

We meet Jock Paget

Jock Paget and Clifton Promise navigate their way through the lake



LEO MASON SPORTS PHOTOS/ALAMY

The talk of the town **Jonathan 'Jock' Paget** burst on to the Eventing world stage with his win at the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials

THE 2013 MITSUBISHI MOTORS BADMINTON WAS, in nearly everyone's mind, a three-horse race. There were those two Titans of the British Eventing scene, William Fox-Pitt and Andrew Nicholson, fighting it out in the Rolex Grand Slam, and they were both likely to be beaten to first place by the reigning Olympic, World and European champion, Michael Jung.

There was colossal media attention on the trio and, when Michael led the dressage on his multiple Gold Medallist La Biosthetique-Sam FBW, the "First German to win Badminton" headlines were already written.

But we all know that, with horses, there are no foregone conclusions. Sam brushed the final showjumping fence and, to a huge gasp from the crowd, the pole teetered on the cup and dropped to the floor. Michael and Sam hadn't won Badminton. But who had?

It wasn't either of the Grand Slam duellists, either. It was a young man who, just 10 years ago, had never jumped a fence. Twenty-nine-year-old Jonathan 'Jock' Paget from New Zealand had just become the first rider since his fellow countryman Mark Todd to win Badminton on his debut at the Eventing nirvana.

Indeed, there were strong echoes of that 1980 Event. Lucinda Green was widely tipped to win her fifth Badminton, only to hit a showjump on Killaire and finish second.

"And Lucinda Green wins her fifth Badminton. No it's not, it's that Mark Todd from New Zealand," exclaimed commentator Dorian Williams.

Jock isn't nearly such an unknown as Mark was then – he was on the Kiwi Bronze Medal-winning team at the London Olympics last year and has been a familiar face on the Eventing circuit in Britain since 2010. But there are parallels to be drawn. Physically, they are both tall and lean. In the saddle, they both show supreme natural talent.

Born in New Zealand but resident in Australia for most of his life, Jock had only ridden a few bucking broncos and hacked out a horse his father had bought until he finished his apprenticeship as a bricklayer. He vaguely fancied working with horses, so he went

to Aussie Eventer Kevin McNab as a working pupil for a year – and has never looked back.

Two years later, he was riding at Advanced level.

Jock stayed at Kevin's for three years before setting up on his own in Sydney, riding a few, teaching a bit and laying a few bricks. When a serious bout of equine influenza meant that equestrian activities in Australia ground to a halt, Frances Stead of Clifton Stud rang and offered him a job – back in New Zealand.

He took it and began to ride her team of purpose-bred, classy

Event horses. Among them was Clifton Promise. A New Zealand Thoroughbred, Promise's pedigree sparkles with diamonds – his sire, Engagement, is a son of the highly successful American racehorse and stallion Alydar, and his dam, the Cautious Style mare Darn Style, is also dam of Olivia Bunn's Championship ride GV Top Of The Line.

Jock told *Horse & Hound*:

"Frances said she had this amazing horse, called Clifton Promise. I thought, 'that's what they all say – it's probably a goat.' Yet he's become the reason behind almost every decision I've made in the past five years."

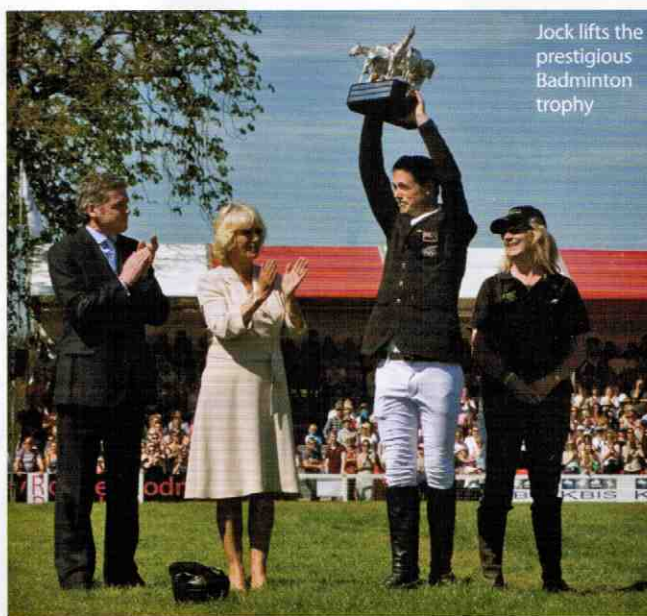
Jock scored his first Three Day Event victory, in the two-star at Richfields, on Promise in December 2007. The following year, they won the three-star there. And now Promise has given Jock his first four-star victory. While Jock has ridden many horses in his short career, it is this one who has taken him on his meteoric rise.

