

Dressage in the Dark



Sue-Ellen Lovett (blind equestrian) challenges Heath Ryan and Brett Parbery.

Saturday Evening at the Australian Dressage Championships 22 October 2016

Words by Scott Pollock, Photos Bree McMinn and Stephen Mowbray

At the 2016 Paralympics, four athletes ran faster than the Gold Medal winner of the same event at the Rio Olympics. This is a wonderful example of the benchmark that some of the athletes with disabilities have to achieve to secure a place on the dais at any international competition.

Although there seems to be great support for athletes with disabilities, do the supporters really understand to what level they are achieving, and do they understand the amount of work that has to be done to not only get to this level but to also address some of the issues they face due to their disability.

As the 2016 Paralympics has just finished, Cathie Drury-Klein, one of the organisers for the Australian Dressage Championships, thought it would be a great idea to create a challenge which would highlight the achievements and difficulties of such athletes. Cathie immediately contacted blind rider, Sue-Ellen Lovett, who has competed at two Paralympics games, a world championships, raised over three million dollars for numerous charities, been on the Sydney Paralympics organising committee and won numerous national community and sport awards for her achievements. A very impressive woman!

After lots of discussion between Cathie and Sue-Ellen, they decided what shape the challenge would take. Initially, Sue-Ellen will do a demonstration at the Australian Dressage Championships riding a mini small tour test to music, to set the scene. Only a year ago, Sue-Ellen was riding with people at each marker with spotlights which they would shine towards her to give her direction but, as Sue-Ellen's eyesight has increasingly

deteriorated, she now has what she calls Living Markers - as Sue-Ellen rides the test, the living markers call out their position as she rides towards them. This demonstration will explain how it all works. After Sue has done her demonstration, Cathie has enlisted two of Australia's top dressage riders, Heath Ryan (Olympian) and Brett Parbery (World Championship representative) to wear glasses that will only allow them to see a dark fog. They will then ride movements on command, relying on calls from Living Markers.

Sue-Ellen doesn't seem to use the word disability, she uses adversity. One of the issues she has is that her eyesight keeps getting worse. "Each time my sight worsens, I'm losing a part of me so it hurts, it's like a kick in the guts. I just have to go through the grieving process each time and start fighting again. Not every day is easy and I'd be lying if I said it was". Sue-Ellen's goal, is to compete at Grand Prix. I have no doubt she will.

So what is it like doing dressage in the dark? "It's very easy to get lost, if I don't have the consistent voice from my team (Living Markers) I have no idea where I am." It was only recently that Sue-Ellen competed at the Brisbane CDI and it went all wrong. One of the Living Markers made a mistake and as a result, Sue-Ellen was lost and luckily completed the test but it ended in tears. She later went on to ride the Inter I, where everything went to plan, and she finished in the top ten. "The accuracy of my test is due to my Living Markers. Some of my eight meter circles may be a bit egg shape but hey, that's OK." Sue laughed. She really does have such a positive outlook on life.

The first rider to put the blindfold on will be Heath Ryan who is not only an Olympian but is also one of Australia's most entertaining riders - he's a showman and there's not many things that would concern him when it comes to challenges. This challenge may be a bit different. "My main worry trying to ride with limited vision," said Heath, "will be not having the ability to judge distance and balance in the arena, these are two of the most important elements when riding a dressage test. Not concentrating on harmony and not knowing exactly where I am is going to be really hard. I salute the achievement's Sue-Ellen has made during her Dressage career she is truly inspirational to all of us. We'll see how I go."

Second off the block will be one of Australia's most envied riders, Brett Parbery, who has time and time again been the one to beat in so many levels of dressage - from Novice right up to Grand Prix. Although Brett is a bit apprehensive, he's keen to give it a go. "I've always been in awe of Sue, I have no idea how she executes the arena so well. I really don't have any expectations but I think it will be a real eye opener, excuse the pun. I'll be interested to see whether it affects my confidence, not as a rider but in regards to trying to step it up a level to get a top result. Time will tell!"

Luckily Sue-Ellen has some great sponsors and a great horse to help make her dreams come true. Her horse Desiderata (Latin for Desire), Sue can't stop talking about, her coaches Jana Poppe and Ann Serrao come in a close second. Then there's her major sponsor - Terry Snow from the Snow Foundation and Willinga Park. And then there's Sally Hart from Horse First Supplements and Horse and Hound Specialists supporting the challenge.

The Dressage in the Dark Challenge will be held before the Grand Prix Freestyle to music on Saturday evening 22nd October from 6:00pm.

