

"He is a sensitive horse, not thick and slow like a warmblood. But unless I'd seen him in action, I don't think I would have thought of eventing a part-Spanish horse."

Another Iberian horse to have made the grade in an unaccustomed discipline, Hilary Self's Hilton Flamenco, was certainly a head-turner when he arrived on the endurance circuit. She imported the handsome grey Lusitano from Portugal as a three-year-old. After Flamenco had progressed as a dressage horse, Hilary, founder of Hilton Herbs, a major endurance sponsor, decided to turn her hand to the sport herself.

She found that despite "F's" extravagant action, he made the times and speeds quite comfortably. Although he came late to the sport and was never tested at longer-distance race rides, F proved that he had the stamina, qualifying in 2000 for the 75-mile class at the Golden Horseshoe ride. But his greatest asset was his amenable temperament, perfect in the heat of competition.

"When you got off him at a vetgate, he would just switch off. You could do anything with him," says Hilary.

So many stories abound of the Irish bog horse who became a world-beater. Perhaps one of the best must be that of New Zealand



Clockwise from top: the great Milton, who carried Arab blood; part-bred Arab Tamarillo, an eventing success; and Chevington, who became a dressage star

rider Fiona Craig's international dressage horse Marcus. The unassuming name is apt, because Marcus's story, from humble beginnings, is of the joy of pure accident.

"He was bred in Ireland out of a 24-year-old mare by a yearling colt, and left on his mother until he was three years old," explains Fiona.

The horse, who was bred as a hunter, went on with Fiona to compete as a grand prix dressage horse, gracing the arenas of Rotterdam and Aachen.

"He was never intended to be a dressage horse at all. Eric Lette once gave him a 10 for

"There is prejudice in eventing about Arab horses, from myself included, until now. I thought Tamarillo looked far too precious to do a job of work"

William Fox-Pitt

his piaffe at Aachen, and that was one of our highlights," says Fiona.

Marcus qualified for the Olympics in Barcelona, but was passed over by the New Zealand selectors, who thought that, as an eight-year-old, he was unlikely to be in the medals. Eventually, although he made a comeback, a series of health problems put paid to his international career and the horse, one of the most admired never to have made it into the top medal placings, has now retired with Fiona.

Marcus was not an easy horse and Fiona attributes this to the fact that he was with