

EQVALAN
GOLD

Rider of the Month

Aachen and the World Championships – it's a long way from Boy Rider at Sydney Royal.....

“A long long way. I was just thrilled to be given the opportunity to come to Aachen, and to be here for six months to prepare. It was so good of the owners, Claudia and Francis Harper, to make it possible. I said to them, ‘I don't think this horse will suit a month long preparation’. She needed to be seasoned, especially for a competition like this, and it paid off, and the work with Ulla Salzgeber, that really paid off.”

In what ways?

“Just the discipline. You have a lesson with someone at home and they say ‘that's okay’ because she's a nice horse and in Australia she looks pretty special. But you come here and Ulla says ‘Matthew, that's okay what you do, but you need a few more gears now’. So we really worked on getting the collection, getting the extension, more of everything.”

There has been some suggestion of horses being pushed over the top – it wasn't a problem for you?

“No. I've worked with Germans all my life. I was trained by Clemens Dierks, and Cinderella was basically trained by Bimbo Peilicke; Ulla has stepped in over the past twelve months and she's given me the best. I'm thrilled – and every lesson, every day, she would concentrate 100% on us.”

You've had a bit of an up and down preparation – fabulous opening, then some bad scores and the mare was sick, how did that affect you?

“Thinking I might lose my horse was the concern. I wasn't really worrying about the WEG. She had both third eyelids removed and she has been diagnosed with cancer. We have to keep an eye on the whole thing, she's blood tested every fortnight – at this stage it has been contained but it could re-occur at any time.”

Did that affect you mentally?

“I don't know, probably from one day to the next I just take it as it comes, I just wanted to get her comfortable, and if it was going to be the worst outcome I just wanted to get her home. But with the support I had from the owners and the vets here, which was tremendous, everyone did whatever they could to make it work.”

Aachen, the WEG, Grand Prix morning..... nervous?

“I was really quite happy because we'd done three shows in a row and she was

just getting to that stage of ‘I'm a little bit tired’ – so I was pretty confident she wasn't going to be naughty at all, and she'd won two out of the last three shows. I couldn't have had a much better confidence boost than that. She'd worked really well the last two days here, Ulla was happy, I was happy.”

When you rode into that huge stadium and you circled that arena did you go ooh?

“No. She's done so many shows here and the Germans have taken her to heart, they think she's lovely. At first they couldn't quite work it out, they couldn't comprehend – how can this horse come from Australia and be so good? Then they had their answer – it's German bred. But they have supported us.”

Do you think it's a good idea for Australian dressage riders to come here to Europe?

“I always would have come over if I'd had the chance. This is the first time I've had both the horse and supportive owners to help me.”

Would you advise young riders to make the trip?

“Not if they're not riding seriously. I think it's a good idea to come and work and have a look, but then it can work the other way. They come for six months and they think they've learnt everything and they go home and they ruin horses – and I've seen that done a lot. Clemens said to me years ago, ‘if you go with a horse, that's fine.’”

Did you come to the WEG thinking you'd make the Special?

“It's always been the dream because that is my favourite test. I'm not a real Freestyle person, I love the Special. My horse has got enough movement to do well in the Special, but unfortunately, on the day, she was a bit too tired but I think that will be her test in the long run.”

Did you bring your music to Aachen?

“Yes, we only ran through it a couple of times, but we went well with it at the local shows. At Stadl Pura, where she came third in the Freestyle, she was leading right until the end and the organisers were frantically running around trying to find the Australian anthem. I wasn't very happy, I said to Ulla, ‘they better find that bloody anthem, they won't want to be playing God Save the Queen!’”

What now?

“My horse went into quarantine this morning. Rodney and I will stay here for a couple of weeks and we'll watch the Bundeschampionate. Then we'll go home and hopefully prepare for the Grand Prix at Dressage with the Stars.”

Each EQVALAN GOLD Rider of the Month receives 6 syringes of EQVALAN GOLD in recognition of their achievement.



Matt w Dowsley

