

DIOR

Much more than an FEI Dressage horse, Dior was a gentle giant with a giant heart.

A BEAUTIFUL PORTRAIT! Andrea Taylor and Dior.



For a horse to reach the FEI levels of Dressage, many things have to go right in his lifetime. He must have the right physical and temperamental attributes; he must be sound, and able to withstand the demands of intense training; and he must be ridden by the right person or persons, to bring out all that it takes to piaffe, passage, do pirouettes and one tempi changes. *Dior* was one of those horses, but also much more. At the age of fifteen, a second career was launched and *Dior* became the first Canadian horse to compete at the Paralympic Games — carrying Lauren Barwick to a top ten finish in Athens, Greece in 2004. *Dior* wasn't just a physically big horse. He had a

heart big enough for two and many people who believed in him, including his owner Andrea Taylor. "He gave me my career," she says.

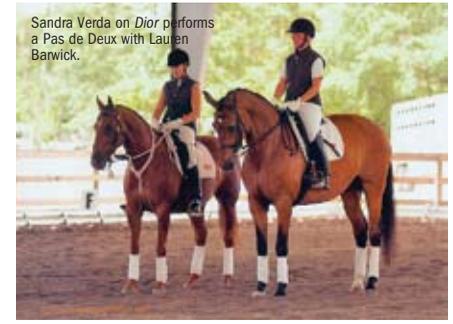
Andrea found *Dior* while on a buying trip in California with Leslie Reid and Rebecca Garrard in 1991. She was not the one shopping, but had decided to tag along. When a visit to a farm yielded a horse that wasn't suitable, the owner was asked if she had anything else for sale. She responded that she did have a three year old stallion. *Dior* was by *Diamont* and out of a *Trapper* mare. Andrea says *Diamont* was known to be a difficult horse, and when she was introduced to the mare, she remembers a very unfriendly disposition. Wherever *Dior* got his sweet personality, it wasn't from his parents. After Andrea had decided she would buy him, she took one last look at him before leaving the farm. *Dior* was snoozing in the sun, and she was apprehensive about going into his paddock because of the look on his face. "He would always have a 'grumpy old man' look on his face when he was sunbathing. Knowing him later I realized it was just the way he napped."

There were many people who contributed to Andrea's partnership with *Dior*, starting with her parents, Linda and Keith. They helped her both buy *Dior* and spend three years training in Germany with Udo Lange and Christilot Boylen. Leslie Reid was instrumental in helping Andrea develop the talents of her "first fancy

moving Warmblood". Andrea says that one of the most important lessons she learned from *Dior* was to do less. "I remember when he was young Leslie would say, 'don't do anything'. She taught me to keep my hands still, and ride him from back to front. Since then, with other horses, I keep going back to that thought: ride cleanly. Keep it true and honest."

Dior became a Grand Prix horse during the three years that he and Andrea spent in Germany in the late nineties. They were short-listed for the Canadian Dressage Team a number of times, and in 2001 finished third in the Canadian World Cup League Final at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto. Periodically, *Dior* would be sidelined with his many afflictions: breaking his jaw and losing a tooth, suffering abscesses with an extra molar that couldn't be removed, and Kissing Spine Syndrome which should have ended his career but didn't. Andrea, who has had her share of serious illnesses and accidents, says that is one thing she and her horse have in common: "*Dior* and I are similar in that way — a set of bizarre medical histories."

Andrea says her decision to let Lauren try *Dior* as a Paralympic mount was somewhat selfishly motivated. "I couldn't sell him. He brought me back from Germany and into the show ring. I considered giving him to a Young Rider, but the work would be too hard. And yet he loved doing his job, even if it was at a walk. His ears would be out to the side and he'd be thinking, 'OK I'm walking very well right now.'" Andrea found it easy to let *Dior* become Lauren's mount because her coach Sandra Verda became essentially a second mother to him. "She's probably the only other person I know of that I would have entrusted him to. She was so enthusiastic and



positive about him, and treated him like her own horse." When *Dior* traveled to Athens, Sandra flew with him. For Sandra, it was an opportunity to ride a horse that could do all the Grand Prix exercises. "On a good day Sandra would get on and do tricks and make him feel like he was doing special things."

After *Dior* returned from Athens, Andrea decided that it would be his last long trip. Flying was not too hard on the big horse, but long road trips had always been difficult for him. Lauren continued to ride and show him locally, and other Paralympic riders — Ashley Gowanlock and Jennifer McKenzie to name just two — also had the opportunity to ride him. He was always a gentleman with anyone who rode him, and

Andrea noticed that when Lauren, a paraplegic, would have to be lifted onto *Dior*, he would stand like a statue. "He would never stand like that when I got on!" Kindness was one of his greatest attributes. "You knew when you saw his face — huge ears, huge brown eyes — it was a big face but a very pretty face." And a face that was fondly familiar to everyone in the local Dressage community. Andrea stayed with *Dior* until he took his last breath. "The last thing I said to him was 'Thank you.'" *SB*

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