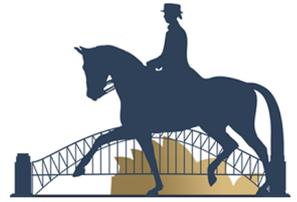




OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA SYDNEY CDI

2 - 5 May 2018 Sydney International Equestrian Centre, Horsley Park



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MEET THE RIDERS OF THE OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI: Alexis Hellyer

Australia's most prestigious international dressage event, the OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI, is not only a showcase of the nation's most talented horses and riders but an Equestrian Australia qualifying event for this year's World Equestrian Games (WEG), taking place in the United States.

Queensland rider Alexis Hellyer and her horse Bluefields Floreno have only been competing at Grand Prix level since September last year but have already achieved one qualifying score on home soil for WEG.

Competing at the 2018 OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI, Hellyer admits achieving the necessary third qualifying score is "definitely on the radar", and she is hoping to build on their recent success.

Tell us a little bit about yourself. You were based in the Hunter Valley but have now established a successful partnership with Elliot Patterson at your stunning property, The Pines Performance Centre at Moggill in Queensland.

We moved two years ago with our business. We do still spend a lot of time in NSW at all the major competitions, and we still have connections with my mum at the property we were based at down there. I'm going down early to the Sydney CDI to the Sydney Dressage comp, so it still works really well. We still ride for NSW because our owners are NSW people and we do spend a lot of time there.

It's been a big year so far for you and Bluefields Floreno; 70%+ at Boneo, then Williga Park CDI, then DJWTS where you won the FEI CDI-W Grand Prix Freestyle with 73.160 and placed second in the FEI CDI-W Grand Prix with 67.848. Are you looking for a World Equestrian Games berth with a qualifier at the 2018 OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI?

Look, yes it would be fantastic and that has to be on the radar. When you've got a horse that is so green but is so talented and going as well as he is already, you'd be mad not to say that you weren't interested. In saying that, the horse will continue to improve from here and he is so young. He is 12 but he only did his first Grand Prix in September last year and went straight to Nationals with only two local Grand Prix scores. It was his sixth Grand Prix run through in Melbourne just gone, so this is probably his seventh Grand Prix.

You posted on social media in February that Bluefields Floreno was "gaining more confidence in the arena". How is he feeling now at the big shows with the atmosphere? You must be very pleased with his progress?

I think he is so consistent, I am really happy with how consistent he is. It's not always about winning, it's about gaining ground at each competition he's coming out. For me in Melbourne was a bit of a different experience because the freestyle was at nighttime, the arena was lit with shadows and things. It was the first time he'd done that. He really sticks with me but he was just a little concerned, I think, with the lighting and stuff. We are so fortunate to have places like Willinga and the new Sydney CDI surface, it's so exciting to be able to continue to ride on these types of surfaces. This is what I train on everyday at home, and you do really feel a difference.

Other riders have mentioned how important the surface that you not only compete on but warm up on is so important. How important is it to you to have these great new surfaces in the indoor and arena six at SIEC for the 2018 OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI?

I think it's important to feel like you can ride to the best of your ability and trust the surface you are riding on. Obviously warming a horse up is not going through your whole test, but you want to get them as supple and soft

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and elastic as you can get them before you go in the test to perform the best they can. Whether it's warming up or working the day prior, I think it's super important to feel you can push your horse, say come on let's do this and bring out the absolute best you can on the day, on a surface that you know the footing's not going to be too hard or too soft and cause damage. It's the longevity of the horse, trying to keep him as fit and happy to do his job for as long as possible.

You have competed at the 2018 OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI in the past. What stands out for you at the event?

I started EA dressage when I was 13, I have come up the ranks watching these top riders and aspiring to be like them. I did all my Young Riders at Nationals and CDI-Y levels and that's where I started at Sydney CDI, being involved in those first offered international classes for the under 21s. Sydney CDI is definitely one of those competitions that is on the calendar every year and I don't think there would be any reason to ever miss it. Toni [Venhaus, event organiser] does an awesome job with the help of Karen Lever scoring, all the volunteers do an amazing job to put on this show time and time again. We are really lucky to have it, it's so central to everyone - whether you are from Queensland or Melbourne, it's a really central competition for everyone to get to.

The 2018 OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI will be featuring the Degree of Difficulty (DoD) judging system for the first time in the freestyle. What do you think of the new system, have you had any experience with it?

I haven't had experience with it. My partner and I made sure we listened to the lecture that was on it with all the judges and riders at Boneo Classic at the start of the year. I think it's great in the way that it highlights if you are doing something that's particularly difficult that the judge doesn't miss it and registers it. I do think it takes a little bit away from the freestyle side of things. Everyone is saying it's to make sure the riders are getting the marks that they should be getting, but I am sure everyone has had one of those freestyles that just doesn't quite work to plan and you have to be able to think on your feet and improvise. But I do hope that it lifts the marks and we bring higher scores, because that's what Australia needs to continue to try and compete with the rest of the world. We really want to keep trying to pull these really big scores and constantly be in the 70-plus range, not those low 60s.

A total of 262 of the nation's best horses will be put through their paces in nearly 500 tests across four days of competition as part of the 2018 OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA Sydney CDI, taking place at Sydney International Equestrian Centre (SIEC) from May 2 to 5.

The Sydney CDI is an Equestrian Australia (EA) Nomination Event for the 2018 World Equestrian Games (WEG), taking place in North Carolina, USA, in September.

The event features competitions spanning levels from Advanced to Grand Prix and Para Equestrian, as well as young horse classes, attracting top riders from around Australia. Tickets are now on sale, and seats for the ever-popular Saturday evening Grand Prix Freestyle to Music event are selling out fast.

For more information about the event or to purchase tickets, visit the event website at www.sydneycdi.com

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Information on OTTO SPORT AUSTRALIA: <http://www.bsmsportequestrian.com.au/ottosport/>

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