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Rider of the Month

This month's Rider of the Month is Maree Tomkinson, who was the best of the Australian entrants at the World Young Dressage Horse Championships in Verden, coming second in the second round to make the Final, on her German born mare, Diamantina.

What was it like to compete at a World Championships?

"It was a wonderful event last year, and a wonderful event this year – very well run, the facility is fantastic, the surfaces are fantastic, the horses were beautiful. It was great to be part of it last year, and great to be part of it this year... and with any luck I might get to go back next year."

The result in the first round was not as good as the result in the second?

"They told me I rode it a bit quietly, a bit like I did last year I guess. Diamantina didn't do anything wrong, she didn't make any mistakes – I think it is the same as last year. Australian horses get very under-scored. Di White's horse was the same, it did a very nice test and Stefan Wolff did a lovely job on him, and they were just under-scored."

In the second round, you came up to second place and make the big final – what was the difference?

"We had a lot of trouble in the warmup arena for the second round. There was a very difficult horse in there being very naughty, and Diamantina is a little bit horse shy, so we didn't have the best warm up, so I just had to ride more forward. The test was a bit more punchy..."

And in the Final, how did she go that?

"That was the best test. She had a really good warmup, she went in firing on all cylinders, she was great."

Did you see any of the winners?

"I saw Susan Pape warm up Cayenne on both days, her mare is really lovely. Lovely cadence in the trot, a well put together mare – attractive, good canter..."

You obviously think Australia should keep coming back to the World Young Horse Champs, what do we have to do to go better?

"The mare of mine, Diamantina is a serious international horse. She was the talk of the town; she'd won a five-year-old class at Rastede, two weeks before. Where did this Australian horse come from? There were people asking Christoph Koschel, who was helping me, what's this horse you are training? He said, 'it's an Australian horse'. And they are like, NO, that's not an Australian

horse! So I think mostly we have to just keep going back, keep producing good horses that do good tests."

To switch the topic how are you going with your Grand Prix horse, Lanzaro, in the hunt for a qualification for Hong Kong?

"We're getting there. We had a mistake at Verden, we did a really good test, but I had a hat problem. It's like an unforced error in tennis, very annoying. I wore my top hat through the warm up, and then into the test, and we came round the corner into extended canter, and my hat started to shift off my head. I had to decide whether to let it fall or take my hands off the reins and pull it back. I took my hand off and pulled it back, and the horse did a flying change so I got 4 for the extended canter, and 4 for the change! Other than that the test was really good, but that brought us down from a 65 to a 63.5."

"I'm just going to keep training and trying. The horse is really good, I think I am starting to get a handle on the whole thing and we are starting to come together, it's a matter of getting out there and knowing what he's going to do in the test. He backs off a bit in the tests and I have to keep him punching a bit."

"The first competition I went to with Lanzaro, I called home and I said it was like going to a gymkhana at home, but the only difference was that there were about five world champions there! I think that's the biggest thing about going to the World Championships at Verden. It's a beautiful venue, but so is SIEC, the biggest difference is that you have all these riders who are really famous, and once you are competing for a while, then they become the people you are competing against every week, you almost forget that these are like the best riders in the world... If you want to do well, then it has to be perfect. The horse can't be not quite forward enough, a bit too forward, a little low in front, it has to be just there, and perfect. And if it is not, one mistake, and forget it, you are finished!"

Maree is continuing in her quest for selection and here's what she says about her latest start with Lanzaro...

"Bremen is like most German competitions, very picturesque with super surfaces, good warmup arenas and not so good stabling facilities! There is also usually rain and lots of mud as was the case here! We always take Lanzaro the day before as he can be quite spooky and it is best to familiarise him with the arena well and truly."

All is going well, the competition starts at 12.00, I ride him early to get in the indoor before it is closed for the Prix St Georges and then I go and get the draw.



They are only ever finished about an hour before the starting time.

So I see the draw and my heart sinks, there are 40 horses in the GP and the riders include Klaus Husenbeth, Karin Rehbein, Holga Finken, Jonny Hilberath, Johannes Augustin with 2, Kasselmans with 3, Cora Jacobs with 3, Rubin Royal and Capuccino to name a few, and where do you think I have drawn yet again? First of course!

What can you do but arc up and ride on. Lanzaro warmed up well, a little fresh but this is good, and we did a really nice accurate test with no mistakes. Christoph Koschel and Ralf Isselhorst were very pleased and excited that we seem to be getting it all together but now we must wait for the score. Sometimes the judges do not know what to do with new faces, especially from Australia, plus going first. But the score is really good 67.4%, our best yet! There are still a few things that can get better so hopefully it can go up some more even.

We stay in the lead for a long time, until Klaus Husenbeth competes and gets 72%. Eventually after many hours of GP the class is over by 6pm and we have finished 8th.

The saddest part about being over here by yourself is that when you have a big day all you can do is go home alone and feel happy for yourself. Sure Christoph and Ralf were great and very excited and supportive, but with all successes and failures you need your loved ones around to make them truly memorable.

The horses are super over here, the training is great and I really think I am becoming a much better rider for all this effort, but it is lonely and isolated and I love Australia, my home and family and cannot wait to get back."

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



Maree Tomkinson



Main: At home at Koschels with Lanzaro and Diamantina; Insert: At Bremen with Lanzaro - 67.4%

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