

Rider of the Month

This month's Eqvalan Rider of the Month is Boyd Martin. The young Australian eventer has recently made the shift – with his wife, dressage rider, Silva – to the USA, and has proved he's made the transition successfully at the Fair Hill International CCI***. Boyd's mentor Phillip Dutton won the event on The Foreman adding just one showjumping rail to his dressage score to finish on 46.4. Boyd's Ying Yang Yo added 0.4 time on the cross country to his dressage score of 46.1, then had a rail, to finish on 50.5. Phillip's second horse, Woodburn, finished on his dressage score of 50.9, just in front of Boyd's Neville Bardos, who also finished on his dressage score of 52.4.

So what is it like – living and competing in America?

"It's a completely different lifestyle and culture. The weirdest thing is when it is cold and it is winter, everyone moves down south – all the dressage horses, and jumpers and eventers, move down to Florida or South Carolina. Phillip Dutton, who I am working with, has got a farm there at Aiken in South Carolina, that was the town the Australian Atlanta Olympic team were based in. We live, train and compete there for January, February, March and April, once it warms up, everyone moves back up north toward Pennsylvania, Virginia and New York to complete the year of eventing."

How big is the eventing scene in the US?

"It's completely different, I think there is a lot more money in the sport. Each Horse Trial you go to, at the bigger ones, there are 500 horses – and then a 'normal' Horse Trials in America would be one of our larger ones in Australia. There's thousands and thousands and thousands of lower level horses and competitors in America. There's huge numbers in low-level eventing.

At the big ones, you'd have two or three Advanced classes, so you are probably competing against 50 or 60 advanced horses."

It always amazes me when I go to Lexington that all their top riders are so old – in their 40's and 50's...

"Definitely Australia has got a much stronger bunch of young riders from 18 to 30 – they are the real hotshots in Australia. Here you've got guys like Bruce Davidson, still cleaning up and he must be sixty... In Australia the riders are a bit younger and I think the reason for that is that it is a bit cheaper competing in Australia. To compete in eventing in America, you have to have financial backing. To enter a normal ODE down the road is \$250 and to get your horse shod is two hundred bucks! To have a bunch of horses if you are a young rider, you basically need someone funding it all for you."

What about the standard – my impression is that they give very good marks for very ordinary dressage...

"FEI is FEI, so if you've got a CCI or a CIC or one of the World Cups, they are international judges so the standard is clear across the world. The FEI events are judged exactly the same. In the Horse Trials, the scoring system is different, the calculation is weird. Do a pretty good test at a Horse Trials – 30. My best score this year has been an 18 which in Australia, is unheard of. They calculate it differently..."

But my impression is that our good dressage riders are better than their good ones?

"No question – I completely agree with you. The standard of dressage in Australia is higher, showjumping in America is higher. I think they are more focussed on buying better jumping horses, and in their training they concentrate more on their jumping. Cross country I think Australia is definitely stronger as well."

"You've got to look at the number of events you go to in America, it's unbelievable. This year I have competed in 120 Horse Trials. The

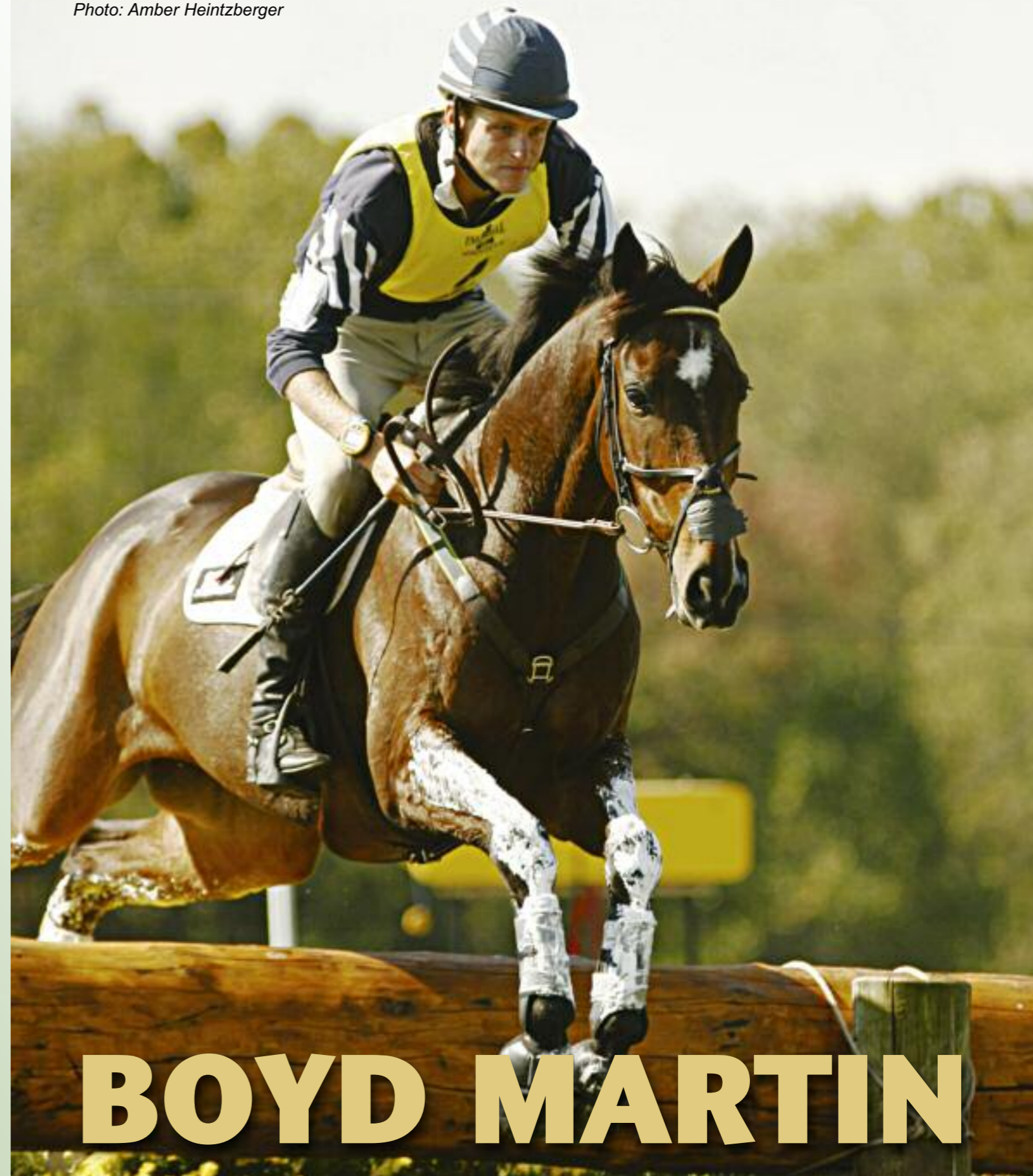
biggest number was 14 horses at the one event! To do a good dressage test on 14 horses at the one event is just impossible. You've got a girl lunging them, and you are just jumping from one to the other. You are lucky to get 10 minutes warming each one up."

