

groom, so I had those days alone with her. It just helps us to connect better.

"And with all that time together, I just had a feeling, even before the dressage, that it would probably happen – if I didn't do anything crazy, the win was there for the taking."

Felix's hunches are intriguing if not always spot on.

"It was similar in Paris with Dao De L'Ocean. I called my girlfriend Lea Siegl from the training camp and said, 'I will lead the dressage.' She laughed, saying, 'A week ago you didn't know the test or how to ride a half-pass with him!'"

His premonition didn't quite work out that time – they were fifth, 0.1 behind the joint thirds – but scored a massive personal best of 22.1 and eventually finished eighth.

Back to Maryland, there were other signs that this was going to be Cartania's moment to shine.

"She isn't usually nice to ride on a daily basis because she has so many opinions, but there she was so soft, smooth and listening," Felix says. "We even checked that there was nothing wrong after the long journey. She was just in a good mood."

Felix's hopes for a tough cross-country

Right: "I hope he'll get his chance in Aachen," says Felix of his World Championships hopeful Dao De L'Ocean, the now 13-year-old he rode to eighth at the Paris Olympics (below) – despite some doubts over the horse's potential "job" in the years preceding the Games



Pictures by MXIMD Pictures and Alamy