbred Nicolas. Modern-day descendants of her line include the international Grand Prix dressage competitor Nirvano (s.Jazz x Cassis) and Small Tour qualified horses Orlando (T.C.N. Partout x Uniform) and Sound of Music (Cocktail x Uniform), who was auctioned at the KWPN Select Sale. Zsuzsa's line has also produced many Z-level dressage horses. "Zsuzsa was a big mare with a slight

Dirk Caremans



Gelder look, although she was very fancy. She had a great temperament but was afraid of small things like umbrellas. However, when my daughter got married, she rode Zsuzsa in her wedding dress, and the mare didn't mind at all", Haak recalls. In addition to her good temperament, Zsuzsa was a good mover. Haak continues: "She had incredibly good cadence and balance in the trot; she always moved the same way: with nice regularity, and she never took a wrong step. Besides that, she was a mare with beautiful long-lined conformation and enough size and bone."

Haak first used Zsuzsa as a broodmare, and she gave birth to foals by the Thoroughbred Saros xx and the Ramiro-son Architect. After two foals, Haak's daughter Carla showed the mare through Z2-level dressage. Haak explains: "I bred her to a Thoroughbred because I wanted fancier offspring than the mare herself. However, the foals were too varied. I wasn't pleased with that, so I started using KWPN stallions again. At that time, Ferro was doing really well in dressage under Coby van Baalen. Obviously, he had the talent to make it to the top, which is why I decided to breed Zsuzsa to Ferro." The result of the pairing was Rousseau, who was born in 1998 and named Rambo. "I knew right away that he was a world-class horse. In fact, I walked from the barn into our kitchen and said to my daughter: 'I've



At the first KWPN Select Sale in 2001, Rousseau commanded the highest bid. He was sold to American buyers for 300,000 guilders.

never seen such a beautiful foal as the one that's lying in the stall!" recalls Haak. The following year, Zsuzsa threw another colt by Ferro, although Haak wanted a filly by the stallion. Unfortunately, he never got his wish. "The year after Rousseau's full brother was born, Zsuzsa was in-foal to Ferro again. At the time, rhino was in our area, so we lost the foal. It was a filly," laments Haak. Later, Zsuzsa developed a lung problem which became chronic, and she had to be humanely euthanized. She was in-foal again at the time. Zsuzsa's Jazz daughter Pandora is the only one of Haak's five broodmares related to Rousseau. Pandora's Special-D daughter won

the Zeeland Provincial Championship this year and qualified for the National Foal Inspection. Pandora is currently in-foal again to Special-D.

### Auction Horse

Rousseau was auctioned twice in his life. The first time was at the Prinsjesdag National Foal Auction, where Jan Lamers purchased the colt. Lamers eventually presented him at the 2001 Stallion Show. "I still keep in touch with Lamers," explains Haak, "so I wasn't surprised when Rousseau went to the Stallion Show." However, Haak was surprised to see the horse he bred again. Haak: "I sat



Rousseau's greatest achievement under saddle was his silver medal win at the 2003 World Breeding Championships.



Rousseau's first year at stud produced the Stallion Show Champion, Wamberto, owned by Harmony Sporthorses in the USA.



## Rousseau's Breeding Value

Arie Hamoen, Stallion Selection Committee Chairman, explains: "Rousseau has an index of 111 for movement and conformation with 93% reliability. He produces large offspring, and he has a sport index of 133 for dressage with 88% reliability, and 145 of his offspring already have a show record. This means his score is above average.

"Furthermore, the stallion clearly passes on rectangular-shaped conformation with a vertical neck orientation and a long croup with average slope, which is positive. Many people think that traits need to be well above or below the 100-point average to be considered good, but that's not always the case, such as with croup angle. Neither a very steep croup nor a very flat croup is desirable for a dressage horse. Rousseau has a ster percentage of 47%; the average is 30% to 40%.

with my daughter in the stands at the Stallion Show, and she had the stallion catalog on her lap. There were a lot of good Ferros that year, and ours had not been in the ring yet. Then, a stallion was led into the ring, and I said to my daughter: 'They'll select that horse; he's world-class. Now ours will never be selected!' My daughter replied: 'Your name is listed as his breeder in the catalog!' The stallion in the ring was Rousseau, but I didn't recognize him because I didn't remember his markings." Rousseau qualified for the Championship in Den Bosch that year, where he finished seventh. His selection report describes him as a stallion with excellent conformation, correct legs, and exceptional presence. After the Stallion Show, Rousseau commanded the highest bid at the first

annual KWPN Select Sale, almost ten years ago. He sold for 300,000 guilders. Although he was purchased by an American buyer, he remained in Europe for several more years. First, he completed the performance test and received KWPN approval. Then at age four, he won the Pavo Cup and finished second in the competition as a five-year-old. The same year, 2003, he took the silver medal at the World Breeding Championships for Young Dressage Horses in Verden.

