

A close-up portrait of Dr Gerit Matthesen, a middle-aged man with light hair and glasses, smiling warmly. He is wearing a blue and white striped shirt under a tan jacket. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

A life in a day

Dr Gerit Matthesen

56, is a private equine practitioner, an FEI Vet and a member of the FEI Veterinary Committee. He graduated in Veterinary Medicine from Berlin University in 1983 and since 1989 has worked or officiated at some 180 competitions and championships, including the last two Olympics and FEI World Equestrian Games™. He lives near Frankfurt with his wife Carola and their sons, Mike (16) and Lars (14).

I wake up earlier than I need to – at around 6am – because breakfast time with my family is sacred to me and I can then drive my boys to the village station to take the train to school. After two cups of coffee (enough for the day) and a glass of orange juice, I read the newspapers, then head to my practice offices in our indoor arena. I have a quick look at our horses then start work.

While I listen to my phone messages I deal with my emails and search the internet for news about veterinary medicine and horse sport. I then start planning the day's schedule with Anna, my assistant vet.

My mobile practice is in a nice, fairly rural area in the north of Frankfurt. There are lots of horse farms but it is not a classic breeding area like the northern part of Germany. There are sport horses as well as pleasure horses. I have examination rooms and stables for horses staying or mares foaling in my practice stables. It's not a big clinic, which gives me time to work at competitions.

After seeing a few small animals in my practice, I normally start my field service at 9.30am. In my car I have enough equipment (ultrasound, X-ray systems and endoscopical devices) for the day's examinations and standing procedures. We mainly have lameness examinations to do or internal diseases to treat, accompanied by routine work like vaccinations or carrying out pre-purchase or health certificate examinations. If time allows, I go home for a quick lunch, but that's not every day.

While I'm driving, I have time to think and I write down everything that come to mind regarding sport, competitions, committees and so on. You have to write down your thoughts when you're over the age of 50!

It is not easy planning my day because any emergency can destroy or delay my schedule. For all the paperwork and certificates I need a time frame, so

“The combination of my profession and being involved in different aspects of top equestrian sport is my vision!”

I often do that over quiet weekends, when there are no competitions. During the winter season, I am less busy, but in summer a lot of weekends are taken over by the competition schedule.

I love my work, especially in Eventing, which is my favourite discipline. My wife and I practiced it – not up to top level, but it was a fine time, despite a broken ankle from a fall in 1988, which, after 23 years, is making walking more and more difficult for me.

I like to do my competition work on a friendly, but strict basis and I really like to hear riders saying they are treated fairly! Over the years, I have acquired a lot of experience and met all the officials and riders.

Usually, when I return home in the late afternoon, there are more small animals to see. When I've done the day's paperwork, I hope there will be no more emergencies, such as cases of colic, which usually occur in the early evening.

I look forward to getting on my horse, which is a beautiful show-jumper. I like to ride, but I've stopped competing. I do dressage, jumping and go out into the fields but it's all just for fun now.

The day finishes with the family and a nice cold glass of German beer!

It's a struggle to find time to spend with my family and I often have to cancel my holidays with them. I am really grateful to my wife and the boys for their understanding of my job and to my assistant vet, who covers for me when I'm out somewhere in the world of equestrian sport.