

# INTERVIEW WITH AMANDA BERRIDGE

## *Dressage now her focus...*

Cambridge-based Amanda Berridge is only 22 years old, but has already made an impressive mark on both the show ring and now the dressage arena. Jennifer Boyes caught up with her to talk about her intense summer with Leonie Bramall in Europe, her Grand Prix goals, and her passion for teaching the next generation.



Amanda & VOLTE SL - Bay of Plenty Dressage Champs - 2010. Photo: Damian Day - [www.nzequine.co.nz](http://www.nzequine.co.nz)

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** When you were younger, you were a well known in the show ring but that ended somewhat as you got older. Why did you decide to do less showing?

**Amanda Berridge:** I really enjoyed the pony classes and competed in all of the height sections over the years. However, when I moved into the Park Hack classes, I just didn't feel the same about showing and wasn't getting the same enjoyment out of it.

I think one of the problems was that I had been so lucky and achieved such great results that I didn't feel I had anywhere left to go in the show ring. In 2004, I won the Pony of the Year title and rode at Werribee, which really is the pinnacle of the sport for New Zealand, the 'showing Olympics.' That is why dressage really appealed to me. I felt that the discipline would keep challenging me and that I could keep improving and going further and further.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Were you faced with any particular challenges when you switched your focus from showing to dressage?

**Amanda Berridge:** At first it was hard – you're starting at the bottom

of the heap again and often don't come home with anything. It takes a little while to get used to not being awarded with all those show ring sashes and ribbons. However, these days I am more proud of one little rosette than some of the prizes I won in showing. That little rosette represents all the hard work it has taken to get where I am today and gives me a huge deal of satisfaction. Getting used to riding my 17.2hh dressage horse Volte SL also took some time, as my only experience in dressage before then had been on a pony!

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What are some of your favourite memories of your showing career?

**Amanda Berridge:** The funniest memory I have is of my first show off the lead at the Royal Easter Show. I rode in a unity class but was so focussed on my workout that I didn't notice the table and chairs in the middle of the ring and rode straight into them!

My final year in the pony ring was also very memorable as we won pretty much everything that we could possibly win. I took three ponies to the Nationals and came home with 10 titles...our truck was absolutely

covered with garlands and ribbons.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** You were Adult Senior Rider of the Year at the 2010 Horse of the Year Show. How did that feel?

**Amanda Berridge:** It felt absolutely fantastic as it was a title I really really wanted to win. However, in saying that, it also came as quite a surprise as there was some very tough competition in that class, and I felt I could have gone a little better. Thankfully, the judges didn't agree with me and all three of them gave me 50/50 which is quite an achievement.

I have to give some of the credit to my wonderful horse, Volte SL, as he gave me a great ride. It really helps to have a good horse in those classes, one that will show you off as a rider. It's much harder with a novice animal that you constantly have to correct.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Will you be heading over to compete at Werribee?

**Amanda Berridge:** All being well, I will be at Werribee. I'm currently looking for a horse that I can borrow for the ride.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** You rode Volte SL in the dressage classes at the 2010 Horse of the Year Show as well. Was it tricky to switch between showing and dressage classes at the same event?

**Amanda Berridge:** Yep, as well as the senior rider class, we competed in the riding horse classes, winning the over 163cm class and coming runner-up Riding Horse of the Year to On Cloud Nine. The next day, we had our second-ever start in the advanced dressage, and I did notice a difference in how he was going. Dressage is all about collection and control, whereas show horses are encouraged to be a bit more forward going so it can be hard for some horses to switch between the two, especially when the classes are so close together. I was very pleased with him though and couldn't have asked for more.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Tell us a little about your horse Volte SL.

