

**Rider of the Month**

When Maurice Bruce says his fight to regain control of his body after a life threatening brain injury is the hardest thing he has done in his life, you take notice, because this man has a lifetime record of achieving amazing impossible goals...

As a young man, he was a Rugby Union star, but he was in his thirties when he decided to embark on a new challenge – riding...

“Our girls had started riding, and I thought riding was something we could do as a family thing...”

But for Maurice – who was later described by an Australian Institute of Sport assessor as the stiffest elite athlete the Institute had ever examined – riding did not come naturally.

“I was one of those riders who feels insecure and grips with their knees. There was a lady, Mrs McPhee who ran a Riding School at South Nowra, and she used to teach me every Sunday morning, and lunge me three nights a week after work.”

*That’s pretty serious – the average weekend rider does not get lunged three times a week...*

“Whatever I did, I tried to do well, but I think it was probably because of how hopeless I was, Mrs McPhee probably

Feuer



Weltsong



Cabonarta



Team at The Hague

# Maurice Bruce

thought I needed special help, and I was keen. I think that was part of the attraction for Mrs McPhee, that I was keen – but I definitely needed all the help I could get.”

*But you took up the hardest of the equestrian disciplines – eventing – what possessed you?*

“Simon Kale used to live in our area and I used to ride past his house, that’s how I got to meet him. I was intrigued with eventing and thought that’s what I should do. The girls were doing Pony Club eventing, and it seemed like a natural progression.”

*How old were you when you rode in your first Advanced event?*

“About 37...”

*And how long before you won an Australian Advanced Title, how many seasons?*

“I won in 1987, my third season of eventing.”

*You were riding Cabonarta, he must have been a very talented horse?*

“He was absolutely terrific. When he used to gallop, it was like sitting on an ironing board, whereas other horses have that gallop motion. ‘Banana’ knew that I didn’t see a stride, so fairly early on, he decided he better see one for survival...”

*Were you scared doing this?*

“Probably about four or five years after I started eventing, when I realised how

dangerous it was. Before that I was so ignorant, that I really had no idea.”

*When did you decide it was time to take up dressage?*

“I remember at a two day event at Hawkesbury, I came 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> in the dressage – last and second last – and Judy and Michael Fasher said I should try to improve my dressage. They were going to Ann Honner at the time, so I went to here.”

*Round about that time you must have bred Kensington?*

“Right at that time. I thought he’d be an eventer – I took him to St Gregorys, and I was trying to get into the water, and Julie Piggott was standing by the water, and she said to me ‘that horse has an attitude problem’, so he became a dressage horse.”

And what a dressage horse! Kensington won Australian Grand Prix titles, represented Australia at two World Cup finals – Gothenburg and Los Angeles – and at the World Championships in Holland in 1984. Again, Maurice moved rapidly through the dressage ranks even though he was he was hardly a natural...

“About six months after I took up riding, there was a competition at Kana Hooka - and Jane and I were going, and Mrs McPhee said, ‘what happens if your wife beats you?’ I said, if my wife beats me, I am going to leave her

and the horse at Kana Hooka.’ When we came home with two horses on the float, she said, ‘well you won did you Mr Bruce?’ and I said ‘No, I decided to give Jane one last chance!’”

*How long did it take for you to compete FEI level with Kensington?*

“About a year. At that stage of dressage in Australia, Kensington was one of the few horses that could move. It was a real effort at first to get the three and four times changes, but if I got them, I won. He was an amazing horse.”

*When did you get the idea that you might represent your country as a dressage rider?*

“Probably when I won the Australian Championship – the Australian Dressage Team had just come home from the WEG in Stockholm, when I won against them I thought I could do pretty well.”

*The first international competition was a World Cup Final in Sweden?*

“It was terrific. I had great help from Jurgen Koschel. He realised pretty quickly that the occasion was getting the better of me. He insisted that I concentrate on what I was doing, he kept on saying to me, ‘Maurice concentrate, concentrate...’ So I just focussed on the test I was doing rather than what was happening around me.”

*The World Championships in The Hague must have been a thrill!*



Kensington

“That was great. I followed Klaus Balkenhol into the ring, and as I was trying to warmup around the arena, the applause was deafening. It was about that stage that I realised I had arrived on the big scene.”

*It must also give you a great thrill that you and Jane have bred such fantastic horses – including Kensington who took you onto the world stage?*

“It was part of what we were doing, I went to South Australia with Simon Kale and he said you need to buy a couple of these mares, and we did. They were Neversfelde Samoneinen and Neversfelde Frueda, one was three months old, and one five months old, and we took delivery of them when they were weaned.”

*Now that you’ve stopped riding are you going to remain involved in equestrian sport?*

“I’ve got Alycia Targa who works for us, she rode our horse Kudu at the Young Riders World Cup in Germany a few months ago, and she gets on well with Neversfelde Weltsong – that’s Kudu’s son by Weltmeyer. While I can help her, I’ll stay involved in the sport. She’s a very talented rider and she does such a good job with him. She’s never rough with him, and I think that’s because of the temperament that she’s got and because she can do things naturally without having to use the whip, I enjoy watching her ride.”

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

