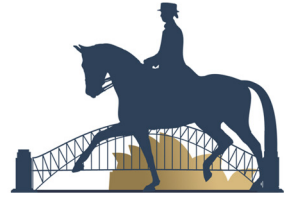


THE SYDNEY CDI

Australia's Premier Dressage Event

27 - 29 April 2017 Sydney International Equestrian Centre, Horsley Park



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Top guest rider returns for Sydney CDI***

Melanie Campbell (nee Schmerglatt) will return as young horse guest rider at Australia's most prestigious international dressage competition, the 2017 Sydney CDI***.

With the focus of this year's competition switching to the next generation of dressage riders in the post-Olympic year, Sydney CDI - taking place from April 27 to 29 at Sydney International Equestrian Centre (SIEC) – also showcases some of Australia's most exciting up-and-coming young dressage horses.

A highly regarded equestrienne, Campbell recently returned to Australia after spending several years as a professional trainer and auction rider at the world-renowned Hannoveraner Verband e.V. stables in Verden, Germany.

Campbell was guest rider at last year's Sydney CDI, and said she was excited to return to the Sydney International Equestrian Centre in 2017 to put the cream of Australia's young dressage horses through their paces.

1. Give us a little background about yourself and your riding career.

I have been extremely fortunate and come from a family with a lot of riding history. I grew up in Australia with my mother Linda Schmerglatt. I was one of those children that was happy being the crazy pony rider zooming around the paddock jumping bareback and even halter-less! Because of this I didn't start competing or become overly serious about dressage until my early teens. My first real serious horse was Masterpiece, our first Australian bred warmblood. He was tricky and full of character but that is what made him stand out in the arena. I was selected to be on the young riders' squad for Queensland with him for two consecutive years. I ran a dressage stable with my mother together in Queensland on the Sunshine Coast. She has been the absolute foundation of my riding career and I will be forever grateful to her for everything she has taught me and will keep teaching me. Position, harmony between horse and rider and position - it has been embedded into me! If you can not sit correctly on the horse we can not balance ourselves correctly, so in turn how can the horse balance themselves correctly?

Since Masterpiece, I have had several young horses that I competed in Australia before moving to Germany to further my knowledge and career in dressage. This has been the most amazing and humbling experience that I would not swap for anything. I have learnt so much, not only riding wise but how the horse industry works over there. The Germans truly know how to do it well. From young horses through to Grand Prix, how to develop a young horse to be able to handle the higher level work better. We as Australians tend to complicate things and the Germans manage to just keep it so simple. I was firstly based in Verden at the world renowned auction centre, (Home of the Hanoverians) I was employed as a trainer of the young horses, competition rider and auction rider. I had some amazing opportunities there and experienced riding some incredible horses that were later on sold to some top world renowned riders. Here I was taught to be able to ride any horse in any situation and especially to be able to bring the best out of every single horse. Showing the young horses off to their very best potential was what Hans Heinrich Meyer zu Strohen taught us to do. I was also lucky enough to have two of my own older horses to ride as well and to train on with Hans Heinrich Meyer zu Strohen. He is an amazing instructor and I feel so privileged to have learnt some of his incredible knowledge.

In the past six months I have been working and training with my brother, Robert Harrison Schmerglatt, in Munich. He rides Grand Prix and trains with Jonny Hilberath so I was extremely keen to learn his methods, which are absolutely incredible. I have had the opportunity to ride a lot of older horses and refine my skills on the higher level movements on these correctly trained horses.

I am now back in Australia. My husband and I will be basing ourselves at the Hunter Valley in Lochinvar. We are incredibly excited to finally be setting ourselves up in Australia. I will be leaving my Fidertanz gelding in Germany with Robert and travelling backwards and forwards to be able to continue to compete and train on him.

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2. You were the guest rider at last year's event - what did you think about the quality of the young horses you were presented with?

Last year I was given a selection of horses to ride that were all very different in type and all very different to ride. There were a couple of flashier young horses, some very good riding horses with very good ride-ability that seemed to have the mind to handle going up the levels but didn't necessarily have the flashy big movement and a couple that had both attributes. Then a couple that didn't handle the atmosphere of the indoor very well so it was a little hard to tell. All in all I really enjoyed riding and assessing all of the young horses.

3. Have you seen a change in the type of horse being bred in Australia for dressage in the past few years? What have you noticed?

