



Left: Felix on Connection D, his first international ride and with whom he went to the pony Europeans. **Below:** "It was always riding and sometimes it was tough," says Felix, pictured between brothers Ben and Christian. "But we learned that if you have a pony, you take care of it every day"



phase were fulfilled when only seven combinations jumped clear: "I was worried it wouldn't be tough enough. Not to be arrogant, but I know I have more chance to move up to the top spot."

And when it came to showjumping, which is historically Cartania's weakest phase, a hackamore this season has revolutionised her record.

"I used to ride her in it for dressage schooling and hacking, but she started leaning on it, so now I only jump her in it at competitions – it's a game changer," he says.

CARTANIA clearly likes things done her way – Felix was apologetically late for our Zoom meeting because "she'd been left inside when she wanted to be outside" – and this is a theme.

"I do really like a tricky horse; somehow I pick them," Felix continues. "I'm not going out looking for them, but I do like the extra challenge."

From his first international mount, his European pony ride Connection D, to his top campaigners today, each one has a certain edge.

"I mostly had to ride horses that my brother didn't want, so maybe that's why I ended up with the difficult ones. For me, it's not such a challenge to win a competition, but to gain the trust of a horse is much more of an achievement. I never like to give up on a horse, and sometimes I feel I can help them."

Quirks haven't stopped these horses reaching the top, quite the contrary. But it took Felix a lot of patience and time to earn the trust of Colero and

Dao, his rides at the past two Olympics.

"Colero needs his people to like him – he didn't come to the stable door for two years, he'd hide in the corner," Felix says. "It's not a good idea to target his weakness, he takes it personally, but once he's on your side, he tries his heart out."

"Dao is similar. I initially thought he didn't want to do the job. He got eliminated twice at two-star only two years before the Olympics, but it wasn't the height or difficulty, just that he was scared. So for six months, I'd pop over tiny logs and houses almost every day until he realised nothing bad would happen."

"Once he switched, he never ran out again, but it took me time to trust him! He is like me, once he understands how to do something he can repeat it."

Frieda is another conundrum. "She was my favourite horse when she was young,

but she has a weird body – the front is completely different to the hind so it feels like you're riding two different horses," Felix says. "Her mind isn't ideal either as she's terrified of other horses."

This horse-shyness became so limiting that the mare's owner resorted to sending her away to be "fixed".

"She came back worse," said Felix. "But I thought back to when I liked her so much and thought she'd be a great horse, so I decided to work with her and never put her in a position where she is scared. I ride her early in the morning, never with other horses, and not near any mirrors as she's even scared of the reflection. It's working out well."



FELIX'S unorthodox approach is rooted in his upbringing. With a grandfather, Roland Perret, who evented at the Stockholm Olympics, Felix and his brothers Ben and Christian were drilled in horses as kids, with winters spent in the mountains ski-racing (the ponies came too).

"We were allowed to play football, but my mother made us feel like it wasn't what we were supposed to be doing,"

Felix and Cartania hacking: a mainstay of the horses' regimes, to keep them sound, happy and healthy