

Haras de la Vie

The breeding farm of life

In 2012, the life of Eric Goossens of [Haras de la Vie](#) changed dramatically. He sold his garden centre, bought a farm to further expand his breeding farm, had a son, Matteo, yet fate struck hard at the end of that same year. Eric was crushed by a water barrel. His lower limbs were paralyzed. Life would never be the same. Although: 'I have decided to continue with my plan and to realize my dream. My days are as full as before. That's how I like it. Mentally I feel as strong as ever, and business is not going bad.'



[Antigone de la Vie](#)

At the Spring Tour in Lummen, two full sisters from breeding farm 'de La Vie' perform in the Grand Prix. They are [Antigone Quality](#) with Hendrik Denutte and [Wimphof's Hinde](#) with Marriet Hoekstra, making a name for themselves in the sport. Hinde (ex-de La Vie) is considered one of the emerging horses in the Netherlands and the same applies to Antigone (ex-de La Vie) in Belgium. Haras de la Vie has been a well-known name in the jumping world for many years, but the best seems yet to come, explains breeder Eric Goossens during a frank conversation. His offer is of higher quality than ever. 'I started to breed in an even more exclusive manner, since training horses is no longer feasible because of my accident. The bloodlines have to be exceptional, so that we can sell at a younger age. And that works. The famous family Witt from Holstein (breeder of Cardento, among others) bought two foals last year. Quite a nice feeling when Holstein does its shopping in Belgium. Another one is going to San Francisco and we sold quite a few to South America. This might be the reason why we there are no more horses of Haras de la Vie performing in the sport. Many of my products are sold to less developed equestrian countries,

including through auctions and I don't breed that many foals every year. Today, I do things differently.'



[Hinde de la Vie](#)

It is late April, and the grass just won't grow. The cold spring is a problem for every breeder. On an extremely cold and wet Monday April 25, the horses of Haras de la Vie are still warm in their stable. 'I have someone on staff who does the stables and lets the horses out. I can't let them out myself given my situation. I can only do it with [Calinka](#), whom I've always ridden myself.' We follow Eric in the direction of the stables and in every stable there is something worth taking a closer look at. Two half sisters of Hello Sanctos. [Jessica](#); the seven-year-old, daughter of Clinton, has two embryos from Comme Il Faut. [Irissa](#); her half sister of Berlin has also been mated by Toulon. Next to them stands [Tuut Tuut](#). 'Everything that comes out of her jumps!' Tuut Tuut is the mother of the GP-horses Antigone and Hinde de la Vie, who successively jumped the GP in Lummen. 'That was a great moment for me. Pity, however, that the owners changed those names.' Because of the super performances of Hinde and Antigone, Eric has inseminated his Heartbreaker-mare this very morning with the sperm of Berlin. With Clinton, however, she also bred well. Tuut Tuut is also the mother of the SF-approved [Consul de la Vie Z](#), who performs at the GP under Frenchman Tony Cadet, and is available for covering at the well-known Groupe France de l'Elevage. The seven-year-old stallion [Cantor de la Vie Z](#) was approved in Denmark and is stabled with the Schou family. I myself have a phenomenal Nabab from her which I will first try in the sport before using her as a broodmare.



[Consul de la Vie](#)

We walk past [Symphonie](#); a full sister of Clinton I (in foal from Tangelo de Zuuthoeve) and stop at the first foal of the year. "A blood-marked, long-legged stallion by Cumano from the mother of [Colore](#). That's the contender stallion who won the Nations Cup in Calgary and the Grand Prix of Maastricht with Hans-Dieter Dreher. I was able to get this foal through the new ICSI fertilization technique. The mare was old and worn and you can only get a foal from Cumano in this way. If all goes well I get a foal from Baloubet du Rouet and the mother of Colore next month and there is also a Cumano from the mother of [Lacrimoso](#) in the making through ICSI.'



[Bella Donna](#)

It does not stop. In the next box is the full sister of [Bella Donna](#), in foal from Cornet Obolensky. There is also a full sister of the top Heartbreaker mare Tuut Tuut, in foal from Nabab de Reve. Next to her is [Grace C](#); a direct Cor de la Bryere from the half-sister of Corrado and more young mares from Casall, Nabab de Rêve and Numero Uno from the sisters of Berlin, Stakkato and Quidam de Revel.

The blood here in the stable is quite exclusive. That much is certain. Did you want to give the Haras de la Vie an exclusive touch from the outset? If anything, this is how it appears to the outside world ...

Indeed, I have consciously invested in better mares, which is the only way to go, I think. Buying a horse is usually cheaper than maintaining a horse, so why not invest in decent material. The work and costs remain the same. The changed circumstances have made that I've wanted to strive for improvement even more. I'm talking about the last five or six years, since the time I've only been running the breeding farm. I regularly also have clients for whom I have to find a top mare and through my contacts, I can help them. Again, this is something I can from my wheelchair.



