

NSW DRESSAGE COUNCIL

YOUNG HORSE

Championships

WORDS & PICS

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This year's competition attracted horses from several states, and was once again judged by German event rider, now trainer, Martin Plewa. Mr Plewa judged last year, so it was interesting to see how his previous winners would fare. Despite torrential rain and warm up areas resembling flood plains, the youngsters were well mannered, and coped admirably. The young dressage classes were by far the strongest. The first day saw all the horses in groups of three judged on their paces, rideability and general impression. Next day, saw the top ten ride a test that was marked, again on the same criteria, and the top three from that test were ridden that night by talented Kiwi rider, Christine Weal. These marks were combined with the test mark and the winners found.

Overall the horses showed little flair, and were not produced nor shown particularly well - although there were some obvious classy types.

The horse to capture everyone's attention in the four year old class (of 35 entries) was AEA Just De Pomme. A splashy Dutch imported chestnut Wamblood colt with plenty of chrome, Just De Pomme is by the Olympic Showjumping gold medal winner, Jus De Pommies. He was shown in style by another Dutch import, Dirk Dijkstra. Judge Plewa was extremely severe on the chestnut in the rideability mark for a minor resistance in the transition (colts will be colts!).

The other two to make the final three were Donna Carrera, the elegant imported black Hanoverian mare, by Donnerhall out of a mare by Raphael, well ridden by Susie Duddy - this mare shows all the athletic prowess to take her to the top - and Shimmer, a very correct grey mare, by the imported Dutch horse, Salute, out of a Thoroughbred mare by Zadkin - and shown with flair by the showman himself, Heath Ryan. The grey showed great elasticity and gave Christine the

ride of the night. Shimmer was the one who really wanted to please, and was so nice in hand and willing to have a go.

Two that were unlucky not to make the final three were Papparazzi, a leggy, tall and light Hanoverian gelding by Graf Landau (imp) from a Fiery Ring Thoroughbred mare, and Richmeed Wisdom, a heavier flashy black gelding by Winterkoenig from a Domherr mare, who showed great freedom in the shoulder and effortless ground covering strides.

The five year old class was not as strong in depth of quality but was a close contest between another Donnerhall (and last year's winner) Donnerheist and AEA Dutch Gem (by Dutchman imp). It was the 8.8 canter work by Mathew Dowsley's Donnerheist that won the day.

Dutch Gem, another ride for Dirk Dijkstra, is out of a mare by Abel Tasman (the first Dutch stallion to be imported to Australia), and is tall and powerful with a fabulous trot and walk (8.8



Above: Winners of the 4 year old class - Donna Carrera & Susan Duddy.
Right: Donnerheist & Matt Dowsley - winners of the 5 year old class

and 8.5 respectively) but just lost a few marks in the rideability. Christine remarked that the mare started off a little tense in her ride, while the stallion showed great training with the best power and lightness in the canter. Third to the Holsteiner/Thoroughbred cross, Tavistock Florenzo. Florenzo exhibited some straightness problems for Christine, which in turn, she explained, caused a lack of power in the paces, but with correction will certainly improve.

The six year old class was a little disappointing overall. The winner was the Arabian/Warmblood, Montezuma (by Montora, out of Karella Trevi) with Tabitha Fisher in the saddle. This big bay gelding's consistency and willing attitude won him the class. Second place to Belcam Gaucho by Grannus II out of the imported Otricher (dressage fans of the mid-80's may remember Judy Mackay campaigning the Dutch mare). Gaucho was ridden by Glennis Barrey and Christine commented on the great education the gelding showed. Third to the Victorian entry, Belcam Aachon (by Aachen - known in Europe as Azarro) out of the Falkland mare, Fama. This bright, and sometimes mischievous chestnut looked very impressive for Emmie Schmul, but Christine felt his spookiness contributed to his neck being a little too high, and that he was not sufficiently over the back to show what he could do.

This class was the closest to judge, and only 1.9 marks out of a 100 separated the three place getters. It was interesting that last year's winner, the Contact gelding, Conundrum, didn't make the ten semi-finalists!

