



FOR RELEASE

Sydney CDI 2020: Tips on preparing young and/or inexperienced horses for their first CDI competition with Lizzie Wilson-Fellows

Renowned for her skills in producing young horses for progression through the dressage levels, Lizzie Wilson-Fellows is a frequent figure in the Australian Dressage world and has attended the Sydney CDI3* since 2002. Owner of the training barn, *Let's Performance Horses*, located in Williamstown in the picturesque Hunter Region of New South Wales, Lizzie has spent the last 20 + years, helping both horses and riders alike to navigate their path to harmonious riding.

Some of Lizzie's top Dressage results along the way with her Grand Prix horse, *Let's Jazzabit*, include winning the Medium Tour Freestyle at the 2019 Sydney CDI3* on 66.8%, winning the Intermediate A at the 2019 New South Wales State Dressage Championships on 70.04% and winning the Intermediate A, Intermediate B and Intermediate Freestyle at the 2019 Australian Dressage Championships on 66.6%, 66.5% and 69.4%. Alongside *Let's Jazzabit*, Lizzie's team includes *Larapinta Showstar* who is currently competing at FEI Small Tour Level and promising newcomer *Fernleigh Florentina*. Lizzie has a wealth of experience going into CDI competitions and she kindly shares her knowledge for those preparing for this year's event.

What do you hope to achieve going into Sydney CDI 3* 2020?

At every competition, Lizzie aims to achieve a personal best score, especially at the Sydney CDI3*. "You want your horses to go out and be confident and have a good experience with no disasters." Lizzie said. "At every competition, you want to grow that little bit more."

What do you love the most about the Sydney CDI 3*?

"It's always exceptionally well run." Lizzie said. She herself has seen the dozens of to-do lists event organiser Toni Venhaus carries with her to ensure everything runs on course. "She [Toni] works exceptionally hard. She runs everything extremely efficiently and goes out of her way to accommodate all the riders," Lizzie commented on the powerhouse attitude behind running the Sydney CDI.



'Let's Jazzabit'

Owners: Moira Kelly & Lizzie Wilson-Fellows,
Rider: Lizzie Wilson-Fellows
© Amy-Sue Alston



'Larapinta Showstar'

Owners: Moira Kelly & Lizzie Wilson-Fellows,
Rider Lizzie Wilson-Fellows
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What do you find most addictive about Dressage?

One of the most incredible things for Lizzie about Dressage, is how an ‘average’ horse can be transformed into an athlete who can dance and showcase their beautiful abilities through correct training and guidance. “You don’t have to have the most talented horse; you start with a blank canvas and you can create the landscape. If you have three good paces, training comes into it majorly. Which means that anybody, through hard work and commitment, can achieve the same goal as someone who is more fortunate.”

In your lifetime pursuing a career in the equine industry, what were some of your lower moments?

“When you have someone say to you ‘What was a lower moment in your career?’ you would expect something to stand out. Nothing did.” Lizzie said. Pursuing a career in dressage means an equal amount of opportunities and disappointment, one of the disheartening outcomes being the loss of a ride on a client’s horse. As Lizzie said, there can be many good and viable reasons for this, but it still remains a major blow to a rider and their team’s opportunities.

“One of the lower events in our community, eighteen months ago, was the loss of Amanda Shoobridge. I think that impacted on a lot of people. I believe that was my lowest moment, personally.” Lizzie spoke fondly of Amanda, a bright personality in the Australian equine community.

As an individual, what keeps you motivated every day?

The reality in such a prestigious and difficult sport as dressage, is that some days are harder than others. “It’s quite easy to think ‘I’m exhausted, I don’t want to go out today. But I always just say to myself, “There’ll be someone else out there doing it,” Lizzie said, bringing forward a way to keep a buoyant and striving mindset. “If I don’t move, I’ll fall behind the 8-ball.” Lizzie is a strong believer that hard work will win over talent every time, so it really is all about the hours you put in.



5YO young horse Fernleigh Florentina
Owner: Peter & Gayle Blyth, Rider: Lizzie Wilson-Fellows
© Amy-Sue Alston

How do you prepare your young horses in their lead up to the Sydney CDI?

Lizzie and her team spend lots of time taking the horses to different places to expose them and prepare them for the sights and atmosphere of this enormous event. “We do a lot of mileage. We don’t always work at home. I will take them to the local competition grounds. I have a very good friend, Karen Waterman, who lets me use her indoor arena. Most of the young horses who go to the Sydney CDI have already been to DJWTS. You can’t go into young horse classes at the last minute.” Lizzie’s current three-year-olds are being given plenty of exposure days in preparation for large events.

What is the most important thing, in your opinion, to prepare a young and/or inexperienced horse for their first CDI?

“You have to know your horse very well,” said Lizzie. An interesting point made, how many of us know our horses as well as we should? “You need to be confident. If you’re not confident, you need to have someone else on the young horse who is. A lot of the time, you will see people who are struggling with their nerves riding a young horse. The young horse becomes impacted by their rider’s nerves and they end up having a little disaster,” said Lizzie.

While at the CDI, how do you introduce new sights and scary smells?

Interestingly, Lizzie and her team avoid walking young horses in hand, due to their unpredictability while at competitions. “We do a lot of walking under saddle. I will work them, take them for a big hack out around the grounds. Spend a lot of time stopping and talking to people,” Lizzie explained. “I have some very good sponsors. All my young horses are on “*Horse First RelaxMe*” supplement and that makes a massive difference,” recommending the supplement from *Horse First*, designed to help horses cope and remain settled.

Lizzie returns to mileage as the most important preparation for young horses to assist with internalising fear and stress.

“Again, you really just need to know your horse. You can’t prevent it all the time. There’s plenty of different options. Ensuring they have the mileage. Making sure you don’t overwork them. Someone a little new to the scene may have the tendency to work and work the horse, and by the time they get to the competition, the horse is exhausted. It’s a very fine balance between working them to get the best out of them, and then just tipping them over the wrong side,” said Lizzie.

What do you focus on the most during a young and/or inexperienced horse’s test?

Lizzie focuses on the reaction off the aids at all times, including during competition tests. A must from all her horses is obedience to the leg, “That if you put your leg on, you get a response. There’s nothing worse than seeing someone kick-kick-kicking and nothing happening. What you allow, you create. If you allow the horse to ignore you, you create a lazy horse.”

Equally important is to bear in mind the big picture sought from the horse. “It’s very important to me that the horse is obedient, soft, round, forward and showing itself off to the best of its abilities,” said Lizzie.

To summarize Lizzie’s handy tips: (1) put in the hours and miles prior to the competition, (2) maintain rider motivation, (3) take the time to know your horse well, (4) at the CDI introduce your horse to new sights and smells, (5) insist on a reaction to the leg, and (6) work towards a soft, round, forward frame to the best of the horses individual ability. Thank you for the really great practical tips we can all work toward, particularly in the lead up to Australia’s Premier dressage event, the Sydney CDI3* 2020. It was just as wonderful shedding a little light on the lady behind ‘*Let’s Performance Horses*’.

Tickets for the event have already gone on sale, and seats for the ever-popular Saturday evening Grand Prix Freestyle to Music event and Educational Workshop on Sunday 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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