Haras de la Vie was also put on the map by Luk Van Puymbroeck and Koen Terryn. How did that happen?

Haras de la Vie was launched in 2000, but I have been interested in this much longer. It was in my blood, as with so many. My father Urbain, who was a manager for the Farmers Union, was also a horse lover. I have always ridden in the LRV (*Landelijke Rijvereniging Vlaanderen - Flemish Horseriding Association*), in the highest class. During that period I founded the KLJ (*Katholieke Landelijke Jeugd - Catholic Rural Youth*) in Drongen together with Luk Van Puymbroeck. We were fellow villagers. When I was in my twenties I started a garden centre in Drongen, and I had to temporarily stop riding. It was only about seven years later, when I was able to rent an extra meadow, that I rekindled my old passion. I was also interested in breeding and in time the idea emerged to start Haras de la Vie together with Luk. We saw possibilities to build a breeding farm in a professional manner. Emphasis was placed on the selling of foals, because we didn't have the time to train them and keep them all because of our professional activities. We also distributed semen of several top stallions, such as, among others, Eurocommerce Berlin and Diamant de Semilly. Our own breeding farm and the distribution of semen complemented each other nicely. We became known, we were innovative and over time Koen Terryn joined us as a third partner. At that time, Haras de la Vie was located on a rented farm in Drongen where the Martens family had held racehorses. We had everything we needed, but because of irregularities within the company, I decided to continue without Van Puymbroeck. It is then that Haras de la Vie really started to grow and build a good reputation. Two years later, Koen finished his setup in Middelkerke so he could start his own 'Quality Stud'. Since then I have fully followed my own course. At that moment I decided to sell my garden centre and look for a new location with more opportunities for breeding. In Drongen I rented the pasture behind my garden centre. There were too few stables and there was not enough pasture. After 23 years, I closed my shop and sold my property in Drongen. I started looking for a new

location where I could realize my dream and start working full time with horses. A bold but well-considered step. Haras de la Vie literally means the breeding farm of life. I could not think of a better name. My life project could grow.



Everything went well, until October 24, 2012

In May of 2012, my son Matteo was born. Our life was coming together. My wife Barbara and I found a beautiful farm here in Koewacht (Stekene) where we would continue our life. Ten hectares of pasture in one single area, with beautiful stables, good road connection, and right in the middle of the Waasland breeder area. When I drove up the beautiful driveway I was immediately sold; this would be the location, but it was also here that I had my accident a few months later, 14 days before we would move. I was moving a water tank with an articulated loader, but the load fell on me. In a reflex, I tried to push away the tank, but because of the way I rotated my back, I broke my spine. It left me with a complete spinal cord injury. Now I'm paralyzed from my waist down. I ended up in a wheelchair and had to stay in a rehabilitation centre for five months. That was a dark period in my life. I admit that there were times when I really lost heart. My first reaction was to sell everything. I could not dress myself, how could I run a stable? There were times when I could not bear to see my son, who was 5 months at the time, because I couldn't handle it. What could I teach him, after all? I couldn't do anything by myself anymore. Today I'm glad I have him. He's four; a nice age. With much falling and getting up, I was able to pull myself together and one day I took the plunge. I was the only one who could do something about the situation. I decided to go for it. I wouldn't let go of my dream and decided to continue the Haras de la Vie, but in a slightly different way. The focus would solely be on exclusive breeding material. From that day, I went for

it one hundred per cent. What else could I do? Sell everything and be bored sitting between four walls for the rest of my life? Be continuously confronted with my shortcomings? No, I wanted to have something to do and that has motivated me to continue, albeit in a slightly modified way, with staff and (for now) without sports horses on my farm. Because of my situation, we couldn't continue training the horses here. So I've had to adjust my plan. Still, I wanted to try it. If it really wouldn't work, I could still sell my farm but in fact I haven't looked back since that moment and always tried to chart the way forward. After all, nothing happens by itself. **If you want to achieve something, you have to roll up your sleeves.**



[Nikita de la Vie](#) (bay) and [Calice de la Vie](#) (chestnut)

You are a brave man. Today you are here in the stable, alone, without staff. Few would have the nerve. Maybe it's because I'm naturally determined. I've had difficult times, though. And it still isn't all roses. In the beginning, when you're in a wheelchair, you feel like people are looking down on you, even if it isn't so. Your self-esteem is zero. Only people who are in a wheelchair can understand. OK; I'm in a wheelchair, but there's so much more. Take for instance simply getting out of bed in the morning, going to the toilet, putting your clothes on, etc .. Some people don't really know how to react and give you a wide berth to avoid having to say something. I've struggled with that mentally, but now I dare say that since a year I am my old self again. I won't say that I came out stronger. Mentally, I feel like I did before. I'm just as ambitious and determined as before. Perhaps it's because of those character traits that I've managed to bounce back. My recovery period also contributed to that. In the rehabilitation centre you

see fellow sufferers progress and you see new patients coming in whose recovery has not yet started. Then you see how much progress you've already made. I really hung on to that. An important principle in my case is that you have to focus on what you can do and not on what you can't.

