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# INTERVIEW WITH KATHARINE VAN TUYL

WORDS: JENNIFER BOYES

This month, we caught up with talented three day event rider Katharine Van Tuyl

**Show Circuit: How long have you been riding?**

**Katharine Van Tuyl:** There have always been horses at home so they have been a part of my life for longer than I can remember. I was riding before I could walk. My first pony was a gorgeous 12.2hh chestnut pony with a white blaze and a couple of white socks called *Mabel*. She was the perfect starter pony.

**SC: Has your focus always been on three day eventing?**

**KVT:** Not at all. In the beginning, I was really into my showing and only did flat classes. I started competing on my first proper Horse of the Year show pony, a lovely little 12.2hh, when I was seven or eight. I picked up a few titles, including Pony of the Year three times running on 14hh *Glenvar Fanfare*.

When I was out of the pony classes, I got seriously into jumping. I had always wanted to jump and even told my mum that if I didn't start jumping after I had outgrown the ponies, I would have to quit riding.

**SC: Who was your first eventer?**

**KVT:** My first horse was Susan Grayling's retired advanced eventer, *All Talk*. He was a 19 year old Thoroughbred and really taught me the ropes. I only had him for around six months but it was the best learning curve ever. You could just point him at anything and he would go over it.

**SC: Which have been your favourite competition horses?**

**KVT:** The young Warmblood I took on after *All Talk* was very special. His name was *The Boomer* and he was one of the nicest horses to ever leave the country. He wasn't the easiest of rides but he went on to be an extremely talented advanced eventer and Grand Prix show jumper. I also took him to Sydney with the New Zealand Young Rider Team in 2000. He was sold to the United States for a substantial amount and was very succesful over there until he was recently retired. He was an absolutely awesome horse.

Even though I was very sad to see him go, I was lucky enough to have another lovely young horse waiting in the wings, a promising Thoroughbred gelding called *Underhand*. He was in the Trans Tasman Team that competed at the Adelaide 4-star event four years ago. He has also been placed at World Cup level in eventing and has competed as a Grand Prix show jumper.

**SC: Underhand has recently been retired from competition. Why did you decide to stop eventing him?**

**KVT:** He has done amazingly well in the years that I have had him and was a definite Olympics prospect. Unfortunately, he has had to stop competing due to serious heart problems. He had been 'off' for around eight months and it was heartbreaking when we finally found out what the issue was...

**SC: What are you riding this season?**

**KVT:** I have a new one called *Redhanded* who is a lovely 16.2hh eight year old Thoroughbred. He was a steeplechaser for a couple of years - I used to watch him on the TV and drool over him. I nagged and nagged his trainer until they eventually gave up and let me buy him. He has been off the track for two years now and is coming along really nicely. He won his first horse trial earlier this year.

We will be competing in the 2-star at Puhinui and Richfields, before moving up to 3-star after Christmas. I'm so excited about this one. He has the best brain and attitude of any horse I've ever had. He's also the easiest horse I've ever ridden. He's a fantastic mover and is just beautiful to ride over fences. He's such a dude.

**SC: So, we hear that you have been hitting the show ring again...how is that going?**

**KVT:** Yes! I took my Thoroughbred, *Black Tuxedo*, to the Wanganui and Palmerston North A&P Shows and he was Champion Novice Hack at both. He also won Reserve Champion Novice Hack at Hawkes Bay A&P. As well as excelling in the show ring, *Black Tuxedo* is also in full three day event training. He was third in his first pre-novice at the weekend. The fact that he can go full throttle cross country but still keep it together in the show ring says an awful lot about his character and versatility.

**SC: Do you still enjoy showing as much as you did when you were younger?**

**KVT:** I love showing as it gives me the opportunity to do something a bit different - I get bored doing the same thing over and over. All of my eventers go well on the flat, as well as over jumps, and are capable of doing well in the show ring. I like pretty horses and don't have any unattractive ones in my yard. After all, it costs just as much to feed a good looking one as it does to feed an ugly one!

**SC: Is there a particular trainer that you use?**

**KVT:** I have trained with dressage instructor Penny Castle for years and years. I can't even remember how long she has been coaching me. I really appreciate her guidance as my dressage needs the most work, although I am getting better. I don't have a serious jump trainer.

**SC: Do you have an official sponsor?**

**KVT:** I don't have a sponsor at the moment but will go looking again once *Redhanded* is up to advanced. Right now, my mum and dad are my greatest sponsors!

**SC: What are your plans for the future?**

**KVT:** My aim is to get *Redhanded* up and going in advanced classes next season. He is my horse for the future. I would also like to be back on the New Zealand team for the Trans Tasman competition in two years time.

**SC: Finally...do you ever get nervous when you're riding around those enormous cross country tracks?**

**KVT:** It really depends on what you're riding. Training courses look massive when you're aboard a baby! I do get nervous in the start box sometimes and definitely have that occasional moment when I think, 'holy... what am I doing,' but once I'm out of the box, everything is fine.

When you're on a neat horse, it makes a difference. There is nothing more awesome than riding a great horse around a huge course. It's the best feeling in the world.

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