

CHRISTOF UMBACH

Suzy Jarratt

Sydney CDLite had been looking forward to welcoming 5* judge, Christof Umbach, to its premier dressage event at SIEC. Sadly, he will now be unable to attend due to his father being seriously ill.

Christof had recently been in Australia judging Dressage with the Stars and we caught up with him at Tullamarine. He was flying home to Luxembourg before judging at the World Cup Final in Leipzig and conducting clinics in Florida before coming back to Australia.

“I was last here five years ago,” he said. “What I’ve just seen at Werribee is an overall improvement in the quality of the horses. Breeding in Australia seems to have got much better.”

Formerly a banker German-born Christof was just four-years-old when he was introduced to horses. “My father went showjumping and hunting and when I was 14 I had my first horse, a Hanoverian, which I competed in eventing and jumping. Later I had one trained by Dr. Reiner Klimke, which was when I developed a passion for dressage.”

He worked in the banking business for twelve years. “But I’m not a banker any more - I’m a professional trainer.”

As a young German GP judge he was invited to many events. “This gave me opportunities to exchange ideas with experienced colleagues, and also broaden my horizons by constantly liaising not only with other judges, but with riders, trainers, event organisers and the media.”

In the last 22 years Christof’s home has been in Luxembourg where he heads the Grand Ducal Dressage Centre situated close to the city.

“In the early days there was only one Grand Prix rider, now there are many more and the country’s making its mark on the international dressage scene. For example, at the 2015 European Championships in Aachen, we started with one team and managed to outperform five other teams including Portugal and Italy.”

As well as warmbloods Grand Ducal has also been home to a successful Lusitano. Christof’s former partner, Sascha Schultz, qualified for several World Cups with his grey stallion, Dragao. And these days examples of this Portuguese breed are popping up at many international events including Australia.

“At the last few major championships there’ve been 11 or 12. Breeding has changed and they’re becoming more popular,” explained Christof. “They now have more impulsion, the trot isn’t as mechanical, the walk’s more marching and they’re very willing to do all the collected movements.”

What he also feels has changed in the dressage world is equine management. “Horses, generally, are now treated better. Thirty years ago they were in small

stables 23 hours a day and only taken out to ride; they had no social contact. Now they go out into the fields. Stables today are bigger, arenas better and there's an improvement in the quality of training and riding.

“At the end of the day the most correctly ridden horses are the ones that go the best.”

He also applauds what he sees as the phasing out of rollkur.

“It all started in showjumping thirty years ago,” stated Christof, “then it was used in dressage. It appears to be over, thank God, trainers have realised it's not the way to achieve their goals.”

And how can Australian dressage riders achieve their goals of reaching the top of their sport?

“They are hampered by their country being so isolated but it's really important they have opportunities to compete against the best, so they need to travel to Europe or the U.S. and go up against the internationals. This is expensive, I know, but I think it is really the only way.”

Sydney CDLite hopes there will be another opportunity to welcome Christof to judge at one of its future events.

We wish him and his family all the very best.

Tickets are now on sale, details are on the Sydney CDI website - [click here for information on tickets](#)