Overall the classes lacked the flair and vitality you would like to see in potential Grand Prix stars. Mind you it could also be partly attributed to the judging - Martin Plewa marked any mistakes from enthusiasm well down so it was better to play it safe and be boring to please the judge. Perhaps not the style of judging one might have expected in a young horse class showing potential.

The judging of the Showjumping Young Horse classes certainly set the cat amongst the pigeons, even though there were only eight entries. Plewa judged on the first day, and the Eric Ropiha from New Zealand on the second. Mr Ropiha is something of a legend, a hugely successful racehorse trainer, he rode FEI level dressage himself, stood the very successful stallion, Witzbold, and bred Australian dressage lynch-pin, Mosaic. He is also a classifier for the Hanoverian society. The variation in scores was amazing. It appeared that Plewa was looking more for an equitation horse, and the ones with scope, energy and exuberance were not marked well enough. For example, the score on the first day for Diamond B Ego (by the Valeur son, Voodoo) was 5.9 for rideability (despite

Chris Chugg riding half the course one handed and showing beautiful flying changes on the straight between the fences) and 6.8 for technique. The next day the same pair scored a TEN and a NINE from Ropiha. How can this happen when the horse didn't go any differently??

Similarly, Diamond B Schultz by the famous Sky High (imp. dec.) was caned by Plewa, yet a more beautifully rideable stallion you couldn't find - not to mention his explosive and careful jump, which made the crowd OOH and AAH. It was thanks to the outstandingly high mark of Eric Ropiha mark that Schultz managed to scrape in to win the five year old class by 0.4 of a mark, from the correct Thoroughbred, Simon Said (by Komon) succinctly ridden by Colleen Brook. Colleen and Simon also easily won their section of the Young Event Horse. The other two showjumping winners were Di Lammemoor in the five year olds (interestingly by Lucamo out of his own daughter) again ridden by Colleen Brook, and in the six year olds, Glenbonnet Grandiamo (by Grannus II out of a Winterkoenig mare) showing not much exuberance but a clean technique for Chris Chugg, who once again demonstrated rideability with one handed control and wonderful flow between the fences.

The other two eventer winners were Wijikuri, a Thoroughbred/Percheron cross, for Peter Hayes, and the six year old class to the very classy Falcon Ebony (a Thoroughbred by Zephyr Zip) and John Cooper. In conjunction with the Young Horse Competition were some FEI tests and Freestyles.

Neversfelde Kudu (last year's six year old dressage horse winner) and Maurice Bruce, absolutely stole the weekend. The mare just oozes international quality and seems to get stronger and more elastic with every start. She won the Prix St Georges and the Kür with fabulously bright and energetic music (perhaps Samoneinen had loaned her some from her famous Kürs library?)

Maurie's Kensington won the Grand Prix but still gets too keen to show his best. Arglen Kaleb shone for Rozzie Ryan in the Medium/Advanced and no doubt will soon be a threat in the FEI ranks. At the Elementary level it was strong indeed and Guacho for Glennis Scott showed the way to win in a starry field with a 69.5% score. There is great depth in the lower levels yet as the grades get higher they seem to get lost.

The weekend ended with a seminar with Martin Plewa. Christine Weal rode several of the young horses - her riding so soft, yet positive and effective and all with an air of effortless ease. Her comments were precise and focussed on the problem each horse had,

with the rider adapting her skills in a few moments to encourage the best from every horse she rode. Christine has been a regular visitor to Europe and her dedication and raw talent are paying off.

Mr Plewa commented on the lack of engagement, but how much of this is conformation oriented? How much of it is from unenthusiastic horses?? And how much from the riders not having the feel of riding a horse through, and getting the horse over the back???

Perhaps Australians are not yet adept enough to put all this into perspective - or so it would seem from the types chosen to produce in this young horse class. There was a disappointing lack of good basic types, of genuine naturally moving horses, sure there were some with real quality, but these were few and far between.

In the final irony of this weekend to celebrate performance horse breeding in Australia, of eleven colts presented for AWHHA classification, including second home grown second generation Warmblood products, only one colt passed - the rising four year old Cool Cat, a Thoroughbred, by Aythorpe (Ire.) out Shinaza by Shining Finish (GB). Hummm...

Cool Cat - the only colt classified out of a line up of eleven horses

