



## INTERVIEW WITH SHOW RIDER SIMONE SIMPSON

WORDS: JENNIFER BOYES PHOTOS: MENDIP FARM PHOTOGRAPHY

In this interview, we speak to a long-standing and successful member of the New Zealand showing community, Simone Simpson.

**Show Circuit: When did you start riding and can you remember your first pony?**

**Simone Simpson:** I can't even remember when I first started riding, it was that long ago! I must have been around 18 months old. My mum used to ride and all my cousins have ridden so that horse-loving gene definitely runs in the family. My first pony was a part-bred Caspian called "Tolley" and he was the perfect little starter pony.

**SC: When did you compete in your first show?**

**SS:** I rode in my first show when I was four years old and won my first rider class. All was going smoothly until the ribbons were handed out and my little pony bolted back to the truck with me hanging on screaming. The only thing mum said to the shocked bystanders was: 'Don't worry- it'll go back to the truck.'



**"At the most recent Horse of the Year Show, he (Gauntlet) was Runner-Up Hack of the Year and he was third the previous year. Not bad for a thoroughbred that only cost us \$3,000.00"**

**SC: Do you think showing in New Zealand has changed much over the years?**

**SS:** Turnout has come a long way since those early days. There's a lot less tweed and much more glitz! I remember we all used to wear these big round helmets that made you look like you were wearing a giant bowl on your head as well. Thankfully, those are long gone! The ponies are also much finer now.

I do think show riders used to be much tougher though. We used to ride around the farm and the roads....I was hunting over full wire fences when I was eight. Now, a lot of children only ever seem to ride in an arena.

**SC: You have had some fantastic successes in the show ring. Do you have any favourite memories?**

**SS:** Out of the 13 times I have competed at the New Zealand Horse of the Year Show, I have only once not made it into the top six. I have also claimed three titles and three runner-ups, including rider titles. I've been so lucky and I've had some amazing horses and ponies.

When I was nine, I was 4th in Pony of the Year and the following year I was runner-up. In those days, it was just the one big class with all the heights in together, so being placed so highly was a huge achievement. I was also very proud when I won the Large Pony of the Year after being runner-up the previous year.

Winning my first Senior Rider of the Year on Valiant Legend was also a very special moment. I ended up taking him to Werribee in Australia and finished third in the Senior Rider class.

**SC: What show horses are you out on this season?**

**SS:** My show hack Gauntlet or "Homer" as he is known at home. I have also ridden another hack, Times Square for Deb Ferris, at a few shows this season.

**SC: Tell us a bit about Gauntlet, as I hear 2009/10 will be his final show season?**

**SS:** Gauntlet is a 13-year-old Thoroughbred that had done a bit of eventing before we took him on. He had raced but the best he had ever managed was two thirds. One of those placings he only picked up because, during the race, an umbrella flew across the course and all of the other horses shied!

We originally bought him to go hunting on but decided he was far too nice to keep out of the show ring. He has done amazingly well, considering he was never destined to be a show horse. He has taken me to Rider of the Year and Tinesha Carey to Intermediate Rider of the Year. At the most recent Horse of the Year Show, he was Runner-Up Hack of the Year and he was third the previous year. Not bad for a thoroughbred that only cost us \$3,000.00. He's an amazing horse and we will never sell him.

We have done three seasons together and it's time for him to do something different now so we'll take him out hunting and do a bit of jumping as he loves that. He'll have a blast.



**SC: You have been over to Australia to compete on a number of occasions. How is showing there different to New Zealand?**

**SS:** I have gone over for the Werribee Grand Nationals three times, twice for the rider class and once for the Large Galloway class and I have also competed at the Canberra Royal, Brisbane Royal and in Sydney. I finished in the top six out of 109 at Canberra and I took Reserve Champion Pony at Brisbane Royal. I definitely feel like a small fish in a big pond when I'm over in Australia as the fields are so much stronger. The horses and ponies aren't necessarily of a much better quality- there are just a lot more of them.

**SC: Have you ever had a trainer or mentor that has particularly inspired you?**

**SS:** "SWMBO" (She Who Must Be Obeyed!), also known as my mother, has always been my biggest source of inspiration and motivation.

**SC: What advice would you give other riders thinking about giving showing a go?**

**SS:** My advice would be to take your time and put some miles in. Don't expect to go to your first show and sweep the board immediately. The more experienced riders have been around for years. They know how to show their horses off to their best advantage and have learned what to do and what not to do. It takes a while to build up that kind of knowledge.

I'm also a big believer in getting involved in other disciplines, aside from showing. You can pick up and develop other skills from jumping, dressage and just from hacking around, which can help no-end in the show ring. I know that my time in the jumping ring definitely helped me with stickability, for example. Varying what you do will also keep you and your horse fresh and interested.

Apart from that, you simply have to have the will to succeed. Give it your best shot every time you go out and you won't go far wrong.