Jock and Promise first competed for New Zealand at the 2010 World Equestrian Games (WEG) in Kentucky. They weren't part of the team that won Bronze, but finished seventh individually

and second best of the Kiwis behind Individual Bronze Medallist Andrew Nicholson.

Jock moved to Britain to prepare for WEG that summer, and has been based at businessman and former amateur Eventer Joe Giannamore's Surrey yard ever since. He won the CIC3* at Bramham in 2011 on Clifton Lush, on whom he finished fifth at Burghley that autumn.

He got selected for the London Olympics and won his first medal –



Jock lifts the prestigious Badminton trophy

“ The pole teetered on the cup and dropped to the floor. Michael and Sam hadn't won Badminton ”



Jock Paget (centre) collects a Bronze medal with his New Zealand teammates at the London 2012 Olympics

Jock's four-star and championship results

- Kentucky 2010: 27th on Clifton Promise
- WEG 2010: Seventh on Clifton Promise
- Luhmühlen 2011: Eliminated on Clifton Lush
- Burghley 2011: Fifth on Clifton Lush, 12th on Clifton Promise
- Kentucky 2012: Sixth on Clifton Promise
- London 2012 Olympics: 10th on Clifton Promise, Team Bronze
- Burghley 2012: Fifth on Clifton Lush
- Pau 2012: Second on Clifton Promise
- Badminton 2013: First on Clifton Promise

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Team Bronze – and finished 10th individually. He made it clear that wasn't good enough, and for the first time the British press got a glimpse of how quietly determined and competitive this cool-headed young man is.

Jock's rapid ascent of the four-star placings has been impressive. His debut was at Rolex Kentucky in 2010, where he and Promise finished 27th. Since then, his only blip has been elimination at Luhmühlen on Lush the following year. Fifth and 12th (Promise) at Burghley 2011, sixth at Kentucky in 2012 on Promise, fifth at Burghley in 2012 on Lush and second at Pau last autumn on Promise again.

After that Pau runner-up spot – when he led after cross country but tapped out a rail, allowing Andrew Nicholson to snatch victory – there was only one place to go.

He leaves nothing to chance and spent time over the winter polishing his game at Michael Jung's German yard. When it came to Badminton he knew he and Promise were good enough if they

produced their A game. Jock also had the advantage of having none of the pressure the 'big three' had heaped on their shoulders – he had nothing to lose and it all to gain.

Fourth after dressage, then second after cross country – he was the 'stalking horse' of the field who pounced to nail the leader on the line. He and Promise showjumped clear – for only the second time in a Three Day Event – but it seemed so unlikely that the mighty duo of Michael and Sam would fault. But they did.

Jock is not a man to give rein to his emotions, and he was remarkably sanguine in the immediate aftermath of his triumph.

He said: "I'll need a week for this to sink in. I wasn't looking [at Michael's round]. I was hanging out with the horse. I've spent a bit of time with Michael and he's such a perfectionist – when he gets to the last fence, you don't expect him to have it down. The crowd cheered and I thought, 'Well, he deserves it'. Then I heard the crowd groan and I thought, 's***, I think I just won!'"

"Winning Badminton is everyone's dream. I came here knowing that I could win, but I never thought I would win."

He's now a Badminton champion – only the second from his country. A year ago, comparing him to Mark Todd would have raised eyebrows – and he has a long way to go to begin to equal the great man's many successes. But he has started in the best way he can. 🐾