

# Sonja Johnson



## Rider of the Month

This month's Eqvalan Rider of the Month is Sonja Johnson, who took out champion's sash at the Taupo Three Day Event in New Zealand, riding the stock horse gelding, Ringwoud Jaguar...

The horse was bred by Sonja's neighbours, Jim and Gussie Saunders, and the Saunders still own half of him.

"He's a registered Australian Stock Horse, he was bred to chase cows, and very early in his life, he was hit by a bull, took a serious dislike to cattle – so they rang me and said, please see if this horse can jump a bit, and we can sell it as a pony clubber. He came to me on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, 2000, there are some dates you never forget, and I rode it, and said, leave it here and I will see what I can do. I rang them 18 days later and said, there is no way this horse is EVER going to be a Pony Club horse – however I have a plan..."

"That was how Jag started eventing. He had literally never jumped a fence... unless it was avoiding a cow, and he was running one star at Werribee within six months of me starting him. He just went from there."

"He is a wonderful example of what the Stock Horse is. He's an extremely athletic, highly intelligent, very laid-back creature. He's a ripper. People ask me how big he is, and I tell them I have no intention of putting a measuring stick anywhere near him. I'd say he is over 15.2, I tell people he is 16 hands with an extendable nose, and that's my nose that's extending."

"We had a great run at Taupo. I could

say I had a life at the water. I'm not quite sure what happened. Wayne Roycroft and Sam Lyle both said don't turn up too short from C to D, and I think I didn't quite turn up short enough. I believe he did four strides in there – it is just as well he takes after the jaguar because no horse should have tried to jump from where he was, and certainly no other horse would have stayed upright. He didn't touch it – it was just amazing. That was the only really hairy moment, the only other thing I am grumpy about with myself is that at the end of the course, I turned the wrong side of the tape to come up, and I had to do a U-ee, my fault and I am very cross with myself."

"I deliberately didn't take the short cut because Jaguar does enough stock work around the farm that he is very aware of his footing, and I believed I could keep coming quicker if I came along that track. It was only a short area that was difficult footing – my horse chases sheep and cattle through the pine trees at home, so galloping through pine trees isn't an issue. Also I have a pathological hatred of galloping over fences on the ground because I once had a nasty accident doing that."

*Was it hard to re-group after the crash at Aachen – or can't you remember what happened?*

"It took me a long time to remember much of what happened at Aachen. People make comments to me about what happened and I go, gee that's interesting. I was unconscious for quite some time at Aachen but the thing that took longest to get over was the broken ribs. Actually nobody should be allowed to ride in an underwired bra because they are very dangerous. I broke my ribs straight along the line of the underwire."

"After Aachen there were two options

– I could give up and crawl in a hole, or I could get wild. It runs in my blood to get wild, so I got wild. I went home, and had a little chat with Harry Boldt. Harry gave me a lot of homework, and quite a few people have commented on how different the horse is looking within his body. I did a lot of Harry's work over the summer and here we are. Really I had two options, give up and get out – or get wild. I got wild."

*The program now?*

"Good question. Adelaide with him. I'll probably pick two or three One Day events before that, because he is very spooky and if you don't run him enough, he's a little toad going cross country – *scary, can't go there!* Next year, we'll plan then... do I stay in Australia or do I go and do a Kentucky? I think I'd rather do Kentucky than Badminton because I've never heard of Kentucky getting snowed out, rained out, all those things that happen at Badminton. Also I think America might be a slightly healthier environment for horses than England can be. I'm hoping that Adelaide will go well enough, and everything will be on track, that I have no need to go overseas, that I can just do a final competition in Australia, and see if they can bear to take me to Beijing. But it is going to be tough. Look at the five people at the top of the list now, and they are going to be bloody hard to kick out of there. Australia is just in this lovely position at the moment where we have so many guys going so well, it's going to be a tough team to get into."

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