### Unmatched Achievement

Rousseau's outstanding offspring are mainly to thank for the achievements that followed. In his first three years at stud, Rousseau produced three consecutive Stallion Show Champions: Wamberto,

Zagreb (Blue Hors Zack), and Ampère. No other KWPN-approved sire has ever matched this achievement. Furthermore, Ampère earned the most points ever in the performance test for the dressage breeding direction. Since then, three Rousseau sons have been approved: Ampère (ds. Flemmingh), Zenon (ds. Whinny Jackson), and Zjengis Khan (ds. Rubinstein I). Other Rousseau offspring are successful as well, such as Warola, who was the best mare of the 2008 Pavo Cup; Violita, who placed third as a three-year-old in the National Mare Inspection; and Wodora, who placed seventh among the fillies in the 2003 National Foal Inspection and fourth as a three-year-old in the National Mare Inspection. (See the side bar for Arie Hamoen's discussion of Rousseau's breeding value.)



Breeder Jos Haak and his daughter Carla at the honouring at the Stallion Show.

Dirk Caremans

Jacob Meijssen



Dirk Caremans



In his second and third years at stud, Rousseau sired two more Stallion Show Champions: Zagreb and Ampère. Zagreb (right), now known as Blue Hors Zack, was the top selling horse at the KWPN Select Sale that year with a bid of € 430,000. Ampère (left) received KWPN approval with extremely high scores.





*Warola (ds.Ubis), ridden by Leonie Bos, was the best mare of the 2008 Pavo Cup with her fourth place finish.*



*At the 2008 Stallion Show, Wayne Channon was Zenon's (s.Rousseau) handler in the presentation of the stallions of 2007.*

### Hassler Dressage and Harmony Sporthorses

Americans Susanne and Scott Hassler, who at the time worked for Hilltop Farm in Colora, Maryland, purchased Rousseau at the KWPN Select Sale following the Stallion Show. Susanne Hassler explains: "With each viewing round of the 2001 stallion selection, we were impressed by Rousseau's natural self-carriage, elastic and carried gaits, and athletic body use. We also thought he would fit well with the other bloodlines in our breeding program. When we went to look at Rousseau in his stall prior to the auction, our eight-year-old daughter stepped into his stall. She petted him under his blanket, and he gently sniffed her head. Even today, he's still the friendliest stallion imaginable." After the Hasslers purchased Rousseau, he remained in the Netherlands for several years and stood at stud in Germany before leaving for the U.S. Susanne Hassler explains: "We put Rousseau's breeding career ahead of his show career and let him stay in Europe for a while, which allowed him to influence the major European studbooks. Our hopes have come true because he's such a good sire, which made the difficult task of long-distance management worthwhile. He's truly a world-class stallion, and he has many sons approved by the KWPN, Oldenburg, and Hanoverian studbooks." Since that time, the Hasslers have started

their own business, and Rousseau's official owner is now Leslie Malone's Harmony Sporthorses. However, the Hasslers still manage Rousseau and ride him regularly. "We trained him to Grand Prix, although he's never shown in the USA. This has not been scratched from the list of possibilities, though. Rousseau is a happy and healthy horse, and keeping his life in balance as a breeding stallion is our priority," asserts Susanne Hassler. Compared with statistics in the Netherlands, Rousseau's breeding numbers in America are not high, but from an American perspective, he breeds a lot. Susanne Hassler: "Since we imported him, he's bred about a hundred mares a year. Only a handful of stallions breed that often here, which means that Rousseau's influence is dominant in North America." When Rousseau was still in Europe, he was available for limited breeding overseas. Even with limited availability, his foals have ranked in the top

ten each year in the U.S. "Now he's available more, and breeders really value that. In addition, his offspring win lots of breeding and sport championships. Rousseau's athletic talent, friendly disposition, and good constitution are traits he can add to the population in America. He's a good match for a variety of mares, and his offspring inherit his uphill conformation, nice head, and powerful, elastic gaits. It's fascinating to see his influence now, and we're convinced that his influence will continue for a long time!" says Susanne Hassler enthusiastically.



*KWPN-stallion Zjengis Khan, here at the GMB stallion competition, shows progression under Nikki Schaap.*