

From the USSR to the US of A



Elena and Adesco C.

A Soviet dressage champion journeys west to freedom, makes a new start and finds her dream stallion.

She won the 1986 Young Riders Championship of the Soviet Union (USSR) at 16, and the next year the Young Riders Grand Prix Championships for Belarus, Latvia and Russia. Her awards included Equestrian Master in Dressage of the Soviet Union and national bronze, silver, and gold medals. She also won the under-25 Grand Prix and was shortlisted for the USSR Olympic team.

Just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Elena's family decided to leave Belarus and immigrate to Canada in 1990 where her grandfather had moved in 1979. "We wanted to be with my father's family. We were looking for a better place to live, a better life...freedom," she explains.

At the airport, she checked in with her large dog. "The manager of the airport said, 'Leave with the luggage and don't take the dog.' I was very fortunate that another lady was really nice who said, 'Leave the luggage; take the dog.' So I came to Canada with whatever I was wearing."

Canada wasn't exactly what she expected. From being what she called a "princess" in Belarus, Elena hit bottom in Calgary. Without speaking English, she realized she couldn't start riding again at any level.

"I wanted to be independent. I thought, 'I can't make the money in horses.' They did not allow us to bring any money with us. I cried a little bit and then I went on to shovel manure. You know that song, what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. This is my motto. So I just worked hard," she explains.

Determined to be around horses, she found work at a nearby stable cleaning stalls, and began learning English by watching television and looking up words in an English-Russian dictionary. Her first boyfriend also helped. "He learned some Russian," she says, "and I learned English."

Elena also had to start over with her education. Although she'd almost completed dental school in the USSR with a 4.0 GPA, she was required to return to high school in Calgary before she could resume college.

In the ten years she was in Canada, she was gradually able to get back into riding and

For dressage trainer Elena Golubitsky the last twenty years have brought her challenges she never imagined. They have also brought her personal happiness and professional success. Once a highly accomplished young rider in the Soviet republic of Belarus, launching her new life in America meant confronting emotional and physical obstacles.

As she returns to the Grand Prix arena, she reflects on her odyssey—and on the very special horse on which she has focused her competitive dreams. Elena had to restart her career in order to find her way back to the Grand Prix, two decades after her successful first career.

When it comes to training dressage horses, Elena says in her eastern European accent, "I love the stallions—there's something about the boys." With her stallion Adesco C, the "boy" she's had for seven years, they've formed a winning partnership. This pair may be unknown and a bit unlikely—he's a jumper-bred Holsteiner and she's an owner-rider trained in Russia.

From Riches to Rags to Riches

In 1990, young Elena Sokolovskaia arrived in Canada with only her classical dressage education and her dog. At twenty, she was a champion rider who had to start over in the horse world.

In Minsk, the capital of Belarus, Elena first rode at age six. "I started riding dressage at 12 and rode my first Grand Prix at 16," she recounts. "We had state-owned horses and I had a very good schoolmaster."



training on her own. "I would buy a horse, train it and sell it," she explains. "Then I would buy another one, train it and sell it. That's how I started to get up to really nice horses."

Rock 'n roll changed Elena's life in 2000 when she made a visit to Cleveland to see the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame. There she met her husband-to-be (last name Golubitsky) and eventually she moved to Ohio. "When he asked me what I wanted as my wedding present, a lot of Russian ladies would ask for jewelry or a car. I asked him for a black stallion. Little did he know what he was getting into!"

The horse she bought was a young Trakehner that looked exactly like her current horse Adesco C, she says. Sadly, her dreams for her young horse did not come true. While pregnant with her first child in 2003, Elena's young stallion developed an inguinal hernia (hernia of the groin, with swelling near the scrotum). Unfortunately, even emergency surgery didn't save his life.

With the insurance payment for this horse, Elena found her next prospect, one with similar bloodlines. "He was a yearling that I bought from pictures in Canada," she recounts. "When he came off the trailer as a two-year-old, I said, 'I bought myself a hunter.' So I trained him for a year and I sold him as a three-year-old."

Third Time's a Charm

Despite these setbacks, Elena refused to give up the search for her dream dressage horse. For a year, she looked at prospects but none seemed to be that elusive right horse. Finally, in 2005 Elena found a young horse in Canada called Adesco C—another black stallion—listed for sale. "I thought, he's a Holsteiner, jumping bloodlines, but I'll go see him anyways," she says. "I didn't want a chestnut. I didn't want a gray. I wanted a dark bay or a black."

She contacted his breeders, Susan and Ron Svarich. It turned out that Elena had met them previously when she had talked with them about a different stallion to breed to a Trakehner mare. So she took a trip to Alberta to check out Adesco C. "He was this three-and-a-half-year-old with a very nice attitude. He had a little bigger head and I thought, he will grow into it. He had a very kind eye," she says. His sire was the Holsteiner Ariadus that stands at Fox Fire Farm in Washington. His dam was Zenit, a State Premium mare (Caribo x Tumbled xx) whose sire was Caribo, a son of Calypso II. She had won her Mare Performance Test in Germany.

