

A rapid rise through the ranks for Kate Welten...

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Taking the step up to Advanced level dressage is a huge step for riders of all ages and experience levels; but despite her relative inexperience, 19-year-old Kate Welten is enjoying a dream run.

The fact that it is completely unexpected makes it all the more enjoyable. The quietly spoken Cambridge teenager keeps a low profile within the sport, but since winning the Pelorus Trust New Zealand Young Rider Title, that all looks set to change.

2011 has been a huge year so far. Named in the New Zealand Young Rider Development Squad, Kate then went on to win the national Young Rider title on her Anamour gelding Amajah (Comet) and the prestigious Waldebago trophy, at just her second Advanced level outing.

In the same weekend, she earned her Silver Fern, representing New Zealand alongside Putaruru's Kelly Van Dyk in the Trans Tasman Derby.

"It was a pretty amazing weekend," says Kate. "I just tried to focus on each test as it came up and was thrilled with Comet as he coped with the atmosphere pretty well. It was a vast improvement over last year's attempt when we got eliminated in the musical freestyle when he took exception to the speakers and I couldn't even get him in the arena!"

Given that two years ago Kate was competing at Novice level and had never ridden higher, her rise through the grades is remarkable. She is impressively level headed and quick to recognise everyone else involved in her success.

A long time pupil of Cambridge trainer Janet Shaw, Kate runs her equestrian endeavours on a shoestring budget and is hugely grateful for the supportive team around her – from Janet and her daughter Charlott Bayliss, to Kate's own parents and her sister Jacqui.

"They just pitch in behind me all the time to make things happen. It's been quite a journey getting to Advanced and it has required a lot of financial input – just things like tails and a top hat and some of the other gear required."

Preparing for her first year of Teacher's College, Kate is fortunate to have earned a Sir Edmund Hillary Scholarship. Her academic focus receive the same quiet dedication as her equestrian pursuits, and as a Cambridge High School student she was a two-time recipient of a Cambridge Blues Foundation Scholarship.

Following on from her success at the Young Rider Champs, Kate went on to finish third in a strong field of far more experienced combinations, in the Inter I at the Waikato Dressage Champs. She also won the Poot Trophy. Top of the field finishes followed at the recent Waitemata Champs, where she took the Champion Young Rider title.

"I'm really pleased at how the season has gone, especially as it was only really meant to be a training year to get used to competing at Advanced. It was pretty exciting to realise that we could be competitive at this level, not only in the Young Rider classes but in the open Advanced classes too."

Kate's season wound up with the two biggest events possible – the Bates National Dressage Championships followed by Horse of the Year.

Despite 2011 featuring some of the smallest Young Rider fields ever at Nationals and HoY, there's no shortage of competition. Kate and Kelly Van Dyk have been head to head all season, usually with just a fraction of a percent separating them.

On paper Kelly clearly has the upper hand – this is her fifth year competing at Young Rider competitions and she is one of the more experienced young riders at Advanced level, competing both her imported German gelding Wolhkahn and Jody Hartstone's Marceau this season.

However barely anything separated the pair at the National Championships, they notched up a win apiece; Kate taking the Musical Freestyle and Kelly winning the YR Individual class.

Horse of the Year did not go as planned for either rider. Kelly riding with an injured knee and Kate battling with a stomach bug. In the end Kelly's experience dominated, with two super tests on Wolhkahn nudging out Kate, who had to settle for Reserve Champion this time.

Both riders now plan to head to Australia to compete at the Sydney CDI 3* - it will be Kate's first taste of international competition and Kelly's second time undertaking the trip.

Likely to cost each rider about \$20,000, the decision highlights the seriousness with which these young riders approach their sport.

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