



Shona Duncan - FINAL TOUCH

# Shona Duncan

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Shona Duncan is well known in the New Zealand showing community for her impeccable training and presentation skills as well as her knack for spotting a future champion. We chatted with her about her successes, her current stable stars and what concerns her about the Kiwi show scene today.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Have you always had an interest in showing? Do you come from an equestrian or showing background?

**Shona Duncan:** Mum rode as a teenager so horses are definitely in the blood. I started riding later than most, when I was 11 years old at Intermediate School. My friend had two horses and that was the beginning... although it took me a year to convince mum and dad that I needed my own horse. My younger brother, Craig, also became keen on horses and together we went eventing and occasionally showing. Craig and I both went to NZ Pony Club Champs, myself twice and Craig seven times. I gave up for a while after competing at Ashburton Champs when I was 20. That was my last event until I got back into riding some 11 years later.

My passion for horses and riding came to the fore again after marrying Alan, who had a successful background in the show ring with flat and jump ponies then in the hack ring with jump horses. We initially purchased a black Grosvenor, and I went straight back to eventing, but how things had changed...those fences just did not appeal anymore! So Alan took over the reins of this particular horse and round the ring jumped him. We purchased my first flat hack, Gee Wizz which started me in the show ring.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What do you like so much about showing? What motivates you to keep competing?

**Shona Duncan:** We have been concentrating solely on showing for the past 18 years now and have enjoyed it for the most part. It has been our family interest and sport for all of this time and collectively we have had wonderful horses and ponies, fantastic success, fun times. However, I must say that more recent years have seen us considerably scale down our numbers and attendance at shows. Showing like most sports these days is seriously competitive, high in costs and you have to have the passion and drive to want it and keep at it. It is still very gratifying to see your animals look so well, go nicely and bring home the right prize at the end of the day. That certainly keeps the motivation on track.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What was the first major title that you won?

**Shona Duncan:** I took my first Horse of the Year title with Golly Gosh in 1995 when the event was still at Karaka. The year prior was my first Horse of the Year, when we were reserve to French Roll. It was, and still is, a great feeling to win, especially such a major title. Ultimately it is the one title that we aspire to achieve at the end of each season.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Which of your horses has been the most successful?

**Shona Duncan:** I have had some fabulous horses over the years. Gee Wizz, Golly Gosh, Saleri and Versace in earlier days all won various titles such as Horse of the Year, Sue Yearbury, Royal Easter, National and Grand National, both under saddle and led. In between, with my daughters Kelsey and Ashley competing, I had a lot of time out but did manage to bring on Gianni who was sold to Roy Davis in Australia, Champagne on Ice and Hidden Treasure, which were all off the track and started out as novices. I now have the show hack Final Touch.

My favourite horse was Golly Gosh - he was very cool and such a neat ride. I am excited about campaigning Final Touch this season, as we only had a handful of shows together last season and, with help from our trainer Christine Weal, I hope that we have a fun, successful season. He is very talented and just a little different to the norm.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Is there a title left that you would like to win?

**Shona Duncan:** Actually, no. I have been extremely fortunate to have won everything ridden and led during my career. I guess to finish on a top note would be ideal...A Horse of the Year title would be wonderful with Final Touch; while he tied for first this year it wasn't to be. In Australia, the hack title at the Australian Show Horse & Rider Championships (Werribee) would be amazing, but quite a challenge.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Do you have a favourite event here or overseas?

**Shona Duncan:** The Australian Show Horse & Rider Championships (Werribee) is a wonderful show to experience and just be a part of if you have the opportunity and is made even more special due to the link with our own Horse of the Year Show. Australia overall has some wonderful, large scale shows and they are usually so well attended... both numbers and quality wise.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What are you competing this coming season?

**Shona Duncan:** This year, I will be competing my hack, Final Touch. Final Touch is my first mixed breed horse to show and, while he certainly has a lot of thoroughbred qualities, his warmblood side offers a scopey, different, temperament to work with.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** How is planning coming along for Werribee? Are you doing any fundraising to get yourself and Final Touch over to Australia?

**Shona Duncan:** Training has commenced as has fundraising. We recently had a great auction and quiz night which was attended and supported by 200 people. We raised enough for one horse and one rider which was excellent. We will be taking two horses and three riders so are now brainstorming for the balance.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What do you think of the NZ show scene at the moment? How do you think it could be improved?

**Shona Duncan:** I worry about the smaller shows and their survival. With the costs so much more these days and the competition level so high it is vital that they are well attended, in order to keep the sport and the shows alive. Perhaps more incentives should be offered to competitors to encourage a lift in entries such as Waikato A&P does. Great schedules and professional, knowledgeable, judges will always go a long way too.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** How has showing changed since you started competing on the circuit?

**Shona Duncan:** Certainly the days of the plain bridles, simple, black longer-styled jackets and bowler hats have been replaced with bling browbands, coloured vests and jackets, top hats, white girths and make up on horses which, to an extent, looks more modern and brighter. However, there is a point where the bling and colours can and do cross the line, and the classic, elegant look is lost.

Also, the days of trot out and canter back have long gone and the workouts are more testing and need to be thoughtfully ridden to show your horse to its best ability.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** What do you look for in a show horse? Are there any faults that would put you off completely?

**Shona Duncan:** I love horses with beautiful fronts, attractive heads and a natural self carriage. I have always had a passion for browns

and bays with very simple if any, white markings. I also like my show horses to be nicely coupled, with a great physique, free, expressive movement and of course ideally straight, although the perfect horse is yet to be found. Soundness is a must, otherwise the horse is too difficult to manage. On top of that, a horse must be honest in nature. We always like to sum up a horse's temperament fast as we have no room or time for difficult and untrustworthy horses. A horse does need a little bit of arrogance in its presence as it gives it the 'look at me' ring appeal, but it must be manageable.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** Do you have any pet hates in the show ring?

**Shona Duncan:** Hmm...precious people!

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** How do you get your show horses looking so good? Do you have any tips, tricks or particular products that you use?

**Shona Duncan:** Like anything in life it does take a number of things to produce a finished and polished result. Training, exercise, feed, environment and care all managed correctly will produce a happy, healthy animal. On the day, all of that done correctly provides a great canvas to prepare for the ring.

*Show Circuit: Finally, do you have any tips for readers interested in taking up showing?*

**Shona Duncan:** Try not to get discouraged or give up as it is a hard road, like any sport, if you want to make it. Put the time in, train, ask advice from those people that you aspire to and copy those that do it well. Don't be led into purchasing gear and clothing that you don't really need. Choose the ideal classy outfit along with a dressage saddle and matching bridle and stay with it. The judge does not know that you are wearing the same outfit each week. Equally, they wouldn't know that you are changing jackets and browbands each week! I would recommend saving the money for a good trainer. It is so important, whatever the level, that you have independent advice and someone knowledgeable on the ground to ensure your training is producing the correct result and the right look for the show ring.

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