Yes absolutely. I think we are finally getting a much better foundation of mares in Australia. I think we are lucky to have a some very good breeders that have realised the importance of having a good quality mare and have imported mares from Germany. Which is now starting to show in our breeding system. Our young horses are starting to become comparable to some of the young horses in Germany. The biggest difference is there are a lot more horses in Germany and it's a bigger industry so they have a better chance to breed the super big moving flashy youngsters. Plus they can experiment more having such a huge pool of bloodlines to choose from.

4. Are we headed down the right path in terms of breeding a suitable style of dressage horse in Australia, so we can be internationally competitive?

Yes I believe we are. The biggest thing that has to be kept in mind within the breeding industry is that temperament is the most important thing and should be taken into consideration above anything else. There are more amateur riders than there are professionals and that is a bigger market. Most amateur riders are not suited to a huge flashy moving horse with the hotness which is required for a Grand Prix horse. I think that it is important that breeders keep trying to breed a horse for these riders but also try and breed something that is suitable for a professional rider.

5. What would you say our strengths and weaknesses are in terms of the training of our young horses?

I believe that a big strength we have in Australia is the way our horses are brought up from a foal through to riding horses. Training a young horse doesn't just start from when we get on their backs, it starts from the moment they are born. The horses are grown up in totally different conditions to our European comrades, being allowed to mature and grow in the outdoors in a much more natural environment. The horses hooves and stronger legs and bones are a testament to this. Another big strength I notice and I find is very refreshing, is the keenness the people in Australia have to learn and to take in information. The dressage world is still very much in its infancy here in Australia compared to their counterparts in some other countries such as Germany and Holland, who are undoubtedly acknowledged as the leaders in the dressage world. The Australian riders, however, are very keen to learn and are hungry to gain more information from their superiors. They are prepared to give almost anything a go, and it is this attitude combined with the quality horses that Australia is now producing that make them such good learners as they are not so set in their ways, so to speak. Our country is so vast and so far away from Europe making it hard to adopt a system similar to Germany, however I really believe because of the determination of the people in Australia we are becoming a much stronger equestrian community.

This is of course a very generalised answer. A weakness I really notice in the training system in Australia and everyone has heard it before but of course the lack of the basics. We are told this over and over again but it is so hard when you don't have someone drumming it into you everyday like in Germany. There is such an incredible system in Germany that prepares the riders and horses for FEI. It is definitely something that Australians still need to learn. Germans are simply so self disciplined about everything. It's just incredible. From a competition point of view there are a lot less young horse competitions here in Australia than in Germany. This I believe makes a huge difference for the horses. The young horse tests and young horse dressage tests for four, five and six-year-old horses that are used, set the horses up for a normal dressage test. The young horse tests allow for the horse to be able to spook or make some small errors and not get marked really low for it. It's not usually until the horses are seven years old that they start to do normal tests where they are marked for every single movement. The German dressage tests are a lot different and I find prepare the horses really well for FEI. I do believe that somehow we could incorporate these young horse dressage tests into our competitions quite easily.

6. Are you looking forward to being guest rider at the 2017 Sydney CDI? Where do you see the event sitting in terms of international competition in Australia?

Yes of course I'm looking forward to being the test rider again. I had a lot of fun last year and it was an honour to ride some beautiful horses on home turf!

I think that the Sydney CDI is definitely one of Australia's most favourite and popular international competitions.

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With more than \$45,000 in prize money up for grabs, the Sydney CDI*** attracts the best of Australian dressage riders. Spectators can still enjoy the 2017 Sydney CDI from the luxury of the Top Spot Marquee, featuring a three-course meal plus wine and reserved dining seating for the main event on Saturday night.

Buy a VIP day pass to the marquee for morning or afternoon tea, lunch with Wild Oats wine, great coffee all day and VIP parking. Packages start at just \$100.

General admission tickets can be reserved from just \$20 online.

For more information, visit www.sydneycdi.com.

Join in the conversation #sydcdi17 #ridewithus

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Picture captions:

Freestyle MS in the 4 YO: Melanie Campbell (nee Schmerglatt) rides Freestyle MS in the 2016 Sydney CDI four-year-old class. PICTURE: Franz Venhaus.

SPH Renaissance in 5YO: Melanie Campbell (nee Schmerglatt) rides SPH Renaissance in the 2016 Sydney CDI five-year-old class. PICTURE: Franz Venhaus.

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