

# Determination sees Fiona and Marcus at the top

What a pleasure to write about a real success story. Fiona Craig, at 24, has had a season in England that you might dream about.

Seven years ago she left Taupo for England, taking with her a nice Rocky Mountain novice horse.

Beaujolais did well enough to get to advanced level in dressage, and is now retired.

Her new horse is Marcus, an extraordinary product, being by a thoroughbred colt, who got loose with an Irish draught cross Hanoverian mare.

He is now seven, and Fiona says he has the action of the Irish draught but the cadence of the warmblood. At 16.3 hh he makes Fiona look tiny, but together they have qualified in four levels of dressage for regional finals, went on to win three of these coming third in the medium, and competed in two levels, all she was allowed, at the national finals at Goodwood.

This is surely an all-time record, and an amazing achievement, ranging as it does from novice, through elementary and medium, to advanced medium. Something that usually takes a year to achieve in each grade, at least. At Goodwood, Fiona won the elementary championships, and finished third in the advanced medium, her other choice.

How has Fiona reached these dizzy heights? By sheer determination and hard work, I can tell.

She was smart enough to go initially to one of Britain's top professionals, David Hunt, who trains near Ascot. He is himself a competitor as well, and has taught many of the top three-day event riders, as well as the dressage specialists. David is, of course, expensive, but Fiona was able to work for him for a while and earn her lessons.



Now she is running a private yard close by, for her sponsors, Killarney Scrap Metals, whose director works in London, but comes down to hunt at weekends.

The yard specialises in producing young horses brought from Ireland, as well as keeping hunters at livery for permanent clients. Fiona, not surprisingly, is a perfectionist, and as such she admits is not the easiest person to work for, so at times she is very sort-handed in the yard.

That can mean having 10 horses to muck out, care for, exercise and turn out for hunting days, and cope with at the end of the day, when they come home, tired and plastered in mud.

I know what that mud can be like, I had a day with the Garth

Hunt, many years ago, courtesy of Miss Sybil Smith, who taught the royal family to ride. I had been having some side-saddle lessons from her, and she asked me to escort one of her livery clients for the day, as she felt he might be glad of a back-up.

That area, round Windsor, is deep going, and we came back properly plastered. Stable yards in England don't go for the hose like many folk do here, but it can take hours to get a horse and gear clean at the end of the day.

Anyway, back to Fiona . . . she had been doing a bit of eventing, too, but obviously her heart and ambitions are set in dressage for the moment.

Her trainer has great faith in her, which is hardly surprising when you see the list of names below hers in the championship: Ferdi Eilberg, another top trainer, from Germany, now living in England, Carl Hestor and Jenny Loriston-Clarke, both on the British team at Stockholm world championships, and many other well-known names in a class of 22.

Pegotty Henriques, the British writer and columnist, says of Marcus: "He is a lovely stamp and very correct and agreeable in his manner of going, offering no resistance and absolute obedience. He has three impeccably sound paces."

Fiona says: "He is a dream to ride, so sharp and forward. You ask and he is so capable he just does it."

Yet at the beginning of the season, Marcus had stifle trouble and she was not sure that he would come sound enough to compete. Patience and that determination she has shown through her seven years of work in England have surely paid off now.