

Mercedes Portaro

Para-Equestrian

Newsletter 20th October 2017



It has been a very busy time in Mercedes' Para Equestrian World. Mercedes has achieved amazing things and has been involved in many affairs allowing her to be an ambassador and example for people with disabilities and her sport.



Mercedes was fortunate to be invited to attend another clinic with Roz Tippett, Western Australia's Para Equestrian Coach. Held at the State Equestrian Centre and with the support of M'liss Henry from CTRC, Mercedes was able to receive expert tuition leading up to Nationals from one of Perth's highest qualified coaches. M'liss was very generous with her time and resources to bring Mercedes' horse, Flash, out to the Equestrian Centre to prepare their dressage tests for Melbourne. It was an invaluable and timely opportunity for Mercedes to improve her skills and gain more experience in a specialised setting.

The annual Abilities Expo is for people with disabilities, their families and carers to learn more about services and supports available in WA. Visitors were able to hear guest speakers, enjoy performances, meet with many of WA's disability service providers and take part in interactive workshops that focus on skill-building for employment. It was held on 19 September in the Grand Ballroom of the Crown Perth. ACTIV Foundation is one of the leading disability service providers in Perth and often promotes Mercedes and her incredible achievements as an example of just what people with disabilities can achieve. Mercedes and Flash were on display on centre stage for the duration of the expo. Many of her friends and family attended, were inspired and commented how wonderful it was to see her real-life story displayed and promoted.



With many thanks to all those who donated prizes, attended and supported Mercedes' Quiz Night, we are proud to announce that a total amount of \$4,000 was raised. More than one hundred people attended and everyone commented how much fun they had. Most people went home with fantastic prizes and EVERYONE with a smile on their face. It can be a daunting exercise to put on an event such as this and we couldn't have done it alone. We were donated beehives, audio/visual equipment, restaurant vouchers and artwork. An eight-year-old little girl won the raffle of the 10kg Cadbury Dairy Milk Chocolate – the look on her face was priceless. The winning table prize was a lunch for 8 at Parliament House that the winners will be attending this Friday. We look forward to many more fun filled nights in the future to help Mercedes achieve her goals.

As a side donation to the Quiz Night, one of Mercedes' friends, Stephanie Haynes, donated a brand new dressage saddle for raffle. The raffle is open until 11 November and we hope to sell 500 tickets. If you know of anyone who would like to win a saddle, please contact Vanessa and we will organise some tickets for you.

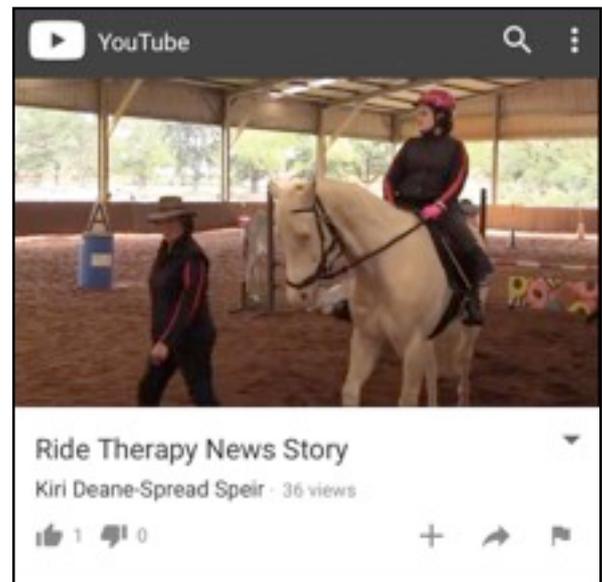


Mercedes was also privileged to receive a Community Living and Participation Grant for a new saddle of her own. Her physio and one of her riding coaches fitted her and then made the application a couple of months ago. It was very exciting to receive news that the grant had been provided. Mercedes was able to pick her saddle up this week and looks forward to being able to ride with support and comfort in the coming years.

