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Competing across the disciplines

Interview with pony rider Shannon Harvey

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Shannon Harvey is only 13 years old but is well known on the New Zealand competition circuit. Since her debut in the show ring, she has come along in leaps and bounds and is hardly ever out of the ribbons. Show Circuit had a chat with her about her continuing success in ridden showing, along with her ever improving results in show hunter and show jumping.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: How long have you been riding and competing?

Shannon Harvey: I've been riding for around five years now and got my first pony when I was nine. I started competing shortly afterwards, in the First Ridden Ring on Rivelin Christian Dior. Later on, I moved into the open ring and won the 12.2hh Pony of the Year title on the imported Australian pony, Oaklands Park in Your Dreams.

Even though I started out in the show ring and still love showing, I now enjoy show hunter and show jumping classes as well. I also do a bit of hunting over winter with Waitemata Hunt.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: Why did you decide to go show jumping?

Shannon Harvey: A few years ago, one of my friends had a little bay show jumping pony that I really liked. I just decided that jumping was something I wanted to have a go at so we got him, and I have stuck with it ever since! I love the thrill and excitement of show jumping. It's nice to do something that's different to the other disciplines I do.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: What ponies are you competing at the moment?

Shannon Harvey: I have three at the moment, including the nine year

old bay 14.1hh riding pony mare, Beechcroft Martini, (Radway Talk of the Town (imp UK) x Tiffany) known as Millie at home. We bought her last year and haven't started competing yet. I'm really looking forward to getting her out and about this season. I've had my other 14.1hh pony Little Valley Griffin for two years now. I mainly do show hunter and show jumping classes with him, although we have ventured into the show ring on a few occasions with some encouraging results.

I also have a ten year old project pony, Star, which we purchased a year and a half ago from Timaru. We're planning to compete in show hunter this year. After that we will probably sell him on as, at 13.2hh, he's slightly too small for me.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: Do you have any particular trainers or mentors? What have you been working on over winter?

Shannon Harvey: Auckland racehorse trainer Leanne Franklin helps me with my flatwork. She has an invaluable and incredibly in-depth knowledge of horses. Recently we have been concentrating on getting Millie ready for the show season. We've been practising getting her moving forward, and stretching and lifting into the contact. I have also just started having lessons with top eventer Vaughn Jefferis. I've only had five or six so far but I'm really enjoying his approach. At the moment we're working on pace and getting the ponies rolling along. One of my favourite exercises is when Vaughn places poles on the ground and gets me to count our strides through them. It's helped me learn how to see a stride and how to lengthen and shorten between fences. I'm also now receiving instruction from Gwen Brown who is a dressage instructor and judge.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: Are there any riders, either in New Zealand or internationally, that you particularly admire?

Shannon Harvey: I really admire Craig Sullivan from Weiti Station.

He makes my ponies look amazing when he gets on, he has a great feel for the horses and I have really enjoyed the coaching sessions I have had with him in the past.

'I also have a lot of respect for show jumper Amanda Wilson. The video of her jumping Showtynn Viking bareback and without a bridle is amazing.'

SHOW/CIRCUIT: You had a pretty fantastic season last year. How did it feel to pick up Reserve Pinto of the Year on Little Valley Griffin?

Shannon Harvey: It felt really good, especially as it was our first season showing him. He went so nicely at Horse of the Year. He also did extremely well in the Saddle Hunter Pony classes last year. Among a number of other great results, he was Reserve Champion Novice Saddle Hunter Pony, at Helensville A&P and also picked up first in the Novice Paced and Mannered Saddle Hunter Pony and second in the Open Paced and Mannered Saddle Hunter Pony.

Griffin is a pretty special character. When he's show jumping, he's very forward and enthusiastic, but in the show ring he really chills out and is foot perfect. Sometimes he can even get a bit too laid back! He definitely knows the difference between the two jobs.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: What are your plans for next season?

Shannon Harvey: Next season I will be competing in 80-90cm show hunter and show jumping classes with Griffin and Star, and working on 1m at home. I will also make my debut in the 148cm Riding Pony classes with Beechcroft Martini. As a long term goal, I would like to get one of my ponies to Grand Prix show jumping level before I'm too old. With four years left on ponies, I'm confident I'll achieve that goal.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: Do you have any exercise, grooming or feeding regimes that you follow with the ponies in the run up to a new competition season?

Shannon Harvey: We always feed a lot of fibre like ezybeet, lucerne and oaten chaff, with extruded barley and Hygain Ice. Prior to the season the ponies are brought into work quietly and then progress to swimming in the horse pool, hacking and pace work on the training track. This is also great for conditioning Griffin for the hunting season and trims them up beautifully.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: How many competitions do you get to on average every year? How do you juggle the ponies and competitions with school/social life?

Shannon Harvey: On average I attend around 16 shows per season; some A&Ps and also show hunter and show jumping competitions.

I ride nearly every night and morning on weekends. I try not to jump Griffin during the week if we are show jumping on the weekends – it is important to look after their legs. Homework is done in the evenings after I come in after riding, and I see friends after competing on weekends. I am fairly good at fitting in the things that I want to do.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: Do you think you will ever focus on just one discipline?

Shannon Harvey: I definitely want to stick with the horses and would eventually like to move on to hacks. When I'm older I will probably focus more on the show jumping side of things; as it is just so exciting and so much fun.

SHOW/CIRCUIT: Do you have any tips for other young riders wanting to excel in equestrian competition?

Shannon Harvey: The best piece of advice I can give is to take your time. If you rush and take shortcuts, you will ultimately be taking the long way round. Listen to your instructor and work on the things that need to be worked on. If you have enough drive and determination you will get there eventually.

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