The Australian Dressage Championships run from Thursday 20th October til Sunday 23rd October, Sydney International Equestrian Centre.

All information about the event can be found at www.dressagenationals.com.au or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AUSDressageChamps/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Cathie Drury-Klein cathiedk@bigpond.com p. 0417 224 432



Brett Parbery, Heath Ryan and Sue Ellen Lovett to go head to head at "Dressage in the Dark"

Australian Dressage Championships

Presented by Equestrian New South Wales
19–23 October 2016
*including CDI-W, CDI-U25 & CDI-Y
and Para-Equestrian*

Sydney International Equestrian Centre, Horsley Park



Massive Programme – 5 days of Dressage

- World Cup Qualifier CDI-W
- CDI U-25 and CDI-Y
- Para Equestrian Championships
- Novice to Grand Prix level Dressage
- Prix St George Stars of the Future
- Riders from across Australia vying for National Titles
- Freestyle to Music all day Saturday into the evening
- Fantastic Shopping in the extensive Trade Village
- Socialise during the event in the "HRC Group Nationals Hub" in the indoor arena

Ticket Prices: Thurs free, Fri & Sun \$10, Sat \$25. Tickets for Saturday night available at www.Nominate.com.au

Contact: Cathie Drury-Klein 0417 224 432 em. cathiedk@bigpond.com
Deb MacNicol Ph 0411 855 187 em. dmacnicol@bigpond.com

WEB dressagenationals.com.au/ FACE BOOK www.facebook.com/AUSDressageChamps



EQUESTRIAN
AUSTRALIA



EQUESTRIAN
NEW SOUTH WALES





Australian Dressage Championships

Timetable of Events

Thursday, 20 October

- Veterinary Arrival Examination GP CDN, CDI-W, CDI-U25 & CDI-Y (am)
- Arena Familiarisation
- Fitness Inspection (Trot-Up) GP CDN, CDI-W, CDI-U25 & CDI-Y horses (pm)
- Riders Forum and Riders Welcome BBQ

Comp. 10: Jillie Cobcroft FEI Prix St Georges Championship

Comp. 13: Tomkinson Group FEI Intermediate A Competition

Comp. 16: Joint Performance FEI Intermediate II Championship

Comps. PE: FEI Para Equestrian Championship Test & Individual Competitions

Friday, 21 October

Comp. 7: Hillgrove Warmbloods EA Advanced 5.2 Competition

Comp. 8: Hillgrove Warmbloods EA Advanced 5.3 Competition

Comp. 11: Canberra Performance Horses FEI Intermediate I Championship

Comp. 14: Tomkinson Group FEI Intermediate B Competition

Comp. 17: Mona Farm, Braidwood FEI Grand Prix Dressage CDN

Comp. 19: Mulawa Performance FEI Grand Prix Dressage CDI-W

Comp. 23: IRT FEI Young Rider Team Test CDI-Y

Comp. 26: Mulawa Performance FEI 16-25 Intermediate II CDI-U25

Saturday, 22 October

Comp. 3: Wagners EA Elementary 3.2 Competition

Comp. 4: Boeckmann EA Elementary 3.3 Competition

Comp. 9: Pryde's EasiFeed EA Advanced Freestyle to Music

Comp. 24: IRT FEI Young Rider Individual CDI-Y

Comp. 27: Mulawa Performance FEI 16-25 Grand Prix CDI-U25

Comp. 12: Agnes Banks Equine Clinic FEI Intermediate Freestyle

Comp. 15: McKinnon Sport Horses & Robali Equestrian EA Medium Tour Freestyle Competition

Comp. 18: Mona Farm, Braidwood FEI Grand Prix Freestyle CDN

Comp. 20: Willinga Park FEI Grand Prix Freestyle CDI-W

Comps. PE: Para Equestrian Freestyle Competitions

Saturday Evening

Dressage in the Dark

with Sue Ellen Lovett, Brett Parbery & Heath Ryan



Sunday, 23 October

Comp. 1: Tally Ho Horse Floats EA Novice 2.2 Competition

Comp. 2: Tally Ho Horse Floats EA Novice 2.3 Competition

Comp. 5: Trailrace EA Medium 4.2 Competition

Comp. 6: Trailrace EA Medium 4.3 Competition

Comp. 25: IRT FEI Young Rider Freestyle CDI-Y

Comp. 28: Mulawa Performance FEI 16-25 Grand Prix Freestyle CDI-U25

Comp. 22: Equestrian Australia Prix St Georges Stars of the Future

Comp. 21: Mona Farm, Braidwood FEI Grand Prix Special Championship