Mercedes is always an eager participant when it comes to promotion of her sport and people with disabilities. In recent weeks, she has been featured in two news reports. One was for Ride Therapy which is another business that operates from Claremont Therapeutic Riding Centre. This form of ride therapy is how Mercedes started her journey at the age of three. Hippotherapy (therapy on horseback) is still an integral part of Mercedes' training. The therapy utilises the rhythmic, three dimensional movement of the walking horse. Mercedes experiences and responds to significant sensory input and it positions her ideally to develop postural control, equilibrium, balance, co-ordination and spatial orientation. It was a wonderful opportunity for Mercedes to display just how far a person can improve when beginning from this base.

Another report Mercedes was featured in was one about how three riders from CTRC qualified and were chosen to represent the state at the RDA National Dressage Championships. The article brought to light the generosity of CTRC in supporting their riders by facilitating the transport of their own horses to the event in Melbourne. It emphasised the advantage it was to be riding their own horses rather than borrowing horses as has occurred in the past. This was the first time that any group has brought their own horses from Western Australia. It also advertised the GoFundMe page that was set up to assist with the expense of transporting the horses.

Mercedes will also shortly feature in a news story for the ABC. Watch this space!!





Nationals



What an exciting week Mercedes had in Melbourne! She was able to participate in a pre-event camp at Tooradin Estate with Sally Francis, Team Manager for the Australian Paralympic Team. She was able to reconnect with Mossie who was the horse Mercedes rode to gold in the Special Olympic National Games in 2014. The camp was a wonderful team building opportunity and a great advantage to have Sally's expertise on tap.

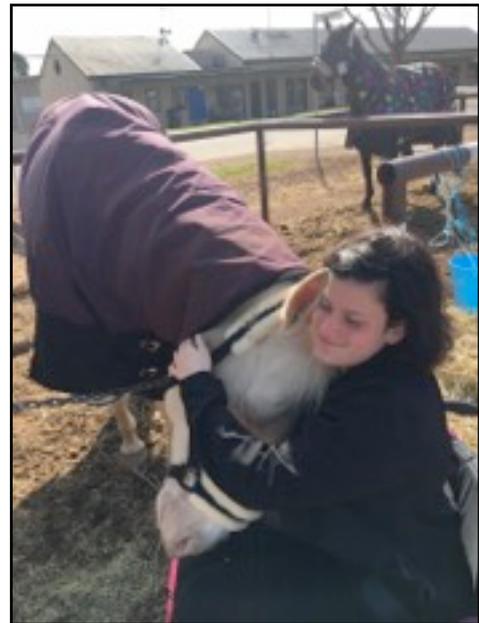
Sharon Jarvis also made an appearance to present the team uniforms and encourage each team member personally. Mercedes was able to rehearse her dressage tests with Sharon and receive invaluable advice and tips going into the competition.



Flash arrived safely at the event venue and Mercedes was able to take advantage of the ample space to get in a few practice sessions prior to competition beginning. Each day of competition had a different dressage test and Mercedes attacked each one with vigour and enthusiasm. Flash was astounding as well. He was calm and familiar with the environment and went to work with Mercedes each time their number was called.

Mercedes competed in the Para Dressage 1.1 test, achieving a first place, scoring 60.313% just 0.2% in front of second place. Para Dressage 1.2 saw Mercedes achieve another first place with a score of 64.67%, 6.0% in front of second place. The highlight for Mercedes, though, was her third test – the Freestyle to Music.

She has worked extremely hard to succeed at the Freestyle and her efforts were rewarded with yet another first place scoring 69.03%, a whopping 11.0% ahead of second place. These scores and placings awarded her National Champion in her division. She was thrilled.



Two of her teammates also won the championships in their respective divisions and for the first time, Western Australia won the overall competition. This was a remarkable achievement for all the riders and their coaches. A highlight was having people from other states approach Mercedes and commend her on how much she has improved since the last nationals in 2015.



We are so incredibly thankful to everyone who supported Mercedes in this competition and she is excited to share her experiences and show off her ribbons to anyone who shows an interest.





With nationals now behind her, a new phase comes into view. Planning has already commenced to see Mercedes rise to the next level. Fundraising will be a constant companion as she enters the Para Arena and her training and participation intensifies. Opportunities are open to her in Melbourne, Newcastle, Donnybrook and of course, Perth. We are excited that so many mentors and coaches are investing in her progress and hope to take advantage of every prospect available to her.

And we couldn't do it without you.

Thank you for your continued support and we look forward to sharing more great achievements with you in the future.