

# Dressage Kiwi soaring

By **JOAN  
GILCHRIST**

For English-based New Zealand dressage rider Fiona Craig, it has been a long, hard road from pony clubbing in Turangi to the top levels of her chosen sport.

But, if all goes according to plan, Craig and her bay gelding Marcus V will step out into the arena as New Zealand representatives at the World Equestrian Games in The Hague in July.

No dressage rider from this country has achieved as much as Craig has in international competition — in Britain, Germany, Holland and France.

In fact, the pair qualified three times for the Barcelona Olympics, but were denied nomination by the NZOCGA selectors, who considered them not ready for the competition.

Craig disagreed and is determined to show that they were wrong at The Hague this year, with her long-term target a medal — preferably gold — at Atlanta in 1996.

Marcus V is not an easy horse, of unpredictable temperament but enormous ability. International judges are agreed that if he is on form at The Hague he will be a very strong prospect.

Deeply disappointed by missing Barcelona and further distressed by the loss of her NZ-bred horse and the death of her employer shortly afterwards, Craig bounced back last season to finish 30th out of 55 in the grand prix at Aachen, in which 20 of the 29 competitors ahead of her were recent Olympic and world championship contenders.

In Rotterdam, she and Marcus were third in the highest level of competition, the grand prix special, behind multiple gold medal winner Reiner Klimke and Anna Merfeldt who had been 11th at Barcelona. There were also several wins in Britain.

At last year's British selection trials for the European championships, for which as a Kiwi she was not eligible, Craig scored 67.66 per cent, second to the subsequent European bronze medalist.

Later, she was second in the Horse of the Year Show grand prix to another of the Brits who won team silver at the European titles.

New Zealand judge Nick Williams, who has officiated at two Olympic Games and at many other top level competitions, has said: "When Marcus softens and gives all his talent, it will take a very good combination to beat them on the day."

Just last week, Craig and Marcus started on the road she plans will end this year at The Hague, by performing the highest scoring test at the first of the British selection trials for the world event.

She could not "win" the competition, because it was an official selection and thus competed unofficially.

Official or not, their 66 per cent was enough to top the best of the Brits, and was more than creditable for a first outing since last October.

It indicated that this Kiwi, who lives on a very frayed shoestring, is going to be a very hot competitor come the end of July in Holland.