

Rider of the Month

This month's Eqvalan Rider of the Month is Gavin Chester who will be riding Warlord for Australia at the World Cup Final in Las Vegas...

For Gavin Chester, this will be his third World Cup Final. He first competed in a Final in Vienna in 1983, when he travelled with David Asimus and Golden Grand – Gavin rode Peter Winton's Hengist. Gavin also travelled to Las Vegas in 2000 with Another Flood... 'that's actually a help,' he says, 'I've been there before...'

It's an awfully tight arena?

"It is, it is not as tight as Wodonga, but then again the jumps are a fair bit bigger!"

This time, Gavin will be riding the Australian bred Warmblood stallion, Warlord – which is quite an achievement since this is the first season Gavin has ridden the horse – and it is the grey stallion's first full season of Grand Prix. The horse had been bred, broken and campaigned all through his career by Melissa Froesch before he came to Gavin:

"I've had the horse just over a year. It's my first season with him. I think Melissa rode one World Cup with him. She trained him the whole way through according to her methods. When I got him, he was pushing ten years old, and also he's a stallion, and stallions tend to be quite strong willed, so it's a bit of a task to try and make a hell of a lot of changes..."

What changes did you want to make with him?

"Mostly just the rideability. Don't get me wrong. Melissa did a great job with him, but I think for the horse to go the next step, he had to travel better, and be more rideable. He's a bit of a cheeky bugger in his mouth, and he was when she had him too. To be honest with you, I've had him for just on a year and I am about to head to a World Cup Final, ideally I would have liked another season because there are still things I am sorting out. Basically it is the horse's first year as a full-on World Cup

horse – this season he did nothing but go in the Grand Prix, every show I went to, and that's the first time in his life that he has copped that."

How do you think he will react at Las Vegas – when I was there two years ago, it was all very nice in the first round, but in the second round, horses like John Cottle's grey stallion, Telegraph, that had looked fairly competitive in the first round looked way out of its depth...

"I don't think it is out of this horse's depth in terms of the height and the width of the jumps. What it will come back to is the rideability – if he gets toey and frazzled. People sometimes miscalculate what's actually happening with our horses when we go to something like the World Cup final. It's not always the fact that they can't do it, it is the atmosphere that they are not used to. You know what the noise is like at Las Vegas, the music they play when you enter the arena... our horses are just not used to that type of thing. What happens is that you get in there with the horse's mind racing and on a hundred other things, not focussed on the fact that you are trying to ride him round that course."

What's the aim of the trip, is he going to Las Vegas to be sold? Or are you bringing him back – or what?

"There's no real plan at this stage whether he'll get sold, or stay there, or go to Europe, or come home. I've been to the Olympics in 2000, I know what's required. I've signed the contract for the horse to be on our Squad but I am not interested in going to another Games unless I am convinced that my horse is up to speed – and to find that out, you need to go and do trips like this. My aim in Las Vegas is to make it to the last day – that would be fantastic. And if you get to the last day, the result is anyone's guess. If he keeps his cool and let's me ride him. It's a big task but I think he's up to it."

Each Eqvalan Gold Rider of the month receives 6 syringes of Eqvalan Gold in recognition of their achievement.



Gavin Chester



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