

Calet de Vos won the SA individual technical championship in Kimberley in 2006 on KSH Maverick



# Three nations, great competition

by Calet de Vos and Jaco Fourie

Riders from South Africa, New Zealand and Germany were selected to represent their countries in dressage, show jumping and endurance, all on loaned horses, in Hastings in New Zealand from 14-18 March this year. The event was run concurrently with the Kelt Capital horse of the year show. Calet de Vos and Jaco Fourie, both winners of the 2006 South African individual dressage championships, made up the South African dressage team.

After a very enjoyable evening at the Sanef Ball in Johannesburg where the teams

were announced and we received our Protea colours, the *chef d'equipe*, Tony Lewis, international jumping judge, Sandy Cox, the show jumping team, Tracey Cockbain, Lorette Knowles-Taylor, Roger Hessen and Jonathan Clarke, and ourselves were all up for an early start on Sunday to meet at the airport.

The show organisers did a sterling job of hosting a show of this calibre. Horses from all over New Zealand and Australia were entered – from Clydesdales, Arabs, Miniatures and Welsh Ponies, to endurance, showing, dressage and jumping horses, with a variety of arenas hosting classes at the

same time. The lower grade dressage classes were held on the polo fields on grass and the international dressage events on sand in the main arena.

### Grand prix

The main jumping event was of course the CSI-4 \$100 000 grand prix. For dressage it was the CDI-W grand prix freestyle, which would ensure a berth for the winners at the World Cup finals in Las Vegas.

The international dressage tri-nations competition was run as follows: twelve horses were divided into two pools of six for each of the two competitions' legs. Two riders per nation were allowed. Each would ride one test per leg, and the combined score would count as the team score. Horses were awarded randomly, and could be seen competing with their normal riders for two days prior to the competition. Riders only had 30 minutes in which to get used to the horses before competing.

New Zealand put forward two formidable campaigners, Jody Hartstone and Kallista Field. Both competed at WEG and the Olympics at grand prix level. Germany sent Mathias Rath and Jessica Werndl, both in the German national squad and, apart from being accomplished grand prix riders, also European gold medallists.

### Prix St Georges

For the first competition, the Prix St Georges, Calet drew a flashy grey mare that got descent scores with her owner-rider on the previous days. Jaco drew a normal bay mare who managed only 53% with her owner-rider. After a mistake-ridden first round, Calet was in third place, 4% behind the leading German rider. Jaco did not fare much better. After the dry cleaners returned a ruined tailcoat to him, he had to borrow tails from a New Zealand rider, and matters did not improve.

His horse put its tongue over the bit and out to the side when halting at X, which naturally

was very expensive in itself, not to mention the problems it created in the execution of the actual movements. Although Jaco rode sympathetically, they still ended up last on 55%, which put the team disappointingly into third place – especially since the warm-up went really well and spirits were high.

### Freestyle

The next day the teams drew six new horses, this time for a freestyle. The owners supplied choreography and music, and with all the official sponsors' events. We had precious little time in which to prepare. Both our horses were average, scoring just over 60% with their owners previously. Calet drew an elegant chestnut gelding that had serious connection problems. She managed to get the bits changed, which helped tremendously. We were off to a good start, lying second after the New Zealand rider after completing the first round with a score of 62%, beating the German rider by a wide margin.

Jaco drew a big 17,1 hh bay gelding, and after another good warm-up, the forces of nature conspired yet again! This time there was an error in reading the music disc and Jaco had to improvise. To make matters worse, after ten seconds into the programme, the wind let loose and the skies opened relentlessly. Jaco's top hat flew off and the borrowed tail coat was completely soaked! During the last centre line, the crowd applauded enthusiastically. Although understandably scoring the lowest on artistic merit, they ended up scoring first technically, and second overall (two of the three judges had them first).

The South African team finished a very close second on this leg, and second in the overall ratings, behind New Zealand and ahead of Germany. Jaco was also awarded a prize of a very expensive wine collection for "most popular rider" by the dressage committee. It was a great learning experience for us both, and we made good friends and contacts during this trip.



The SA Equestrian Tri-Nations Cup team are Roger Hessen (left), Jonathan Clarke, Sandy Cox, Jaco Fourie, Calet de Vos, Tracey Cockbain and Tony Lewis (Photo:Tracey Cockbain)

## New Zealand

New Zealand seems to have the very same limitations as South Africa with regard to isolation and lack of trainers, but a dynamic dressage committee refuses to see it as a problem. According to the committee, the single most important factor in getting New Zealand riders to produce horses to grand prix, was to offer the grand prix freestyle, with the biggest chunk of the prize money going to this class. This also helps to attract sponsors and to raise money for training.

The quality of riding, education and horses in South Africa, compares more than favourably against those of New Zealand, especially at levels up to medium. The normal New Zealand test book is very similar to our Sanef tests, with the exception of the inclusion of an extra four advanced tests, which introduce *piaffe*, *passage* and *1-tempi's* very gradually. The advanced tests 1-4, Prix

St Georges and Inter 1 is a separate grade (small tour).

The A5 to A8 and intermediate 2 tests are used as warm-ups, and the grand prix, GPS and grand prix freestyle are used for all major championship classes. The grand prix class saw five starters, with scores between 55-61%, which bodes well for South Africa to apply for having our own world cup qualifying league soon, since South Africa is introducing the intermediate 2 and grand prix freestyle this year. The grand prix freestyle was televised, together with the show jumping grand prix.

Our immense gratitude towards Sanef for affording us this wonderful opportunity. Thank you also to the sponsors, Cathay Pacific Airlines and Kelt Capital, and the organisers for the five-star treatment and warm hospitality we experienced all the way. In addition, many thanks to the South African jumping team for their great support. **SAH**