"When I saw him, he was unbroke so they free lunged him for me. He was already licensed as a jumper for the Canadian Warmblood Horse Breeders Association. Adesco had this very good mind. I knew he was a little long in the back, but he had a good jumping hind end. The trot was good," she continues.

Elena appreciated Adesco C's bloodlines, although not dressage-oriented, and his good



Elena and Adesco C in piaffe, in the Developing Grand Prix Horse Championship.

manners. When he showed an impromptu piaffe, that natural tendency told her he could be a Grand Prix prospect.

She definitely didn't want another horse that moved like a hunter, so she wanted to test ride the horse. "I really wanted to feel him between my legs. They said, 'Well, he's had the saddle on.' I said, 'Okay, has anybody sat on him? Can you put the saddle on and see how he reacts?'"

Although the young stallion hadn't yet felt the weight of a rider, Elena determined she would take the chance and sit on him. "So we put the saddle on, we longed him, put the stirrups down. I said, 'I really want to feel him.' They gave me a leg up and here I am on the top of my future horse. He just looked and said, 'All right.'"

She felt he was perfect and knew he was the horse for her. "He felt great under me. I didn't want a horse that would be too wide. I don't like really wide horses. He wasn't too skinny, either." His height, at 16.2 hands, fit Elena well. (Since then, he's grown to 17.2.)

After starting his training, Elena encountered her first setback with Adesco C. He developed an inguinal hernia, the same thing that had claimed the life of her first horse in 2006. Fortunately, he recovered.

"I think the one horse that I lost, my wedding present, helped me," Elena explains. "You know how you look for the reasons why things happen and you want to find a good reason, even in a bad time? Maybe that's why it happened, so I could save this one. He recovered really well. I gave him good time off to make sure."

Elena was working two jobs at this point in her life, both as a horse trainer and as a part-time dental hygienist. She first





Elena and Adesco C in canter, in the Developing Grand Prix Horse Championship.

competed Adesco C in 2007 at Training Level. Soon after, he had another break while she was pregnant with her second child, Max.

In 2009, she faced a major challenge to her career. "Unfortunately, when my baby was six months old, I broke my back in a horse accident," Elena recounts. "So in Adesco's training, he had some more time off because of my personal circumstances. But I knew he really wanted to come back to work."

"Adesco is the only horse I feel safe to ride," she continues. "I never worry about him bucking me off. [When I ride him] he knows and he's taking care of me. He can buck when he's free, and he does. I see him in the paddock when he plays and he's pretty powerful with his bucks, especially when the girls come by."

Elena hasn't yet bred Adesco C, although she has had him checked for semen quality. She is planning to have the stallion approved through performance. (He is already approved by the RPSI and the CWHBA.) "He puffs up when he sees mares," she remarks. "He just has this presence. He knows these are mares, and he tries to handle himself."

Blue Moon

The U.S. is searching for up-and-coming combinations, and Elena and Adesco C could be one of those, at the start of the new Olympic quadrennium (2013-2016). Meanwhile Elena trains and instructs at Blue Moon Stables in Novelty, Ohio, outside of Cleveland, noting her work with horses of all types and ages. "I train clients' horses that they can afford. I ask students what is their goal," she explains. "I still train the classical dressage. We dance!"

Elena strongly admires and adheres to the classical philosophy of the late Colonel Alois Podhajsky, famous Olympian, author and director of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, who wrote, "I have time' should be the guiding word especially of dressage riders during the entire course of training . . ." Another favorite Podhajsky quote is, "Horse and rider should always be an aesthetic sight."

One of her clients at Blue Moon is her sponsor of five years, Barbara Grove. Elena has trained Barbara's Trakehner stallion,

Tokaimo 000, to Grand Prix. "Barbara is showing Intermediare I," Elena says proudly. "She got her qualifying score for regionals and her first score for her gold medal."

Elena extends her gratitude for many friends, clients and sponsors who have helped her and Adesco along their journey to Grand Prix, including her annual trips to Florida for training and competition. Ware and Barbara Grove, Gretchen Levy, Michael Zweig and Tami Kowit are some of those who've stood by Elena, especially while she recuperated from her back injury.

