

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS FOR NEW ZEALAND DRESSAGE

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LOUISA HILL LOOKS AT HOW FAR NEW ZEALAND DRESSAGE HAS COME AND OUR MEDAL HOPES FOR 2012

Champion dressage rider and past Olympian, Louisa Hill, has seen her fair share of world class events. She competed at the Athens Olympic Games in 2004 on her talented Hanoverian mare 'GABANA' and also won the PSI FEI World Dressage Challenge in Hagen, Germany, in 2003. Her achievements didn't stop there. She has won countless championships in New Zealand, including titles at both the Nationals and the Horse of the Year Show. She also has a number of up and coming prospects in the wings, including powerhouse of a horse, 'BATES ANTONELLO'.

Despite her successes in the international arena, and the temptations of superior facilities overseas, Louisa has retained New Zealand as her base. She is proud of her country and believes the standard of dressage has come a long way over the years, with the potential to go even further.

'Finding those ridiculously gifted horses, such as **'MOORLANDS TOTILLAS,'** is a numbers game and we just don't have as many horses and riders as they do in Europe. The riders and trainers over there will go through hundreds of horses, selling and buying, just to find that one superstar. Here in New Zealand, we usually stick with what we've got!' says Louisa. 'However, the quality of horses in New Zealand has definitely come along in leaps and bounds. This became apparent at the recent FEI forum in Manfield Park. Olympic dressage rider, Steffan Peters was extremely impressed with **'BATES ANTONELLO'** and even offered us the chance to travel to the United States to train with the idea of competing at Kentucky. The fact that a New Zealand horse, bred by me and my sister, impressed one of the top dressage riders in the world is hugely encouraging, on both a personal level and to the Kiwi dressage scene as a whole.'

Louisa puts much of the continuing improvement of dressage horses in New Zealand down to the many dedicated breeders around the country.

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'The breeders are doing a great job and have imported some truly brilliant stallions such as **'PRESTIGE VDL'** and **'ANAMOUR'**. People like Judith Matthews are also bringing some exceptional mares into the country. I think the introduction of more bloodlines can only be a good thing and will give Kiwi dressage riders a much larger pool of potential dressage prospects to choose from.'

'I'm excited to see what is brought in next,' smiles Louisa. 'I'd love to see some **'BELLISSIMO M'** offspring in New Zealand as I've always loved that stallion. His pedigree is first class, his performance record so far has been very impressive and his foals are all beautifully put together and have lovely, quality paces. A **'MOORLANDS TOTILLAS'** baby would also be very nice! His action is incredible and his piaffe and passage is just out of this world.'

According to Louisa, one of the downsides of living in New Zealand is the distance the country is from some of the most experienced dressage coaches. She believes that, although there are some very good riders living here, they simply do not receive the same degree of attention and refinement as some of their overseas counterparts.

'In Germany, most riders will see a dressage trainer once a week. The top competitors, such as Anky van Grunsven and Isabell Werth, will spend even more time with their coaches and will barely ride without a trainer watching over them,' explains Louisa. 'In New Zealand, we don't have that luxury. We will often go three months at a time without seeing an international trainer. However long you have been riding, having an experienced eye on the ground is so important. Even the tiniest errors can have an effect on the overall picture when you're working at such a high level and a good instructor can help you iron those small faults out.'

'It would be a real boost to New Zealand dressage if we could get trainers from overseas to come and visit us more often,' adds Louisa. 'I have been trying to get German Grand Prix dressage rider and trainer, Andreas Mueller, to move to New Zealand for ages. He's so inspirational, a beautiful rider and gets some exquisite work out of 'Bates Antonello' whenever he's here. I haven't quite convinced him to relocate yet but will keep trying!'

Even though New Zealand has never qualified a dressage team for the Olympics, Louisa has high hopes that one day the dream will be turned into reality. Hopefully, in time for the 2012 Olympics in London.

'Not making it to Beijing was a bitter blow for the Kiwi riders,' says Louisa. 'I think the pressure got to them in the end and they didn't perform as well as they normally would. They have all come above it now though and I feel a very positive and encouraging atmosphere among the Grand Prix riders at the moment. All the riders competing at that level appreciate how difficult it is and genuinely want to support each other which is great.'

'I went to watch the Bates NZ Dressage Championships over in Taupo in March and there were 16 Grand Prix horses competing. That's an excellent amount. So many Kiwi riders produce their own Grand Prix horses. It would be absolutely fantastic if we could get a dressage team together for 2012. It is difficult as you must have three or four extremely talented horses at their peak at the time of the qualifiers. However, I do think we have the horses and the riders capable of making it happen. We just need to stay positive and keep believing that it can be done...'