**Amanda Berridge:** I've owned Volte SL (Voltaire II x Fernandez), a 17.2hh chestnut gelding, bred by Seattle Lodge Stud, for a little over three years. He came from just down the road and had just started at level 5 dressage when I got him. The first 18 months were pretty hard, and there were a few times when I desperately wanted to give up. I have to give credit to John Twomey who rode him quite regularly and really helped out. I've put a lot of hard work into Volte over the years and thankfully it's all paying off now.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Do you have any other horses?

**Amanda Berridge:** Apart from Volte SL, I have a project horse that I have been working with and hope to sell at the end of the season. I am also currently on the lookout for a nice young dressage prospect. A promising youngster that's about ready to be broken in and brought on would be perfect. Volte SL is 14 years old now, and I would really like another potential star waiting in the wings.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** With the dressage season back in full swing, how have things been going? What are your aims this year?

**Amanda Berridge:** Volte SL is just getting better and better. He is now fully established at Prix St Georges level and doing very well in his classes. I'm looking forward to seeing how he progresses this year. I would like to keep pushing towards Grand Prix and would love to be competing at that level at the end of next season.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** We hear you spent time at Leonie Bramall's yard this year? What was that like?

**Amanda Berridge:** I spent eight weeks riding for Leonie at her yard in Germany, from the end of May until August. It was incredibly hard work; I have never ridden so many horses! I was schooling about six or seven horses a day without a break. It was so intense but I had a real breakthrough in my riding while I was out there and came back to New Zealand a much better rider.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Is there anything in particular that Leonie taught you over those eight weeks that really sticks in your mind?

**Amanda Berridge:** Leonie is very passionate about getting the basics absolutely right and one of the things we went over was half-halting. She actually taught me to refine my half-halt on a chair! I had to sit on the very edge of it and, using my stomach, bring the back two legs off the floor, to imitate how a rider should ask for a half-halt. The first few times, I simply could not do it as my stomach muscles weren't strong enough so Leonie prescribed lots of core exercises. Before Leonie showed me the half-halt exercise, I always used to get a sore back as I wasn't using my core correctly. Ever since Leonie walked me through how to use my body properly when executing a half-halt, I have not had that back pain problem while riding. It was a real 'eureka' moment.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Having seen the way things are done in Europe, do you think New Zealand dressage is heading in the right direction?

**Amanda Berridge:** I didn't compete while I was over there, but I did groom at a few of the more local shows. Looking at the quality and standard of horses over there, I do think we have plenty here that would stack up against them. On top of that, the standard of riding is continually improving in New Zealand. With all the international trainers who are visiting this country and the exposure we have to how things are done overseas, a new way of riding is developing. We are adopting a more international style of riding and training.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Along with Leonie, do you have any other trainers you work with?

**Amanda Berridge:** I have been training with Caroline Twomey for the past six years. She is an excellent instructor and has a very similar approach to Leonie, having been taught by her. Caroline has been absolutely amazing over the years. She's on call 24/7 whenever I need help or advice and constantly has our progress on our mind. She'll call me out of the blue just to let me know about some tip she has for me that she thinks will help our training. She is currently in Australia, but I am really hoping she comes back to New Zealand as I'm not sure what I would do without her! She's more than an instructor; she's a very close friend.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *On top of all your riding commitments, you also find time to teach. How did that come about?*

**Amanda Berridge:** It all began with show rider Jorgia Weck, who I started teaching six years ago, when she was just five years old. It grew from there really, mainly by word of mouth. I have a few children under my instruction now, and they are all turning into very talented riders. Two of the girls I teach were competing at Werribee last year; another was runner-up Junior Rider of the Year at the 2010 Horse of the Year Show. I feel enormously proud when they do well and have their ponies going so nicely. I prefer teaching the young ones over the adults as they are so open and keen to try new things – most of the time anyway! Teaching them how to ride properly at such a young age gives me such pleasure. Those riders are the future of equestrianism in New Zealand. Giving them a real understanding of riding so early on will stand them in great stead as they go on to compete in whatever discipline they choose. It's great to be involved in that journey.