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RUSSELL HALL

Johnathan and Clifton Promise at Puhinui

Each month, we showcase an up-and-coming rider, and ask them some probing questions. This month, it's Muriwai event rider Johnathan Paget

Just five years ago, Johnathan Paget had barely sat on a horse. But over the past eight months, the 24-year-old has rapidly shown himself to be one of the shining lights for New Zealand eventing's future, picking up wins and placings at horse trials around the country on his talented string of Clifton mounts, owned by Frances Stead.

Johnathan was born in New Zealand but moved to Sydney with his family at age five. Though his parents had equestrian backgrounds - Dad as a rodeo rider and Mum in eventing - they no longer rode and Johnathan grew up a regular city boy, qualifying as a bricklayer after leaving school.

But when he was 19, his parents bought a small lifestyle block, and a horse to go with it. "I hopped up one day, fell straight off, then started mucking around with this riding thing," recalls Johnathan. On the suggestion of his father, he trained as a bronc rider, then went to Kevin McNabb's eventing yard as a working pupil.

He clearly must have shown a natural aptitude as well as a great work ethic, as just 18 months later Johnathan had his first three-star run. "He was a damn good coach," says Johnathan of Kevin.

Frances Stead of Clifton Eventers enticed Johnathan back to his homeland late last year, and he is now the main stable rider for the Clifton team, with up to 12 horses in work and generally five or six to compete at every event.

What do you enjoy most about eventing?

Winning! And the lifestyle it creates

Which of your horses should we look out for next season?

Clifton Promise, Clifton Razz.

What moment has given you the most pride?

Jumping Clifton Promise around Kihikihi. It was a tough track for an experienced horse, and he is very inexperienced at three-star level but he made it a fun round.

If you could compete any horse, alive or dead, who would it be?

Phar Lap, so I wouldn't have to worry about time penalties.

Tell us about your sponsors

My sponsors are Frances Stead and Russell Hall. They are great supporters of Donna Smith, myself and other riders, and of the sport, and they do it in the hope to win medals for New Zealand, and produce high quality and safe event horses.

Tell us about your trainers

I spent three years as a working pupil for Kevin McNabb in Queensland, Australia, and still get help from him as often as I can; the man's a genius. In New Zealand I see Christine Weal who is an amazing rider and coach, so I hassle her quite a bit. I also see Eric Duvander as much as I can for lessons, advice, course walks, fitness programmes etc. And I've just started seeing Vaughn Jefferies for jump lessons and really like the way he teaches, so I will hassle him more too.

What are your competitive plans for the future?

To win more, and long term to take Clifton Promise to WEG 2010.

If you could buy anything to assist your career, what would it be?

More three-star horses. H&P

The Mountain Horse One to Watch rider featured each month wins this stylish Mountain Horse cap



Do you know of an up-and-coming rider, in any discipline, who could feature in this column? We want to build the profiles of our rising equestrian stars, of all ages. Send your suggestions, with contact details, to: editor@horse-pony.co.nz