

Behind the Stable Door with Paul Tapner

When Australian event rider, Paul Tapner, won Badminton with Inonothing - a horse that had been particularly challenging in the past - victory must have been especially sweet. We go behind the stable door, courtesy of Gatehouse Riding Hats, to find out about Paul and how he turned the corner with the horse he describes as "a legend".

When was the first time you rode for your country?

My first international event was the World Cup final in Pau - I think it was 2001 - but I wasn't on an official team, so I'm hoping that the World Equestrian Games in September will be my opportunity to wear the Australian flag.

Editorial note: Equestrian Australia will announce their WEG event team on 2nd September.

When did you first start eventing?

My first affiliated event was in 1988. I was 13, which was then the minimum age for competing in affiliated competitions in Australia. Up until then I'd competed in anything and everything at Pony Club, but that was my first serious event and I was hooked on eventing from then on.

What was the most frustrating part of the three phases for you in those early days?

I wouldn't say I found any of it frustrating, but I soon realised that my dressage needed to improve as I was always gaining places in the jumping phases. The only way to do that was to get lots of lessons.

Who was your mentor?

Initially it was Peter Taylor, a top event rider in Australia at that time. He eventually introduced me to Julie Piggott who was then in partnership with Brook Staples. I started out with them as a working pupil in their eventing operation in Australia.

Do you miss Australia?

I don't miss Australia especially, but I do miss my mates. The Australian culture is quite different compared to England

and it took me quite a while to adapt.

Is Badminton now your favourite venue?

I would rate Boekelo as the best three day event in the world, but then I've recently been to Aachen for the first time and that was also pretty amazing. It's an all-encompassing equestrian festival with so many top class competitors from all the disciplines. I don't usually enjoy watching equestrian competition, but I would go there as a spectator.

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Inonothing was said to have quirks, so much so that at one point you wanted to tell the owners that there was nothing you could do with him. How did you change this?

It wasn't that there was nothing I could do with him; more that I didn't think he'd be an event horse of any standard. I didn't do any one thing to change him; it was just patience and persistence and trying to figure out why he was having problems. Then, at the end of one season, it just seemed to click and he won the final event of the year. The next year he came out full of confidence and strength and continued to go up the grades. From then on in he's been a very good, consistent horse.

What has Inonothing taught you about yourself?

He confirmed that I have patience and persistence, plus

a degree of stubbornness. Eventing is a true test of horse and rider. You don't need the best or most expensive



Paul Tapner and Inonothing
at Badminton
Photo by Stephen Davis,
SW&P Photography

horse to succeed but you need horsemanship. A lot of people have come up to me since Badminton and said that his success has given them hope for themselves and their horses.

What changes stand out the most that you have seen in the sport over the years?

Shorter cross country courses and increased technicality, although we've seen a little re-balance recently with some big old fashioned courses this year; probably due to the likes of Ian Stark coming into course design.

What changes, if any, would you like to make to the sport today?

The sport needs to attract more corporate money and market itself as an entertainment – Boekelo and Aachen certainly know how to put on a good show.

How would you describe, in one word, what makes a great event horse?

Willingness.

What is the one task on the yard that you prefer to delegate to someone else?

Tacking up and mucking out.

When was the last time you had a dunking in the water?

Highclere one day event; the only fall I've had in the water and only fall I've ever enjoyed. I was flying through the air thinking 'this is going to hurt' and then I landed with the biggest splash and thought it was actually a bit of fun – I wouldn't want to do that again though.

What is the funniest thing that has happened to you in a competition?

It wasn't funny at the time, but at Weston Park this year, Georgina (Paul's wife) was grooming for me as usual. We were running late so she tacked up my horse as quickly as possible, I jumped on and trotted the very long way up to the dressage arena, only to find that I was on the wrong horse. I was riding Tiger Flynn, who's coloured, and I should have been on Kilfinnie, who's

black. My dressage test was in 10 minutes time so I didn't have time to go back and swap horses. Fortunately, the organisers allowed me to go in on Tiger Flynn, who did a very nice test with very little warm up, but Annabel Scrimgeour was judging and, because she sometimes helps us train the horses, she spotted my mistake and gave me a lot of stick afterwards for getting on the wrong horse.

Other than eventing, what makes your heart beat faster?

Before I had kids I used to love snow skiing or rock climbing to get the adrenalin pumping. Now it's stressing that my kids (six year old Joshua and four year old Madison) might hurt themselves when they're riding because they are fearless. I now know what I put my parents through.

What makes you really laugh?

My children – like all kids they say some funny things.

If you had to appear on MasterChef, what would you cook?

I love cooking but I'm completely useless so I would be embarrassed because I'd really want to do a good job. I'd have to cook my favourite meal, spaghetti bolognese, which is a bit boring and not really worthy of MasterChef.

What was the last film you watched?

Mission Impossible while I was on my way home from a competition - one of my owners had kindly organised someone else to drive the lorry.

Thanks go to Gatehouse Riding Hats for their help with this interview. **Visit www.gatehouserange.co.uk for information or call Westgate EFI on 01303 872277 for stockists.**

Paul is based at Wickstead Farm Equestrian Centre in Wiltshire. To follow his progress and find out more about Team Tapner, visit **www.tapnereventing.com**