You have made plans and you seem to be achieving them. What's in the pipeline? Soon the groundwork will be ready. I've had the ground in my domain in Koewacht raised 1.00m to 1.60m so that I can keep the horses out longer. It was a multi-year plan. The soil will also need some time before it forms a firm structure, but eventually it will increase the value of the domain. Sometimes, structural adjustments are much better than temporary solutions. The next project is the indoor arena. That is supposed to start this year. There will be a hall of 25m x 50m with a dozen stalls, not for our own horses, but for any external rider wants to come here with his own horses. I'm basically looking for anyone who wants to train my horses as well. Currently, the six sports horses are spread among several riders and that is not always easy to follow. I want to follow their evolution myself. I want to see them in action and not just at competitions. However, most are already sold before they go under the saddle. We breed a dozen foals per year. The largest part goes abroad, but in the future I would want to keep a horse a bit longer. In the more distant future we want to build another house here. Now I live in the former offices in the stable. Ideal because everything is ground floor level. We only had to adjust the bathroom.

How hard is it to live with your disability? It's different. Not only for me but also for Barbara. She didn't want this either. All too often, the partner is overlooked. I am keenly aware that she had imagined a different life, but I try to bear my responsibilities in the family as much as possible. In the morning I get myself ready in twenty minutes. I take our son to and from school, because Barbara is still working four-fifths. Shortly after my accident, I would have never thought I could do this, but it works well. Four times a week, the physiotherapist comes by for a half-hour session. We are mainly focussing on mobilizing my legs. Science does not stand still, and I bear in mind that there might be something invented one day that could help me. That's why I have to keep my legs flexible, even though they are paralyzed. I am and remain ambitious in everything. I've also ridden once. Piet Imschoot had advised me to try it. I visited a Para Equestrian competition and immediately set to work. Half a year after my accident I started riding at a local riding school. They put me on the horse and I held on to a vaulting girth. On the lunge I immediately walked, trotted and galloped. People stood watching in disbelief, but I've never done it since. It's not that great for your self-image. Indeed, my legs were swinging in all directions and I found that I needed too many people to help me. I didn't want to depend on that many people just to sit on a horse. Moreover, it all took too much time to my liking. I've focused on breeding. That's more my thing. Again, I do need staff, but I can do a lot myself. I even transport horses. They are loaded and I drive off toward my destination. I'm not really scared. After all, everyone should test their boundaries. I'm an optimist and I want to move on in life because I want to achieve something. In the stable I'm also constantly busy. Some customers are surprised when they arrive and see me in a wheelchair or when I'm on the quad driving through the meadow. I can't hold horses anymore, let alone train them, but I can still do the management and marketing. I follow everything. My days have become too short again, and that's how I like it. Since 2014, I've become the importer and distributor of the sperm of [Cornet Obolensky](#) who is stabled in the Ukraine, simply by contacting the owner and telling him what Haras de la Vie is and what I stand for. That same year I made an agreement with the Holstein Association for the distribution of the semen of their stallions. This year I even have [Casall](#) limitedly available for non-Holsteiner mares. These are all things I can do from my wheelchair. Since some time I am also the commercial man at Hippomundo.com, a project in which I firmly believe. Koen (Terry), my former Haras de la Vie partner and founder of Hippomundo, approached me for this. It's simply amazing how much information this website provides. We want to unify the databases of all the studbooks and link them to international sports results. Currently, BWP, Zangersheide, AES and the Brazilian studbook are already on

board and we are in talks with quite a few large studbooks. It may take a while until all the data has been merged since there are 72 studbooks in the world, but step by step we are moving forward. Since 01.10.2014, all international results are kept and published on Hippomundo. We publish faster than the FEI itself. We also have the results of all the major competitions of before 2014. Hippomundo is the perfect link between sport and breeding and aims to be a complete, reliable data source for anyone who wants to know something about a jumping, dressage or eventing horse. We work with IT professionals from around the world. It has become a serious machine. Many organizations and companies call upon our services. We also provide the Z-Ranking, the auction catalogues, stallion grading information and results of breeding products for websites of stallion owners, breeders and studbooks. No better publicity for a stallion than for example the sporting results of his progeny that automatically appear on the site of the stallion owner. The Haras de la Vie website will soon be linked to the Hippomundo databases. Internet has always been an important medium for [Haras de la Vie](#). It is the reason why we can sell all over the world. I can only recommend breeders make themselves known internationally and this does not always have to cost much money. Again, Hippomundo has a solution. It's unbelievable what an evolution the Internet has produced. The stream of data that flows online is unlikely. The Internet has no secrets. The possibilities are enormous. All the results and technical breeding information is available online via Hippomundo. Everything is verifiable. Today you can't get anywhere without verifiable data and this is a favourable trend in breeding. Facts on the table, it's the best publicity! It creates trust amongst potential buyers.



