



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SYDNEY CDI 2020 JUDGES INSIGHT: Q and A with FEI 5* JUDGE MARIA SCHWENNESEN

One experience too fabulous to pass up (other than the Sydney CDI itself!), was the opportunity for Q and A with Maria Schwennesen. Maria is one of only 30 FEI5* judges in the world, an Oceania board representative for the International Dressage Officials Club, Chair of the Equestrian Australia Dressage Judges Committee, member of the Equestrian Qld Dressage Committee and associated Officials Subcommittee. In recognition of her achievements, Maria was awarded Equestrian Australia's 2017 'Official of the Year'.

An outstanding leader in the global dressage community, Maria is known for the depth of her dressage knowledge, approachability and sense of humour. She is equally at home judging at prestigious events such as a career highlight at the European Junior and Young Rider Championships in Roosendaal, Netherlands; as she is holding small seminars for local dressage clubs in remote areas of outback Australia.

Having reached the pinnacle of dressage judging, Maria shares what she will be looking for from combinations at the Sydney CDI, provides her tips for spectator judging at the event, her position on achieving dressage/life balance and the importance of furthering dressage education for all.

Sydney CDI

There are many competitions seeking 5* judges to attend their events around the world. What is it about the Sydney CDI that makes you want to return as a judge?

Of course it is my country's show which I am super proud to be part of, but the really appealing parts are - the venue is top class, the organising committee is nothing but professional and friendly always running a seamless schedule from Young Horse through to GP, the best international judges and stewards from around the world are invited to officiate and the competitors are the top of their class from Australian and New Zealand.

What are the most important things you will be looking for from our combinations in higher level tests at the Sydney CDI?

A harmonious test which shows complete understanding between the partnership and the requirements asked from the test. The combination of power and relaxation is not an easy thing to achieve but necessary for high scores. Accuracy and precision is resultant from these factors, not the other way around.

For riders and grooms, personal fitness and horse health are some of the foremost considerations during training and in preparations for big competitions. How do you train and prepare for big competitions as a judge?

Really in a similar manner – judges must make thousands of quick decisions each day they officiate, so personal fitness and mental stamina is mandatory. We work as a team so social networking is important to develop the confidence in your team to enable the relaxation and focus required for a successful result.

Do you have a favourite test/ movement/combination of movements to judge, and why?

There are many well planned movements in our tests, all of them have been written and chosen to test different aspects of development and training of the particular level. The PSG is a wonderfully flowing test which is popular with both judges and competitors and is why it has been not changed for many years. I am pleased to see EA has brought back the 10 meter ½ circle loops in canter and counter canter with the flying change after, plus the medium canter with the flying change over CL. These are old movements which have been revamped and test many responses which had not been included recently.

We will be using the 'Spectators Judging' App (SAP) this year at the Sydney CDI. Do you have any tips for our spectators?

Be part of the whole atmosphere and judge as a group or by yourself, it is so much fun plus you will learn to understand more the intricacies of dressage which makes this technical sport so appealing. As a judge I am always amazed how close the spectator results are to ours, and they reflect a very strong opinion which is interesting to consider.

Achieving Balance

A movement has commenced towards mindfulness and personal balance within the Australian dressage community. How have you managed to obtain personal balance between dressage and the rest of your life, and why do you think it is important?

Like any high performance task, there are many outside pressures to contend with and not always every day is the same, so ones freedom and peace of mind in your life is not only conducive but necessary to attain the balance required to perform at you peak. While judging, singular focus is 100% in demand so minimal distractions originating from other concerts in your life is preferable.

It is all about planning a workable schedule ahead so you can include your family and outside interests in life into your program as most people are time poor these days.

What is often lost in our dressage focus is that many of our high achievers are multidimensional, reaching success in a number of fields outside the arena. What do you think is your most satisfying achievement outside dressage?

As a young girl I dedicated many years towards classical piano and completed my final teaching letters and apart from the knowledge and ability attained, the sense of achieving something deriving from a long term project was an amazingly satisfying feeling of success. This would have been one of the early lessons of life I remember learning. Of course watching my children's successes as they grow, they are now all well balanced professionals with families of their own, so that is always a Mothers pride.

Are there any life skills that you feel have served you to perform well in your judging dressage role?

If you look at the diversity and success in general life of all the top judges of the world, they will range from professionals, academics and businessmen and women. All successful in their own areas, so perhaps it is more the way their minds function in an orderly manner, calculating and estimating their final decisions.

Dressage & Judging Education

You have been an avid supporter of regional, rural and remote Australia, particularly across North Queensland and the Northern Territory in your role as a judge and judge educator. How would you encourage other judges to 'go North' or 'go West' to add value to their development?

Every judge should accept regional invitations as it is important to offer education opportunities equally to all official and competitors. Also for the regions to feel part of one community rather than feeling isolated and unsupported. Personally I love seeing and briefly becoming part of their lifestyles and find I learn much from them as well.

What advice do you have for those thinking about or just starting on a dressage judging pathway?

Seek support and advice from your state dressage authorities to understand and appreciate the thoroughness of Australia's preparatory education process for all upgrading judges which is amongst the best in the world and get cracking. It is a wonderfully fulfilling and challenging hobby which can be undertaken for many years. No horse and rider combination is ever the same, so the interest never wanes and after many, many, years we are all still learning and developing our skills.

Do you think participation in a basic level of judging education would be of benefit to all members of the equestrian community, even if they do not intend on a judging pathway?

There is no doubt in my mind that everybody who is in anyway part of the dressage community should attend a seminar or workshop to develop their knowledge and understanding. Riders and coaches in particular should make the effort to attend the State's educational programs provided. In Qld where I live, these are free to attend and we always encourage everybody to attend and our aim is to bring all areas of dressage into one compatible and friendly community.

Don't miss seeing Maria in action judging at this year's Sydney CDI! 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

Tracey Mahony (Media Coordinator, Sydney CDI 2020)

Photocredit: Franz Venhaus



Photo: Franz Venhaus

ENDS