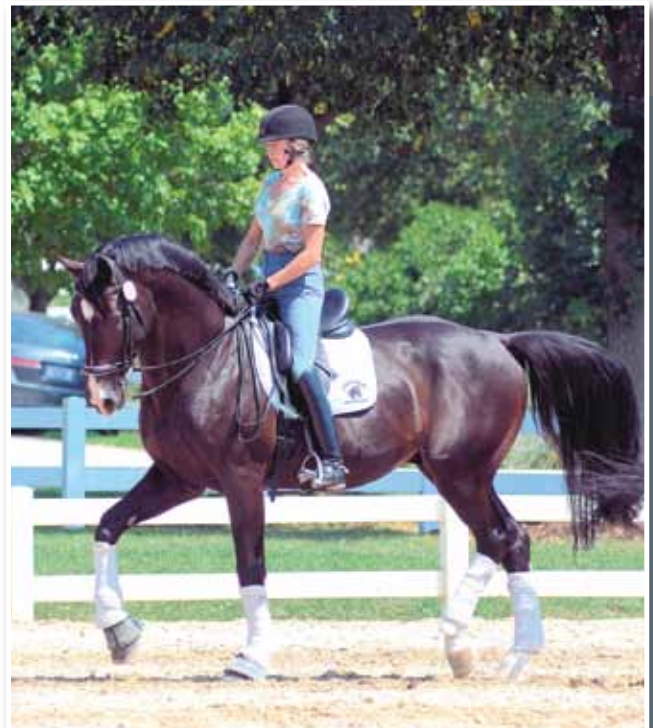
Progressing to Grand Prix

Both Elena and her horse are strong characters—tough and determined as they've worked up the levels to Grand Prix. "To me the spirit is very important," says Elena. "I like the spirit. You have to feel the horse's spirit." When she first met Adesco C, she appreciated his expression. "I saw that spark in the eye, and you want to see that spark in a horse."

After recovering from her accident, Elena first showed Adesco C in Prix St. Georges in 2010, and in 2011 they were Region 2 Champions at Intermediare I. Early in 2012 the pair ventured into their first Grand Prix classes. She trains primarily with George Williams and has also received help from Lars Petersen. "You need somebody. I brought along horses to Grand Prix, but you need someone to be your eyes on the ground. George is really good."

In her training, Elena works to build her horse's back muscles. "With a bigger horse, it takes way more to carry all that weight and stay supple. I am building that back, building the hindquarter. We do hill work. Sometimes I ride him twice a day. I'll do arena work, then I take him out and do the hill work. He loves that since he doesn't realize he works."

Elena sees her horse's strong points as his expressive changes and his innate talent for piaffe and passage. "He 'sits' and people



In posting trot, Elena encourages Adesco to start collecting the gait, as coached by Ernst Hoyos.

notice. International judges have given me nines for piaffe. I can do the elements," she says. "Sometimes it's so hard, the strength needed. He really concentrates."

Elena mentions that she changed Adesco's diet about a year ago, and she attributes much of his muscle building to Triple Crown's "Complete" feed. The formula contains beef pulp with 12% protein and 12% fat. "I feed Adesco only their Complete and I also increased his portions to nine scoops a day. It's made a huge difference. This feed has helped to increase his muscle mass and fitness, without making him hot and crazy," she remarks.

During 2012, Adesco and Elena qualified for the national championship in Developing Grand Prix Horse classes, and competed at the event held at Lamplight Equestrian Center in Wayne, Illinois in August. In the Intermediare II test, Elena placed sixth with 63.289 and the pair attracted the attention of master horseman Ernst Hoyos, who offered to help her school the next day in preparation for the upcoming Developing Grand Prix test.

Elena was thrilled with the opportunity to school under the eye of such an expert horseman. "This was the first time I worked with him. He only saw my horse in the warm-up the day before. It was amazing. He's a true master, and I was so thankful he could help me," she remarks.

"He suggested little corrections," she continues. "He wanted me to collect the horse today, but not to work too hard because tomorrow we have the championships. We just

concentrated on getting him under himself, and working on correctness, thoroughness. At the end, we trained the piaffe and passage, and it was really nice. We wanted not to do too much."

Elena describes more about her session with the master. "He's good with stallions. He says, 'You have time, don't rush.' He saw when the stallion got a little bossy on the legs, 'Now, get him, get him.' It was perfect. He truly understood the stallion. And he knows with a stallion you can't override them. It will backfire. You can't win it. They are big, powerful animals. You only weigh ten percent of their body [weight]."

Elena was pleased with her test on Saturday in the Developing Grand Prix, earning 60.958 for sixth place. "I want to give him the time to mature. If I feel he's ready for the Regionals, to do the big Grand Prix, we will go." Last October the pair did indeed compete at the Region 2 USDF Championship at the Kentucky Horse Park. In the Grand Prix, Elena rode both Adesco C and Barbara's stallion Tokaimo 000. "I still want to give Adesco the time to mature," Elena says. "I know he needs to build behind. This is the big point now. And I want him to enjoy the work."

Following in the classical principles of the colonel, Elena practices the motto she admires, "I have time." Most certainly, the time she is taking, along with the joy and determination Elena brings to her riding, will serve this pair well as they work to make their mark at the highest levels of their sport. **WT**

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