Chinees clients visiting Haras de la Vie

You are commercial person. Haras de la Vie has from the outset been strong in marketing. Of course. Selling our breeding products was always essential, but it has always been our goal to breed horses at the highest level. I can't sell something which I'm not committed to. I think that fairness in business is still one of our priorities. It's not always easy to find the right balance between breeding and what the market demands. Initially we focused primarily on well-known names in the pedigree because we often took part in auctions. Now I do it differently. The intrinsic quality of the horses is the main requirement. I have not participated in auctions in the last few years, in the first place because of my accident. After all, auctions require a lot of effort and I can't do them without help. Secondly, a bit less is ok, because I have already created a quality label with Haras de la Vie that makes successful selling over the Internet possible. Auctions are not all rosy. Not everything is reality. There have been too many foal auctions. I might still go to the Foal auction Prinsjesdag, where Hinde de la Vie was sold for the highest amount. Today I sell the foals from home or over the Internet. My website is up-to-date and is followed worldwide and Facebook should also not to be underestimated. Now that I run Haras de la Vie alone, I try to do it in a different, better way than when we were together. I concentrate more on the sport in the direct maternal line and what I keep for breeding has to perform in the sport first. Previously, this was given much less attention. I can judge a horse quite well because I have ridden myself, but I still want to learn a lot. I therefore seek guidance from people who know the business and have good intentions. The full sister of Belladonna which I acquired after my accident, partly through the mediation of Frank Gevers, had such phenomenal jumping quality that I decided to purchase her even though she was expensive. My gut instinct told me she was a good investment. She has a sportier build than her illustrious sister and showed a strong push-off. Her offspring is nothing short of fantastic. Two of her products, a Darco mare and a Cornet stallion, are now back in Holstein. I'm not afraid to take risks, as long as it is a calculated risk. That's important. Buying is easy. Buying well is not always easy.

You've always been a progressive man, up to today. You already indicated that you jumped on the bandwagon of the ICSI story. Is that a calculated risk? I've been going to Utrecht for OPU (Ovum Pick Up) since the winter of 2014. After I had read an article about it, I got in touch with the people at the University of Utrecht. Had I not been in a wheelchair, I would perhaps not have done it. Now I see it as a way to distinguish me from the rest. ICSI is the ideal technique to breed with exclusive material and obtain better results. The mares go the University of Utrecht during the winter and per cycle all the ova are removed and then taken to Italy to be fertilised via ICSI, the microscopic variation of IVF. It's not cheap. It's a complicated process and the success rate is relatively low in proportion to the number of oocytes. After one winter I had two successfully transplanted embryos from an old mare, but the quality compensates everything. Because of the exclusivity, you can possibly sell at higher prices. Again, I think I take a calculated risk. ICSI provides fantastic opportunities. With ICSI, mares or stallions that have a low fertility can be still be used. In this way, I was able to use the mother of Colore and the seed of Cumano. Without ICSI I would have never had that foal. Another advantage is that the frozen embryos can be implanted at the time when the surrogate mare is really ready. You can use your own mares, which is cost saving.

What do you do differently now than before? I try not to sell everything to exotic countries, but also within Europe. At the time it happened because of all the auctions, but you never hear much from those horses anymore. On the one hand because you don't follow the circuit and because the sport is less developed in those countries. So I'm pleased that Antigone and Hinde have remained nearby. In the case of Antigone, however, the sale did not go through that easily. Koen (Terry) did not think it was a nice foal. My father and I were convinced that this was a model for international sports. Koen ultimately believed us and bought Antigone. You can be sure that he hasn't regretted it. The slogan of my breeding

farm (www.harasdelavie.be: your choice for the future) was confirmed here as well.

Haras de la Vie has always focused on the selling of foals. Is that still feasible today? That's always been good for us. In recent years the sales of foals have slowed, but now I notice there is again more interest. Maybe it's because I've raised my bar. The market demands more sport than before. It's important that the mares can show a track record. Those who stubbornly refuse to follow the sport, remain stuck with their material. You have to listen to the market and I'm glad I can still do that in my situation.



Eric & [Calinka de la Vie](#) (before his accident)