

THE COUNTESS DE POURTALES - AFTER ALL THE FIRST MODERN FEMALE OLYMPIC STARTER

by Karl Lennartz and Walter Teutenberg

In the last number of *Citius - Altius - Fortius* Bill Mallon published an interesting article ("*The First Women Olympians*" in which he - in connection with the *Olympic Games* in Paris, 1900 - hinted at two female croquet players. He questioned our statement that Helen de Pourtales had participated in the sailing event in May 1900. This statement had been received by Walter Teutenberg from Sven von Mitzlaff. Who is Sven von Mitzlaff?

Von Mitzlaff (born 1914) was an active officer, a successful amateur rider from 1930 to 1940 and the champion of the German amateur riders from 1937 to 1940 with a total of 148 victories. After the year 1945 he was successfully employed as a trainer by the studs *Zoppenbroich, Waldfried and others*. In this function, he was responsible for several victories in the *German Derby*. What has Sven von Mitzlaff got to do with the Countess de Pourtales?

Sven von Mitzlaff's father, Otto von Mitzlaff (1877-1938) - also a well known amateur rider and trainer - had been married to Auguste, Countess de Pourtales (born 1888). This Auguste was a daughter of Count Hermann de Pourtales (1847-1904) - the Olympic winner in sailing of the year 1900 - and of Margarete Manet (1857-1888), his first wife. Sven von Mitzlaff was in a sense the "step-grandson" of Helen de Pourtales who became the second wife of Count Herman von Pourtales. Countess Helen de Pourtales (1868-1945) herself was a Barby by birth, the daughter of a New York banker. Helen Barby married Hermann de Pourtales in 1891. They had three children. Helen de Pourtales thus had dual Swiss and US citizenship. Her husband, Count Hermann de Pourtales (1847-1904) was Swiss. He came from a Huguenot family who lived in Switzerland where he was born. In Berlin he was an active Prussian officer for twenty years and later returned to Switzerland. He had dual German and Swiss citizenship.

Sven von Mitzlaff as a man brought up in a sporting environment is certainly a reliable witness when he expressly confirmed to Walter Teutenberg that his mother had participated in the sailing events on the River Seine in the year 1900 on board the "*Lerina*."

And this brings us to a second little correction in Bill Mallon's article. Bill writes that Alexander de Pourtales won the 1-2 ton class in the sailing events for Switzerland. This is not quite correct. In the sailings events of the World's Fair, representing the Olympic Games events, on the River Seine in May 1900 it was expressly stated in the proclamation that every simple course formed an event of its own which had to be given its own prize accordingly. There was no total classification of the three courses. Thus the crews were able to swap so that we will always remain in doubt as far as the correct establishment of results is concerned. However, in the event of the class of 10 to 20 tons, which was staged in the Channel of Le Havre in the beginning of August, the proclamation expressly spoke of three courses with a total classification. All in all there were eleven events on the River Seine in May and only one in the Channel in August. In the first event on the River Seine (on 20 May) in the so-called *Course d'honneur et d'ensemble*, all the 64 boats from six countries entered were to start. However only 62 took part. In this prologue the boats had to start by classes on intervals from boats of 1/2 tons to 10 tons. Because of the slack wind only seven boats were able to cross the finish line by 7 PM. The "*Lerina*" did not belong to this number. However, as the "*Lerina*" had started, the Countess Helen de Pourtales had become the first woman participant in the modern *Olympic Games* according to current interpretation. In the first course of the class of 1-2 tons the "*Lerina*" won on 22 May, the following were the results:

Yachting - 23 June
1-2 Ton Class - Race #1

1. Lerina SUI 2:15:32 std
(Graf Hermann von Pourtales, Grafिन Helen von Pourtales, Graf Bernard von Pourtales)..... Lariviere)
2. Marthe 2:17:29 std
(F. Vilamitjana, Charles Hugo, Auguste Albert, Duval)
3. Nina Claire FRA 2:26:28 std
(Jacques Baudrier, Lucien Baudrier, Edouard Mantois, Dubosq)
4. Amulet FRA 2:26:56 std
(Eugene Laverne, Henri Laverne)
5. Ducky FRA 2:31:14 std
(Marcel Moisard)
6. Freia FRA 2:33:54 std
(..... Warenhorst)

German Starter: None
Date: 22 May
Site: Seine at Meulan
Teams: 8 boats from 2 nations

Two days later, in the second race the “*Lerina*” came in second after the “*Aschenbrodel*” from Germany which won quite easily.