"In Australia, I'd be maxed-out at four horses, a big weekend would be five, and it would be over two days – then you wouldn't have another Horse Trial for two or three weeks, so you go home and train your horses. When you are competing ten horses at a ODE in America, you are actually hardly riding them, you've got someone else riding them the day before – the focus and energy spent on preparing a horse for dressage in America is different just due to the number of horses and events. Sometimes you do three horse trials in a week – one on one weekend, a mid-week one, and then another next weekend. It's a bit impossible to really give the horses your best go. It's not a cop out, but you can explain why the horses are generally not as classy on the flat as they are in Australia."

Have you found it hard to make a living?

"There's a bit more money in it here, but the big problem is if you try to own your own horses. We shipped over five, Silva brought two dressage horses and I brought three eventers, and we've had to sell a couple of them. To compete your own horse is horrendously expensive, with the shoeing and the vet and the cost of entries. That's the negative, if you can work out a way of getting someone else to pay, you are loving it. The American eventing culture loves to be coached, and I'm teaching five times more than I would have in Australia. You make a fair bit of money selling horses and trying to line horses up with riders. My life has changed a fair bit. In Australia I had my hand in a bit of everything, breeding a bit, riding a few breakers, teaching a few lessons, training a few horses – here at Phillip's, there are 55 event horses,

Boyd and Ying Yang Yo at Fairhill –
Photo: Amber Heintzberger

**BOYD MARTIN**

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*Boyd and Neville Bardos at Fairhill –
Photo: Amber Heintzberger*

and that is all we do all day, and compete. It is a bit more focussed on high end competition.”

How do the locals feel when they go to their big event and one former Aussie wins and comes third, and an Aussie takes second and fourth...

“I don’t think anyone expected it. There’s 70 horses that started and just four with Australian connections, and then have them take all four top spots, I don’t know if it is luck or what? It goes to show that the cross country course was pretty important, but having said that, Phillip and I, were first and second after the dressage, and we both showjumped real well. At the end of the day, good riding and good horses come through at those big competitions. At lower

levels you can get away with not riding so accurately, or having a lesser horse, and still go well.”

The aim is to get to Hong Kong?

“Second and fourth at Fair Hill and I’ll bat them up again next year for Kentucky. I’d like to think they’ll be listed... My big thing is competing at the highest level and doing the best I can. I’ve been close before; you’ve got to just keep trying. I think I’ve put myself in an environment where I’ve got more opportunity – with one of the best riders and coaches in the world in Phillip, then alongside managing my horses is Dr Kevin Keane who stables his horse at Phillip’s – he’s a guy with a better feeling for the horse’s health than anyone I’ve come across before. That put

together with going to really big events and training well... sooner or later I’d like to get my chance.”

“On the USA leader board, I was the sixth placed overall rider for the year with 300 points – an all time record for someone eventing for the first time in America. I had 120 events, for 18 firsts, 15 seconds and 12 thirds... and I’ve just picked up a really good new sponsorship from Devoucoux Saddles – they are French jumping saddles. That has been a big deal in my life...”

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

