



Changes at the Spanish RIDING SCHOOL

Director Werner Pohl discusses the Spanish Riding School's fresh outlook—post privatization.

By Jessica Lawrence • Photos by White Stallion Productions

Soon you'll be able to bring home more than a T-shirt from your trip to the Spanish Riding School (SRS) in Vienna, Austria. The institution known for its strict tradition and exclusivity is embracing its private company status, offering invaluable new opportunities for dressage riders. From offering instruction to students outside the school to selling trained Lipizzans, the SRS is venturing into unknown territory in order to become a profitable enterprise.

Established in 1572 and inspired by the Renaissance, the SRS has always been a selective and disciplined institution dedicated to the classical dressage training of its famous white Lipizzan horses. Known all over the world for their performances at the elegant Winter Riding School in Vienna (above), the carefully trained stallions demonstrate "high school" movements, such as piaffe and passage, and airs above the ground, such as the courbette (above, right). Not far from Vienna, the SRS raises the next generation of trainees at the Piber Federal Stud.

However, the new millennium brought change. In 2001, the Austrian government ended its support. "The Republic of Austria has made a forward-looking step in the history of the Spanish Riding School," states Dr. Werner Pohl, director and manager of the SRS and the Piber



Federal Stud. He says the traditional institution is equipped to facilitate solid economic development "without damaging the cultural heritage with cheap and quick marketing strategies." Life as a private company, thus far, appears to be promising. Currently, the SRS is balancing its profit margin successfully, making most of its money through the traditional evening performances and morning exercise sessions that are open to the public.

To retain the rich traditions and daily rituals, it is essential that the school remains profitable, and this necessity has sparked a multitude of opportunities for dressage riders around the globe. Pohl believes this is the perfect time for the public to become involved with Lipizzans on a personal level, and those who have dreamed of riding with the legends of classical dressage will soon have that

opportunity. Working with a four- to five-year plan, the school will develop a program to teach outside riders on Lipizzans at a modern training facility recently completed 25 miles northwest of Vienna.

The Piber Federal Stud near Graz—where foals are born and future stars are chosen—is another integral part of the new SRS. "We want Piber to be a place where people can develop a relationship with the Lipizzan horses," he says. "We want it to be much more than a guided tour." One idea is to have an "adventure path" throughout the stud farm geared for children and their parents where they can watch the foals playing, being handled or receiving early training. "We would like people to be involved from the very first steps a foal takes. It should be a very exciting experience for anyone who visits," says Pohl.

In the past, Lipizzans that did not make it to the top performance level remained at the farm, never to be sold even though they were highly trained. Pohl says their long-term plans now include selling some of these horses. "We have increased training of the horses at the federal stud in Piber in these last few years to enable us to sell some of the stock and have more horses ready for possible advancement," Pohl says. "We already have interested American buyers." To keep up with developments, visit the Web site for the Piber Federal Stud—piber.com.

Back in Vienna, one of the main objectives is to keep the Winter Riding School performances running. Pohl contends that there are enough horses and riders to offer the public a short but first-class program at the Winter Riding School even while others are on tour. He plans to have year-

