



STALLION POWER

TWO ENTHUSIASTS TALK ABOUT COMPETING A STALLION...

WORDS: JENNIFER BOYES PHOTOS: LISA POTTER - www.nzequine.co.nz

It's not hard to see why many competitive riders would rather own a stallion. Their extra power and presence can give them a valuable edge in certain disciplines. On top of that, the thought of owning a profitable breeding animal can be very alluring. However, despite the obvious benefits, owning an entire is a massive responsibility. Everything the stallion owner does, both at competitions and at home, must be with the safety of other horses, people and the stallion himself in mind.

Auckland based dressage rider, Lisa Blackburn, is a first time stallion owner. She bought the 16.3hh bay Licensed KWPN stallion, 'PRESTIGE VDL' in 2007 to campaign at high level dressage and to market as a breeding stallion. Since he arrived in New Zealand, 'PRESTIGE VDL' has been getting better and better. At the beginning of 2010, he started competing at Grand Prix and has racked up some impressive results already. He was Grand Prix Reserve Champion at the Waitemata Dressage Championship Show in February and 3rd overall at the National

Championships CDI*** in March.

'I wanted to import a top class dressage prospect but the cost of buying a gelding was going to be so expensive and high risk, with the chance that they could injure themselves and be unusable. I decided to go the extra mile and went looking for something that I could offer as a breeding stallion as well as taking up the dressage ranks. I knew Prestige would be perfect as soon as I saw him.'

Even though it is relatively common for stallions to compete in the dressage arena,

there are certain things that need to be kept in mind when heading to an event.

'There are a few things you must do differently when competing a stallion,' says Lisa. 'For example, recently introduced rules state that there must be two people per stallion at all times. This can be quite inconvenient if you don't come from a big yard as it means you have to hire a full time groom for the duration of the event.'

Lisa admits that she has been lucky with 'PRESTIGE VDL' as he has been fairly easy to handle. However, she believes that the right management and training also goes a long way towards making stallion ownership much more straightforward.

'I think the most important thing is to treat them like a normal horse as much as possible,' says Lisa. 'Prestige goes out all day and isn't isolated. He is behind double fencing but can see the mares and other horses. When he comes in to be groomed, or to have his feet seen by the farrier, he is expected to behave just like any other horse. Quite often he is tied up next to mares outside of the breeding season and he doesn't bat an eyelid. I have been very fortunate as I know it isn't always so easy,' smiles Lisa. 'Thankfully, I managed to find the right one with a nice, cruisey temperament.'

Unlike Lisa, David Marshall, owner of Holly Farm Arabian Bloodstock in Canterbury, has been around stallions all his life. He started riding them when he was just thirteen, so has had plenty of time to get to grips with their quirks, behavioural patterns and how they react to different situations.

'Riding a stallion at such a young age is not something I would necessarily recommend doing now!' laughs David. 'But it gave me a really good understanding of how their brains work. My dad owned an Arabian stud and I ended up riding the stallions as they were the only ones who were consistently in work, unlike the mares who would be unavailable at certain times of the year.'

'It's a real pleasure to ride a stallion. I've always managed to form much stronger bonds with them than mares and geldings. One thing

that makes them different to other horses is that they are always thinking. Riding one is like having a full time conversation. It can be a challenge but a very enjoyable and rewarding one.'

A number of Holly Farm stallions are used for competitive endurance riding, including the 15hh grey Arabian 'PRAADA NZL' and the 15.1hh grey Arabian 'ZAADAM NZL'. 'PRAADA' is a FEI Star Rated endurance horse and has a collection of accolades to his name such as 3rd in his first CEI*** 120km ride and 2009 Hororata CEI* 80km Winner and Best Conditioned. 'ZAADAM' is an open endurance horse and has also collected his fair share of winnings in the discipline.

'They have a lot of natural strength and fitness which helps their performance in competition,' explains David. 'They require much less fitness training at home than the geldings which is a real plus. Another great thing about them is that they will generally tell you if they hurt or tired. They look after themselves and don't take risks. This can be hugely beneficial when you're racing as you know they're not going to go to the bitter end and injure themselves.'

As with any discipline, there are rules and guidelines in place at endurance events especially for those competing with stallions. 'Riders with stallions need to make sure their mount is wearing large 'S' plates on either side of their bridle or halter at all times,' says David. 'They must also wear a blue ribbon in their tail so that riders coming up from behind know to give them plenty of room. When they are not being ridden, stallions are kept in metal yards on the competition grounds with a large written sign indicating that they are entire.'

David agrees that there is an element of responsibility to owning a stallion. 'Regardless of whether you consider your own horse trustworthy or not, you never really know what they're going to do next,' says David. 'Any stallion can react offhandedly and you definitely need to be very aware of your surroundings when handling one. However, if you treat them with respect, are consistent in your training and never become complacent when around them, you could end up with one of the best competition mounts you have ever owned.'



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