**NATIONAL AUSTRALIAN DRESSAGE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2015**

I have written a couple of reports in the past, returning from the Young Horse classes in Werribee or the Victorian Dressage Championships. Hugo and I are quite well travelled for a couple of amateurs. I have been thinking about this one for a while, hoping to report back something useful, rather than just a diary of the trip.

So what is useful? What have I learned or experienced that is worth passing on? Assuming that someone is planning a trip to the mainland, will read this and is open to a bit of advice, here goes.

1. You cannot be too prepared. Label your boxes, pack your first aid kit, clean all your gear, write lists, talk to other people to find out what they took with them that they could not do without. And pack spares – halters, lead ropes, reins, spurs and whatever else you could lose or could get broken.
2. Make sure your horse is ready. Organise a shoeing just before you go, get the chiropractor, schedule a massage or muscle rehab session, get teeth done.
3. Pack for every possible change in the weather, for you and your horse.
4. Give yourself time. The boat trip can be tiring and/or stressful. Hugo had a week in Melbourne before we travelled up to Sydney. He had another 5 days in Melbourne before we got on the boat to come home.
5. Don’t change your routines unless you have to. If you normally school for 45 minutes, don’t ride for an hour and a half. If you normally do a 30 minute warm up before a test, stick to that.
6. Trust yourself. You know your horse, and you know what they need. If walking out for an hour hand grazing makes them happy, do that. If they would rather snooze in the stable, let them.
7. Gather a support crew if you can. But make sure they are people you can get on with under stress!

A mainland trip with a horse is a big and expensive exercise. It can be very daunting. But good planning and preparation makes all the difference.

In addition to the logistics, I have learned a few things about riding. Firstly, nobody is perfect (although Brett Parbery comes close). I saw quite a few Grand Prix riders doing things that did little to create quiet harmony with their horses. Secondly, the warm up is important (need to work on that one). Thirdly, I am not nearly fit enough (see my second point) so have reluctantly taken up jogging.

My final point is something I have known for some time, but is always reinforced and reaffirmed every time I set myself a new challenge with my riding. I love my horse. I am very lucky to have him. He has his strengths and weaknesses, and I have mine. Every day I try to polish up his strengths and make them shine. Every day I try to find ways to improve the areas we find difficult. Onwards and upwards, as they say. I hope all my friends that I have met through this wonderful sport are having us much fun on their journey as I am having on mine.

Philippa