

# Cindy Pender gives up her glitzy browbands...



Manawatu based Cindy Pender is renowned for her show ring expertise and success, both in New Zealand and across the Tasman. However, she recently decided to hang up her glitzy browband and break into competitive dressage. She chatted to Show Circuit about her new found focus and why she thinks so many show riders are making the switch to dressage.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** You initially made your name as a top show rider in New Zealand. When did that passion for showing begin?

**Cindy Pender:** I've been involved in showing since before I could walk. Mum was a keen showie and had me competing in the open show pony ring when I was just seven years old.

I still love showing...the gaiety of the top horses, their elegance and refinement. It's always a pleasure to watch a winning horse and rider combination in total harmony with each other. I have since moved away from the show ring and dressage is now my primary focus but showing will always be my first love.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What prompted that decision to stop showing and focus purely on dressage?

**Cindy Pender:** I had always dabbled in dressage with my park hack, 'Sherwood Outspoken,' known as 'Rusty' at home, despite the fact that he was purchased as a show horse. We had a fantastic time together in the show ring but around two years ago I started feeling we were in danger of repeating ourselves and getting stuck in a rut. We had won every showing title available in New Zealand and I had taken him over to Australia to compete. I didn't want to carry on doing the same old thing with him.

We needed a fresh challenge so about 18 months ago; I made the leap to focusing purely on dressage. I knew I had to stop playing around, flipping between showing and dressage. I had to concentrate on just one discipline. The schooling is completely different for both sports...my instructor would watch me and say 'that's your dressage trot...and that's your showing trot.' I didn't feel we could excel at one if we were also training and competing in the other.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Where did you find your horse 'Sherwood Outspoken'?

**Cindy Pender:** When I started looking for a new show horse 11 years ago, I had a very set idea of what I was looking for. In fact, I was so specific that it took me four years to find what I was after. I wanted something small as I'm only 5ft and didn't want to be over-horsed, and I also wanted something that had correct conformation, great movement and lots of chrome! I searched throughout New Zealand and also Australia, travelling back and forth to all the shows, the Horse of the Years and the Royals.

I couldn't find anything that met my criteria in Australia and actually ended up finding 'Sherwood Outspoken,' known as 'Rusty,' at home, here in New Zealand. He fell into my lap really. I saw him as a very green horse competing at the New Zealand Horse of the Year Show in 2004 and I just loved him. At the end of that following winter, I approached his owners, we made a deal and I brought him home.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Has it been difficult to make the transition from showing to dressage?

**Cindy Pender:** You definitely have to do your time in dressage and many people still look at 'Rusty' and think of him as a dinky show horse. He has truly risen to the plate though and

continues to get better and better. He is small at just under 15hh, and is a completely different type to those big honking warmbloods! But I've been told that he grows in the ring. He doesn't look his size when he's out there strutting his stuff, and that is to do with how big his movement is. He really covers the ground.

Last year we competed at our first Nationals which were pretty overwhelming. The first day was something of a disaster but we pulled it together for the second day and picked up 5th in one of the competitions. It has taken us a while to break through in dressage competition but I think that second day was the turning point for us. It taught me an awful lot about how I wanted to approach the remainder of that season.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What level are you training and competing at now? What are your plans and goals going forward?

**Cindy Pender:** We are training at Level 3 and schooling some Open

Medium movements at home with my instructor, ex-showie turned

dressage rider and trainer Rachel Bird. One of my immediate goals is to compete at the 2011 Nationals and improve on our performance last year. I have purposely kept 'Rusty' back a level, even though he technically should have gone up a grade this year, as I wanted to be competitive at Level 3 at this year's event. In March we'll be going to the 2011 New Zealand Horse of the Year Show, and then I will move him up a grade for the winter competitions.

I think 'Rusty' will go a lot further than I am capable of...A number of judges have commented on his ability, including one who referred to him as having the potential to be an '80% horse.' I don't in my wildest dreams think we'll ever be out at the international Grand Prix events but I do think we'll get fairly high up the grades and hold our own. My aim is simply to take him as far through the levels as we can go and then retire him when the time comes. He is a forever horse, I will never sell him.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Is there anything that you like about competitive dressage that you think is missing from showing?

**Cindy Pender:** New Zealand showing is somewhat in the doldrums at the moment and one of the issues is that there's no accountability. In dressage, the judges have to put a mark down on paper so, even though it is still a subjective sport to some degree, the reasoning behind marks and placings is much more transparent. Dressage judges are also much more open to discussion with competitors after the event which helps everyone grow and improve, and is beneficial for the sport as a whole.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Finally, why do you think so many show riders make the leap to dressage? What attracts them to the sport?

**Cindy Pender:** If they are anything like me, they love dressage for the exactness of it. In the show ring, if you perform an amazing workout, there is still the chance you might not win as other factors come into play. But if you really pull out the stops and give a fantastic dressage test, you are often rewarded. Even if the test isn't that good, you are still rewarded as you get feedback on your score sheet enabling you to go away and work on what you need to do for next time. There is always the opportunity and encouragement to improve and that's what I love about it. That's what keeps me coming back for more.