Yachting - 25 June
1-2 Ton Class - Race #2

1. Aschenbrodel (1.0 ton) GER 3:09:19 std
(Martin Wiesner, Ottokar Weise, Dr. Georg Naue, Heinrich Peters)
2. Lerina 3:55:14 std
(Graf Hermann von Pourtales, Grafिन Helen von Pourtales, Graf Bernard von Pourtales)..... Lariviere)
3. Marthe 3:57:49 std
(F. Vilamitjana, Charles Hugo, Auguste Albert, Duval)
4. Nina Claire FRA 4: 10:17 std
(Jacques Baudrier, Lucien Baudrier, Edouard Mantois, Dubosq)
5. Freia FRA 4:11:22 std
(..... Warenhorst)
6. Mamie FRA 4:30:08 std
(Texier fils)

German Starters: Aschenbrodel [Martin Wiesner, Ottokar Weise, Dr. Georg Naue, Heinrich Peters]
Date: 24 May
Site: Seine at Meulan
Teams: 10 boats from 3 nations

We assume that Sven von Mitzlaff had been correctly informed by his step-grandmother, the Countess de Pourtales and thus she was the first woman to participate in the

modern Olympic Games. She had started in three events and had belonged to the winning crews in two events. And therefore - according to our interpretation - she is a double gold medal winner.

In addition we would like to contribute an item to the women croquet-players. In the journal *La Vie au Grand Air* it was stated in connection with a croquet game on the occasion of the events of the World's Fair: "Among those who had entered there was a mademoiselle yesterday. Furthermore Mme. Depres, the wife of the president of the French Croquet Association, was missed who, though being present on this day and playing a few rounds, did not participate in the event of the World's Fair.

It is generally accepted in Olympic history that women had successfully participated in the tennis and golf Tournaments in Paris. However, and according to our interpretation there is no other way, if we deal on equal terms with all the amateur sports events at the World's Fair and at the Olympic Games - in the year 1900, then there was a further women participant in the Olympic Games: this in the free ballooning event, contested between 17 June and 12 October. Twenty-one disciplines in this event were performed. From 9-12 October the distance and endurance discipline for top ballooners were staged. Here Maison from France (who finished fourth) remained in the air for 11:38 hours, covered 650 km and starting in Paris, reached Keulroth in Silesia. As a helper his wife Mme. Maison had been on board with him, and thus would be another female Olympian in 1900. By the way the winner, Count Henry de la Vaulx, together with Count Castillon de Saint-Victor, was in the air for 35:45 hours, nearly reaching Kiev in Russia after covering 1,925 km.

This information was collected from our latest book *II. Olympische Spiele in Paris 1900* which was recently published in the *Agon-Verlag* in D-34121 Kassel/Germany (Frankfurter Str. 92 A). [*Editor's Note:* See review of this book in the **Book Review** section on p. 38 of this issue.]

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tuesday, 5 December 1995, marked the fourth anniversary of the founding of ISOH and our first "Olympiad" has now come to a close. Sadly, just a few weeks earlier we learned of the death of Erich Kamper, our Honorary President, and the doyen of Olympic historians. Although I never had the pleasure of meeting Erich, my first letter from him was dated 20 April 1974 and after 21 years of regular correspondence it seems as if I have lost a close friend. I am sure you will all share the sentiments expressed by Bill Mallon in the accompanying obituary.

When ISOH was founded by a small group of historians in London in 1991, I was delighted to be asked to serve as the first President although I can now confess that I entertained some reservations about the need for such an organization. I felt that I knew of just about everyone interested in Olympic History and that the need to formalize many years of amicable correspondence was perhaps not necessary. How wrong I was! Since the founding of ISOH, I have made countless new and knowledgeable friends, many of whom I have had the pleasure of meeting personally and I am sure that through ISOH other members have also been able to widen their field of contacts.

The main vehicle for learning of members with similar interest is, of course, our journal, *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, and we owe an immense debt to Bill Mallon for editing a publication of such high quality. From the very first issue he produced a journal which was far superior to many of the publications of societies of much longer standing. However, all of Bill's efforts would have been in vain without the necessary finances to meet the printing and postage costs. Here we are indebted to IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, for making funds available to meet the cost of publication.

Speaking of the IOC, many of you will already know that Karel Wendl, former Director of the Olympic Studies and Research Centre for the IOC, has now retired and I am delighted to report that, in recognition of all the help he gave to ISOH during our early years, Karel has been elected an Honorary Life Member by the Executive Committee. We wish him a long and happy retirement.

I believe it can be safely said that our first "Olympiad" has been successful. We are now recognized by a number of international academic bodies, and many of our members have published the results of their researches in a particular field. The wide-ranging nature of the articles in the Journal also serves to confirm the growing interest in Olympic history. Starting in 1996, ISOH will be listed as a recognized organization in the *Olympic Movement Directory*, published by the IOC.

In closing, I would like to express my thanks to the members of the Executive Committee for their support during my term of office and I look forward to meeting them and many other members in Atlanta.

Ian Buchanan
President, IS OH