

"I do really like a tricky horse; somehow I pick them," says Felix, whose two five-star winners Colero and Cartania (right) both display utter brilliance despite their "quirks"



Felix smiles. "It was always riding and sometimes it was tough. We learned that if you have a pony, you take care of it every day.

"My grandfather was really strict with us in the dressage. We had to ride the ponies for two hours or more and run through our tests a lot before the competition, something I never do now. Before his dressage in Stockholm, he warmed up for five hours!"

Felix has guarded admiration for his grandfather, who was fifth after dressage in Stockholm.

"He liked to lean forward over drop jumps, so he was always falling off – he fell off twice at the Olympics," Felix says. "A German rider overtook him, then fell off himself and asked my grandfather to catch his horse and bring it back – so the German team won silver and The Queen gave my grandfather an award for fair play."

But while Felix hasn't inherited his cross-country position, he follows the same schooling system.

"Where I grew up, in Germany, it's arena, arena, arena – but my grandfather did all his training in the woods and fields, which I found interesting," says Felix, now based in France, 10 minutes from Geneva. "I too work mostly in the fields and woods, maybe only once a week on the sand. If you can do a half-pass in the woods, why shouldn't it work in the arena? If a horse is correctly ridden you should be able to ride any line anywhere.

"I think horses get tired of the arena, but the main reason I do it is because I think the horses stay sounder. For me, the worst



Above: just 26 days after serious injury, Felix lines up at the Blenheim Euros with Frieda. Left: Colero, who came out of his shell to become Felix's first five-star winner

thing is if a horse is injured. My number one priority is to keep horses sound and healthy, the results are second or third."

Felix adds that a stint with Michael Jung taught him the art of test-riding.

"He trains his horses so they are always ready to do any movement on any occasion. It applies to cross-country too, so if you want to make a flying change, it happens, you don't waste three strides and concentration on the fence because the change isn't coming."

For all that Felix is a stickler for details, he insists he's "not competitive, not at all".

"I don't always want to win, but I do

always want to get the most out of a horse – which can be annoying for the people around me! I am definitely not relaxed, I'm very picky.

"I just think there are negative aspects of running fast every time. For example, I wouldn't be able to handle Cartania if I always rode her fast."

He points out that Cartania has been inside the time three times in the past five seasons, precisely when it mattered: the two championships she's contested and Maryland.

"I do it for the good of the horse," he says. "What's

the point of winning €400 at a four-star short? I prepare everything to peak at the right moment, like riding for my country."

And so thoughts turn to the World Championships in Aachen, where Switzerland will keep pressing for their first medal since 1981. Colero will be 18 and although he's "in better shape now than when he was 10", Felix treats every competition as though it were his last. Dao De L'Ocean hasn't been seen in public since Paris but the 13-year-old looks his likely ride.

"I made a mistake giving him too much time off after Paris, and he lost too much muscle, which has taken time to build up," says Felix. "He's ready now and I hope he'll get his chance in Aachen."

If past form is anything to go by, the best thing to do is tell Felix he has no chance at all. **H&H**

NEXT WEEK

Access all areas with British Olympic dressage gold medallist Laura Tomlinson